

Rhetoric of Leadership

Retoryka przywództwa

6 (2) 2019 EDITOR: ANNA BENDRAT

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Rhetorical Ambiguity and Political Leadership: Ethos and Negotiation in Fredrik Reinfeldt's 2005 "Welcome to the New Moderates" Speech

Retoryczna niejednoznaczność i polityczne przywództwo: etos i negocjacje w przemówieniu Fredrika Reinfeldta „Welcome to the New Moderates” z 2005 roku

Abstract

This article explores how rhetorically ambiguous speech acts can work as preventive negotiations of potential conflict within a political party and how such acts can affect the ethos of the leader. I show how rhetorically ambiguous speech can be a way of performing rhetorical leadership and communicating a democratic ethos while motivating participation in a common action for ends understood differently by different audiences.

W artykule omówiono, w jaki sposób retorycznie dwuznaczne akty mowy mogą pełnić rolę zapobiegawczą w rozwoju potencjalnego konfliktu w partii politycznej i jak takie działania mogą wpływać na etos lidera. Autor ukazuje, jak retorycznie dwuznaczne przemówienie może być sposobem na rozegranie retorycznego przywództwa i komunikowanie demokratycznego etosu, przy jednoczesnym motywowaniu do uczestnictwa we wspólnym działaniu dla celów rozumianych inaczej przez różnych odbiorców.

Key words

rhetorical ambiguity, equivocation, polysemy, rhetorical leadership, conflict management
niejednoznaczność retoryczna, dwuznaczność, polisemia, retoryczne przywództwo, zarządzanie konfliktami

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Received: 26 December 2018 | Accepted: 14 June 2019

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29107/rr2019.2.2>

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Rhetorical Ambiguity and Political Leadership: Ethos and Negotiation in Fredrik Reinfeldt's 2005 "Welcome to the New Moderates" Speech

Introduction¹

Inherent in the idea of democratic leadership are notions that leaders should interpret, influence, and manage public opinion. Leaders define common actions and rules, and persuade and inspire the public to implement what is ostensibly the will of the community. This includes managing the disagreements, conflicts of interest, and other differences between the participants in deliberation. Indeed, such differences and their interplay in the public debate can be conducive to good public judgement. However, such differences may threaten unity and affect common action negatively. Decisions in which consensus is not possible present certain rhetorical problems such as the risk of conflict or polarization. Such situations call for rhetorical leadership that demands tact, diplomacy, and conflict management skills.

The legitimacy of leadership ultimately rests on the notions of a mandate embedded in the community. A democratic leader's authority and rhetorical agency depend on trust and respect for their office, while simultaneously, the leader's ethos can be seen as a reflection of her personal traits, history of public action as well as her office and its mandate. In the context of rhetorical action, the interplay of ethos, the position or action advocated, and the manner in which it is advocated by the leader influence both the outcome of the rhetorical act and the leader's ethos in future contexts (O'Keefe 2002, 186f). In situations where controversy arises between factions within a community, leaders face the challenge of advocating positions that may alienate segments of the audience, potentially undermining their own future rhetorical agency.

In this article, I discuss the implications of meeting such challenges through rhetorical ambiguity. My aim is to show how rhetorical ambiguity can be a mode

1. This article is based on the chapter (in Swedish) "Välkomna till de Nya Moderaterna – Fredrik Reinfeldts tal vid Moderaternas partistämman 2005" in my PhD dissertation (Bruhn 2018, 193–242).

of democratic leadership and can function as conflict management in addition to the implications of this on the ethos and mandate of leaders. The analysis shows how, in 2005, the former prime minister of Sweden, Fredrik Reinfeldt, advocated the political platform that would reflect the renewal process of the Moderaterna party to the party congress.

Rhetorical ambiguity and pragmatics

An utterance can be understood as rhetorically ambiguous when it implies multiple meanings to the audience present in its context of enunciation in ways that serve certain rhetorical functions that allow for differing interpretations by different audience subsections.² As a verbal message, the different possible semantic meanings of the words, or syntax, can make a sentence's meaning indeterminate. Puns, for example, work through the polysemy of words. "We know shit!" is the slogan of a plumbing company in Lund, Sweden, and it functions by the simultaneous recognition of the literal and the idiomatic meanings of the sentence. However, a semantically ambiguous sentence is not necessarily pragmatically ambiguous in a particular communicative exchange. The recipients' understanding of the communicative context can render even the most obscure sentence perfectly clear (Piantadosi, Tily, Gibson 2012). Whether or not an utterance is rhetorically ambiguous rests on the multiplicity of audience understandings of context. In the terminology of the Bakhtinian dialogic model of communication, the recipient *completes* the utterance into a meaningful statement by ascribing it context (Todorov 1984, 40f). To communicate purposefully, speakers choose expressions according to their understanding of how the audience will understand the context. My local plumber chose the slogan trusting that those who live in our city would be familiar with its English idiomatic meaning. The pun works by the audience's simultaneous recognition of different possible contextual uses for the phrase.

In a broad range of everyday situations, a speaker may want to communicate in a way that is pragmatically understood in different ways by different interlocutors (Wasow 2015). This requires that the speaker be familiar with what contextual meanings for certain concepts are salient to different audience segments. However, the mere adaptation of an utterance to a complex, heterogeneous audience can take on rhetorically ambiguous qualities. The use of euphemism – wording used to avoid offending – could be a rhetorically ambiguous enunciation if some in the audience interpret the utterance literally and others interpret it as a euphemism. Such

2. I have chosen the term 'rhetorical ambiguity' in lieu of several alternative and similar concepts, some of which are mentioned below. This is an attempt to emphasize the situational character of communication and to avoid intentionalist interpretations.

an utterance performs different simultaneous actions by reassuring one sceptical audience segment while signalling a veiled clarity of intent to the other.³

Bull argues that political leaders tend to equivocate as a way of performing facework. When asked a question that presents a dilemma based on the divergent interests of different constituent groups – a “threat to face” – political leaders use ambiguous speech and noncommittal answers to maintain a favourable relationship with all constituents (Bull 2008). The rhetor acting in a situation with such a dilemma adapts to the diverging interests as a constraint on her rhetorical agency. Myers (1999) applies Perelman’s *composite audience* to explain how a speech delivered in 1945 by the British foreign minister was adapted to the differing interests of stakeholders regarding Palestine. Myers found that, by using certain devices to give specific impressions to specific audiences, the communicated position of the speaker is rendered “nearly as complex as is [*sic*] the audience being addressed” (Myers 1999, 66). Thus, rhetorical ambiguity can affect the ethos of the speaker performing rhetorical leadership. Ambiguous utterances can be understood as the rhetor seemingly making a divergent range of commitments to the different addressed audiences despite being incongruent or even incompatible. However, the leader risks being seen as vague, indecisive, or even “slippery”, and the ambiguity could cause a range of incompatible expectations for future action.

Ambiguous meaning can aid in the functioning of an organization. Eisenberg calls this *strategic ambiguity*, as it allows for fruitful outcomes in the aggregate (Eisenberg 2007a). Strategic ambiguity allows for different participants to function as a “unified diversity”. Eisenberg argues that the careful and intentional structuring of ambiguity in organizational communication can produce what amounts to consensus in action rather than consensus in terms of belief or motive (Eisenberg 2007b, 133f). The constitutive function of rhetorical ambiguity can therefore be thought of as an *orchestration* of different social actors. Certainly, such an orchestration resulting in concerted actions can be regarded as a goal of rhetorical leadership. If the term ‘orchestration’ is used to discuss the relational outcomes that leaders rhetorically enable for their addressed audiences, then it allows for inquiry into the qualities of rhetorical leadership in a heterogeneous community. The term maintains the presence of the diverse interests, ideas, and beliefs embodied in the community and places a focus on the implications for order and cooperation of the rhetorical act.

3. This particular example could be construed as what has been called a ‘dog whistle’ (Goodin and Saward 2005), or ‘calculated ambivalence’ (Richardson and Wodak 2009).

The dialogic approach

Ceccarelli studied the negotiation of disciplinary boundaries between scientific communities in key interdisciplinary books. Her method comprises “a historical reading of conflict [...] combined with a close reading of the primary text [...] tested against a close intertextual reading of responses written by members of those communities” (Ceccarelli 2001, 171). This method looks for audience interpretations, and it can uncover the textual elements that give rise to a multiplicity of meanings that may be relevant to understand the social action of a text. The application of this method to democratic leadership can uncover not only the interplay of rhetorical action and ideas circulating in the community but also the articulations of relationships between the actors that favour them.

Tindale argues that viewing the utterance as *commitments* made in a shared cognitive environment allows for an analysis of argumentation that sidesteps issues of intentionality if the cognitive environment is sufficiently known (Tindale 2015, 192f). This reflects an understanding of communication as practically enthymematic in viewing the utterance as a tacit reference to certain *topoi* or *loci communes* as shared points of reference. This reference is an indication to the audience of the contextual component needed to complete the utterance into a meaningful whole. However, the cognitive environments of different audiences diverge, and rhetorical ambiguity can occur depending on salient associative connections to the symbols used by the rhetor. For example, the raising of a red flag at a protest rally can inspire pride in a socialist, but others may see it as an affront or a threat. As long as we are able to analytically reconstruct the relevant cognitive environments of the different audiences to some degree, this opens up the utterance to a criticism of the plurality of its rhetorical functions.

A dialogic perspective provides tools for identifying rhetorical ambiguity through its focus on the interaction between utterances and the discourses to which they belong. Utterances can be seen as *interventions* in discourse – actions that respond to states of meaning that are made in ways that anticipate certain reactions (Bialostosky 2016, 60ff). The *polyphony* of an utterance, other voices in a discourse implicitly answered, is indicative of the cognitive environment engaged by the rhetor. Other such voices can be engaged explicitly in sentences like “some people say...” or implicitly referenced (Fløttum 2010). The choice of topic and verbiage can indicate other relevant voices dialogically engaged by the rhetor. Forms such as euphemism, ideological keywords, allusion, and equivocation can indicate a plurality of incongruent positions engaged by the rhetor. Polyphonic criticism amounts to mapping out the utterances’ intertextual relationships by tracing the rhetor’s tacit references to other actors’ speeches and texts. Bialostosky notes that this entails a collapse of the distinction between ideas and the social actors that

give voice to them, allowing for the analysis of rhetoric closer to the level of social relationships (Bialostosky 2016, 78f).

In this approach, the rhetor makes sense of and responds to community discourse as a complex and fragmented social text in a rhetorical and purposive way. If the rhetorical leadership is considered an intervention in the discourse of a community, then it influences its trajectory in some way. Mapping out the voices engaged in dialogue by the rhetor and reconstructing their positions allows for treating them as dilemmatic elements of the rhetorical situation arising from a heterogeneous audience. This demands a close reading of previous utterances from the voices engaged by the rhetor. If the leader engages the voices as fundamentally different, they are addressed as a *composite audience*. This can be a fruitful method to uncover the relational qualities of an act of rhetorical leadership and its implications for ethos, as it highlights the complexities of rhetorical positioning and its articulation of controversy.

Divisions in a democratic community: The case of *Moderaterna*

In the wake of the Swedish 2002 general election, the historically bad electoral result of 15.2% threw the liberal-conservative Moderaterna party into a state of crisis. The party had lost one third of its voters in four years. The result was a clear indication of the unpopularity of its policies that also signalled a threat to their status as the main opposition party. The loss of a large number of seats in parliament meant an economic blow to the organization due to the Swedish party funding system. Fredrik Reinfeldt was appointed party chair in August 2003, and in his inaugural speech, he announced that he was to oversee a complete reworking of the party's political programme. Between Reinfeldt's appointment and the party congress of 2005, several shifts in policy were announced through different media outlets. These included the acceptance of the Swedish labour laws and property tax system, two areas heavily influenced by social-democratic policies that were previous hallmark issues for the party. Less obvious, but nevertheless important, were the new policies on the welfare and public education systems. The party leadership officially adopted the single-payer system as policy in 2007, but this was heavily foreshadowed in earlier announced policies. These seemingly radical shifts in policy were controversial in the party, and the qualities of these controversies are relevant factors in the rhetorical situation.

This party renewal process energized existing divisions within the party, and the specific shifts in policy announced by the leadership threatened to open up new lines of division. The strategy of publicly announcing possibly controversial shifts can have a dampening effect on conflict and resistance. The common public

identity constructed through external communication controlled by the leadership creates a situation where internal criticism of the leadership policies implies a threat to the “face” of the entire organization (Heffernan and Stanyer 1997). In the case of Moderaterna, this dynamic could have been enhanced by an obvious increase in favourable media interest and rising support in opinion polls. One of the most salient traits of the debate in the party, as well as in reflections by members about the process, is the high level of uncertainty about the political meaning of the policy shifts. Kristofferson writes that not knowing where the party was headed was increasingly common among party members (Kristofferson 2006, 212).

In terms of Mouffe’s (2005) distinction, the renewal process highlights the interplay of politics and the political within the party. The politics of the renewal process rearticulated the ‘we’ identity of the party as a whole, in relation to the different ‘they’ of the surrounding political milieu: unions, political parties, economic classes, et cetera. The new party line implied a re-ordering of the relations between ideological currents within the party sphere, effectively modifying existing we/they relationships between those currents. When applying this perspective to a political party and its surrounding stakeholders, one can expect mainly adversarial, agonistic relationships. Most participating actors can be taken to share affinities to the party and each other due to a common organizational history, basic ideological tenets, and in the case of Moderaterna, a common critical stance towards the social democratic structure of the Swedish welfare state.

The ideological currents in Moderaterna during the period reflected a variety of conservative and liberal positions different from each other as well as from outside positions. However, these were not organized in clear factions. Some currents corresponded to certain arenas, regions, and organizations; for example, a current of pragmatic conservatism was particularly present among the local politicians of municipal governments. These seemed to have the most favourable view of the new direction of the leadership. In contrast, a strong current of visionary liberalism was common among urban party functionaries, private sector sympathizers, and students. These currents can be treated as abstract social actors, given the collapse of idea–agent distinction implicit in the dialogical model (Bialostosky 2016, 21). They can be delineated along lines of ideology, favoured political strategies, and attitudes towards the party reform process.

The agonistic relationships between the different currents come to the fore in the specific policies of the renewal. For example, the policy of accepting the strong laws of employment security was antithetical to the idea of an unregulated labour market espoused by the visionary liberal current. A deliberative process entails several rhetorical moves to circumnavigate or solve the dilemmas rising from the incompatibilities between ideas in heterogeneous communities. The complexities of such us/them relationships are further complicated by the attitudes towards one

another held by the agents. Aakhus identifies three strategies for negotiating an impasse in argumentation: the redirection of discussion, the postponement of conflict by temporary compromise, and the relativizing of key positions and arguments. He describes this as the mediator inventing “lines of plausible dialogic activity, [...] devising a language game that everyone can play [...] preventing dissensus from consuming the dialogue” (Aakhus 2003, 283). As I will show, these can be understood as core functions of the rhetorical ambiguities in Reinfeldt’s 2005 party congress address. His aim was to secure the approbation of the congress vote for his political programme. The rhetorical ambiguity of this speech articulated the implementation of the programme as a common action that all members could subscribe to for their own reasons.

“Welcome to the New Moderates”⁴

Even though several of the policy shifts embedded in the platform that Reinfeldt advocated had already been publicized, none of them had been formally approved by congress vote. Reinfeldt began by welcoming the present delegates to the party congress and to the “New Moderates”, the moniker used for the renewal platform. What this meant in terms of politics was clearly spelled out in four bills proposed by the party executive. Reinfeldt discussed them generally in terms of historical and ideological continuity, the socio-political landscape, party strategy, and party values.

Through use, a term aggregates possible meanings for an interpretative community, which is the source of polysemy (Winter-Froemel and Zirker 2015, 324f). Similarly, the use of a term in different senses in a discreet rhetorical act can render a term ambiguous. Throughout the speech, Reinfeldt uses several everyday words and phrases as political terms through their connections to established ideological terms. The term *idea* is interchangeably used in its everyday sense and in the sense of ideological part. He talks of “developing ideas”, “our own ideas”, of entrepreneurs and politicians “having ideas” for practical solutions. But he also talks of the foundational “idea pair”, *freedom* and *responsibility*, of “idea foundation”, and of the party as an “idea party”, which is a common label to distinguish a party from interest-driven politics. Through the use of this ambiguous term, Reinfeldt articulates two simultaneous, albeit contradictory, possible explanations for the 2002 election failure:

4. The speech was broadcast on the public service channel SVT 2 on August 26 2005, as part of the coverage of the party congress. A text manuscript (Reinfeldt 2005) was published on the party website as a press release. In my translation, I have particularly sought to find comparably ambiguous wordings to the Swedish source text.

To my delight, I could fast see that Moderaterna did not suffer a collapse of ideas [*idékollaps*] in the 2002 election. We certainly had reasons to ask ourselves if we had developed, *described* our values and our idea-foundation [*idégrund*] so that people understood them. But we were not in a position where what we saw as *foundational values* were no longer working.

The Swedish cognate term *idékollaps* refers to the collapse of an ideological framework under the weight of empirical reality, and sometimes in a transferred sense, a political action that contradicts its professed ideological foundation. The election platform of 2002 included major tax cuts on capital and capital gains as well as costly reforms that fell in line with the liberal visionary current. In this passage, the 2002 result can be taken as indirectly assigned to a bad *description* of the values and ideas that were foundational to that election platform. Nevertheless, in the allocation of what did not work outside of *foundational* values, the passage could give rise to two different reasons for the bad election result. From the passage, the policies of 2002 could be viewed by the audience as bad in terms of policy, or in addition to that view, bad in terms of tactics.

The two possible readings of the passage echo the two major competing explanations for the 2002 result voiced in the party. From the visionary liberal current, the failure had commonly been attributed to the uncharismatic former party chair, a campaign unfit to deal with criticism from the left, and a widely publicized racism scandal. Analyses from more pragmatic conservatives had underscored the radical policies of the 2002 programme and its theoretical basis in supply-side economics. They argued that this was met with suspicion from the voters because it entailed cutbacks in the welfare system and an accelerated income inequality. The passage opens up two dialogical relations in answer to these voices, making them present within the composite audience.

The specific audiences being addressed and the dialogue with them is implicitly continued throughout the speech. A later section of the speech ties the past failure to Reinfeldt's advocated actions:

Can they govern? Can they make these good ideas into feasible [*genomförbar*] politics?⁵ These questions also asked of us Moderates and they are questions that we have reason to ask ourselves. *Feasible* politics means that we know by what steps, in what pace and what tempo we implement our political proposals. It is an obligation for a party that intend to change peoples' reality and everyday lives, that we can *describe* not only the final step, even though they're probably interested in that, but also what the first step looks like.

In this section, Reinfeldt frames the policies of the renewal platform in terms of *feasibility*, implying that this has been a guiding principle in its development.

5. *Feasible* does not capture the many possible meanings of the Swedish word *genomförbar* used by Reinfeldt throughout the speech. In Swedish, this word is used in many different senses, like *implementable*, *viable*, *workable*, *practicable*, *realizable*. In German, it translates to *Durchführbar*.

In this section, the word *idea* seems to denote an ideological value. However, in relation to the previous discussion of the reasons for the 2002 result where the visionary liberal political ideas were articulated in the rhetorically ambiguous senses of good/not good, the meaning of *feasible* can be understood as making a range of different commitments with different implications. The renewal platform can be understood as feasible in terms of practical implementation leading to its intended results, and feasible in terms of being persuasive to the voters. Yet, for this both/and articulation, an either/or interpretation remains a possibility. In placing salience on the “first step”, the passage can be understood as arguing for a focus on pragmatic conservatism in its emphasis on governing capability, while being simultaneously open to the interpretation that the renewal programme is primarily a tactic to make the implementation of the failed visionary 2002 programme feasible. The passage serves to assure the conservative current that the platform embodies feasible politics and good government, while simultaneously assuring the visionary liberal current that the platform reflects their politics, which they understand as “good ideas” that are feasible through good government.

When Reinfeldt later distances himself from the “idea of revolution”, this rhetorical ambiguity is further underscored. Reinfeldt evokes democratic motifs by portraying the revolutionary attitude as arrogant overconfidence with “unpleasant effects”. Reinfeldt expresses how he means to “develop the party’s views and attitudes about how to change society”. This passage can thus simultaneously be understood as a strong statement in favour of a democratic attitude with consensus politics as a goal, an implicit criticism of the visionary liberal current as wrong in their “views and attitudes”. But the theme of making old policies feasible through cautious government is made present by his statement that “we will implement our ideas by the people implementing them through their growth”. He talks about slow and incremental changes, firmly rooted in the different needs and interests of others. The refocusing on the “first step” earlier allows for an understanding by the visionary liberal audience of Reinfeldt’s message as an implicit call for patience and strategy. The passage can also serve the function of admonishing the party for *seeming* or *acting* revolutionary in the 2002 election and for giving the same impressions in 2006.

This is typical of the construction of ethos in the speech. It projects an image of a listening and reflexive democratic leadership style underscored by the recurring argument that the development of the new political platform has been an “open process” engaging many participants. However, this is expressed through a mildly sarcastic style and admonishing tone of voice that usually targets visionary and uncompromising attitudes. In consistently returning to themes of steps, tempo, implementation, and personal growth, the speech is structured in a way that projects

an image of direction and strategy. It heavily features the *phronesis* dimension of ethos, with Reinfeldt's leadership implied as embodying the collective wisdom of the party. However, in the nebulous mentions of the "final step" – defined as "the good society" where one has "room" to "come into one's own" – the speech retains a rhetorical ambiguity as to whether the renewal platform is to be understood as wise in terms of ideological change or as part of a long-term plan. This allows the different audiences to project their own goals in their understanding of the purpose of the renewal platform.

This dynamic is particularly present when Reinfeldt discusses the points of controversy in the platform. In discussing the new policy for tax reductions, he says that "we have shifted [*förskjutit*] our tax reductions and choose to prioritize income tax reductions before [*före*] other tax reductions". The word *förskjutit* implies a shift in order and in context, but it is also commonly used in the sense of to *reject*, *dislocate*, or *disown*, which allows for a strong sense of a new ideological order. The terms *prioritize* and *before* are indeterminable. In context, they can in mean *either* ideological reprioritization or a chronological prioritization. This frames the following discussion of the specificities of the new tax policies in the distinct purposes of either a modernization of the party ideology or a change in party strategy. Through this lens, the motivation for the policies that Reinfeldt provides, namely, the benefit of the working population, can be understood as either coming from a genuine foundation in the public interest or as an indication of new target voter groups as strategic necessities.

When read as a dialogical engagement with the perspectives of the pragmatic conservative position and the visionary liberal position, the speech evades any authoritative interpretation of the purpose of the renewal platform. This rhetorical ambiguity is mirrored in the divergent responses to the speech from party members. Former Chairman Ulf Adelsohn commented, "I can't see that this is new politics, but they have shifted [*förskjutit*] it temporally" (Kristofferson 2006, 127). The visionary liberal editorial of *Svensk linje* critically interpreted the speech as a clear ideological shift. Regarding Reinfeldt's advocacy of the new tax policy, it sarcastically noted that "the perspective cannot be misinterpreted – the politicians know how the money should be spent better than the people". Other voices interpreted the message as clearly a strategic idea: "We need to realize that the voters' acceptance of the small in the long run give them an understanding of the large. Fredrik Reinfeldt is running a prosperous and successful concept" (Danielsson 2005). The ambiguity of the speech is reflected in some of the responses: "The party is doing the right thing in abandoning the earlier politics, or at least the earlier rhetoric" (Sigfrid 2005). This response acknowledges the ambiguities in the way the shift was advocated through the qualifying remark about the earlier

rhetoric. The sentiments expressed by party members after the 2005 congress reflect a wide range of conflicting understandings of the purpose and function of the renewal platform. They also reflect different understandings of Reinfeldt as a pragmatic leader, as a democratic conservative focused on public benefit, or as a sly strategist.

Discussion

Reinfeldt's address frames the new policies as falling in line with the party's ideological history. However, the speech rhetorically orchestrates the relationship between the party's liberal and conservative ideological currents, a shift of the order implicit in the 2002 election programme. The policies advocated by Reinfeldt were firmly presented as a pragmatic and cautious reform agenda, but the rhetorically ambiguous speech allowed for an understanding of them as a strategic shift to make possible visionary liberal ends. If the speech at the congress was symptomatic of the leadership style of Reinfeldt and his cabinet during this period, then the ambiguity of the renewal is part of why they managed an effective mobilization in the 2006 election. The party made an unprecedented political comeback in Swedish politics by winning 26% of the votes and government power through a four-party coalition. Part of this comeback can be attributed to the organizational coherence of Moderaterna during this period. The controversial shifts in policy could have led to internal polarization which would have been detrimental to mobilization, and if conducted in the open, would have projected an image of a party in internal policy struggle.

Given that Reinfeldt placed a firm focus on the *first step* while maintaining the final step as ambiguous as "the good society", his advocacy can be understood as a *temporalizing* of potential conflict in a compromise that can be seen as beneficial from both of the main currents' perspectives. It allowed for the audiences to interpret the platform as directly aligned with their personal interests whatever they were, albeit urging patience to the visionary liberal. Some also noticed this indeterminacy and reacted either with suspicion or in favour of what seemed a professed openness to change in the long term. This move is typical of a *redirection* of discussion, and indeed, of political focus. Apart from the gearing of policy towards the working population, the renewal was promoted in language that redirected party practices to the first step. This meant a campaign focus on the short term, with a pragmatic reform policy concerning a potential first term of government. In the speech, Reinfeldt continuously returns to the 2006 election as the locus of action. In remaining ambiguous about the ideological aims of the platform, he could rhetorically place the emphasis of party discussion towards policy

that would be palatable to the voters. He did this by *relativizing* different interests, particularly those of tax reduction and labour legislation issues, by contrasting different alternatives in terms of feasibility (*genomförbarhet*). In the speech, this relativizing is consistently motivated in terms of the current situation through the use of qualifying terms, thus keeping the ideological status of issues such as job security legislation and property taxes open.

The interplay of these three negotiating strategies amounts to an orchestration of the party's internal dynamic, placing the pragmatic conservative current as the ideal of action while simultaneously inviting the visionary liberal current to join in for their own ends. This could be taken as a move to suppress conflict by not recognizing contradictory interests. The differences between audience segments implied in the simultaneous dialogical engagement with them can be thought of as an uttered agonistic understanding of the party's internal relationships. However, these ideological conflicts were realigned by Reinfeldt's devising of open-ended common means.

Conclusions

The construction of ethos by not taking definitive sides in an ideological conflict while clearly advocating specific actions can be conducive to being perceived as the leader of the whole organization. By ambiguously aligning the act with the political interests of the different currents, Reinfeldt's speech could be seen by widely different subjects as identifying himself and the platform with their goals. However, the notable ambiguities of the speech were also recognized by party members. Their reactions were mainly that of wary acceptance, plausibly influenced by the increasing popularity of the party.

The leadership mandate sought by Reinfeldt in the speech is intertwined with the mandate for a policy programme that is ambiguous in terms of a change in ideology or strategy. Goodin and Saward (2005) argue that ambiguous rhetoric can only generate a leadership mandate, as a policy mandate would require the informed consent of the constituency. However, in his temporalization of potential conflict, Reinfeldt articulated the policy programme as *both/and* in a way that bracketed the incongruities of the ideas of his constituents. Such ambiguity may sometimes be necessary in democratic politics, as a changed common policy may require consent but not necessarily consensus on the meaning of the action. In remaining open to a change of policy throughout the speech given a change in circumstances, Reinfeldt does not demand substantially changed views from his constituency; rather, he projects the ethos of a pragmatic and democratic leader, with the renewal policies as an embodiment of this leadership. Yet, the incompatible

commitments to different aims embedded in the ambiguous speech were also intertwined with his leadership mandate. A temporalization of potential conflict can wane, and different expectations can undermine the legitimacy of leadership as policy is implemented and politics progress.

The rhetorical ambiguity through which this was performed can be seen as ethically dubious. However, from a situational point of view with the party as the ethical subject, the open-ended consensus on the first step can be understood as in line with the common interests of the party. The rhetorical ambiguity can also be seen as democratic, given that in his speech, Reinfeldt makes no attempt to constrain the pluralism of ideological positions within the party. The language game everyone could play, to paraphrase the earlier Aakhus quotation, was a game of a common language of political means necessary to win government power – their common *first step*. This may have helped the party achieve a temporary unified diversity (Eisenberg 2007b, 133f) that was united in action, but diverse in ends. As a strategy of rhetorical leadership, rhetorical ambiguity can implicitly negotiate conflict in a way that allows a heterogeneous community to move forward together.

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