

Competence and collectivity: the discourse of Angela Merkel's media communications during the first wave of the pandemic

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic emerged as a testing time for political leaders across the globe. In retrospect, some leaders seemed to be better at handling the crisis than others. The German chancellor Angela Merkel has been hailed as one of the few national leaders who successfully led through the first wave of the pandemic. With regular press briefings and televised speeches delivered during that time, she kept the nation informed about the situation and the restrictive but necessary measures. Nationally and internationally, she was praised for a decisive response to the crisis and persuasive communication style (Delahunty, 2020; Requena, 2020). According to a Pew Research Centre survey conducted in 2020 (Schumacher and Fagan, 2020), Merkel's handling of the pandemic and her communication style contributed to an increase in trust with 81.5% of German participants expressing confidence in the chancellor and 87% evaluating her response to the crisis as very positive. Internationally too, survey participants from other 14 countries perceived Merkel as a trustworthy and competent leader. Thus, the case of Merkel's media communications during the first months of the pandemic present a unique opportunity to explore two interrelated aspects: firstly, it can help us identify some of the strategies of political discourse that can bring about an effective and trustworthy (media) communication in the situation of a global health crisis; and secondly, it can contribute to a better understanding of the role of (media) discourse in the performance of effective political leadership in times of a crisis.

Most research on leadership has been preoccupied with identifying traits that make successful (business) leaders. Although this research has offered valuable insights into the concept of effective leadership, it has almost exclusively focused on a set of innate behaviours in an attempt to formulate something like grand theories of good leadership (Clifton et al., 2019). Recognising that text and talk are central to leadership, more recent research emphasises leadership as a processual activity performed *in situ* through discourse (Fairhurst, 2007; Schnurr, 2008; Fetzer and Bull, 2012; Clifton et al., 2019).

Political leadership is a paramount example of such a discursive activity. Discourse is the tool and the trade of politics (Partington and Taylor, 2018) and in fact, it is difficult to think of an aspect of politics which is not conducted through discourse. And while some forms of that discourse happen behind closed doors in private encounters, political discourse is foremost a mediated public activity with politicians skilfully utilising mass media and increasingly social media to inform and mobilise the public (Fetzer and Weizman, 2006). Mediatized monologic speeches or statements in particular can be valuable sources of insights into how politicians perform leadership through discourse because in such communicative events the politician is the prime agent who is in control of that discourse. He or she has the opportunity to strategically choose what to say and how to say it, what to foreground and what to background in order to present him- or herself as a competent leader who acts and reacts appropriately to the situation (Fetzer, 2011).

This study investigates media performances, specifically televised press briefings and speeches given by Angela Merkel during the first wave of the pandemic from 13 March to 23 April 2020, from the time Covid-19 restrictions were put in place in Germany to their gradual easing. It is particularly interested in identifying the kind of discursive strategies and devices that she used to do deliver public health measures, and to do her 'convincing' work. In doing so, this study hopes to contribute to the growing body of research on leadership as performed through discourse and equally offer some novel insights into the kind of discourse that can

constitute effective leadership for a crisis situation. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows; since this study is concerned with persuasive discourse, Section 2 introduces the notion of persuasion in the domain of politics. Section 3 situates the study within Merkel's leadership and communicative style before the pandemic, while Section 4 outlines the methodology and analytical procedures used. Section 5 presents the main features of Merkel's media discourse as documented in her speeches and statements in the first months of the pandemic and compares them with the features of her pre-pandemic communicative style. Section 6 concludes with observations regarding discursive media strategies to lead effectively through a global health crisis.

2. Persuasion and political leadership in times of crisis

The term persuasion has its origins in Latin *persuāsīōn-* or *persuāsīō* meaning a capacity to convince (OED Online, 2021)¹; in modern day English, persuasion is mostly understood as a communicative behaviour performed to “induce cooperation, submission, or agreement” (OED Online, 2021). As such, it is a ubiquitous phenomenon – we all engage in some form of convincing work on an everyday basis to get our own way or to influence someone's outlook or behaviour. Sornig (1989: 95) is one of the first scholars to emphasise the language and linguistic dimension of persuasion as “the intrinsic and essential function for which language can be”. He defines persuasion as a goal-orientated strategic selection of lexical and grammatical resources deployed to convince someone of a particular point of view. It does not matter whether the perspective outlined by the persuader is true or false or whether the persuader believes it or not; “it is the *way* things are said (or done), irrespective of the amount of genuine information carried by an utterance” (Sornig, 1989: 95). Because the way how things are said is the key here, there is not a single set of resources to do persuasive work and in fact, any small or large discourse devices can be utilised for that purpose.

The prime goal of persuasion is to influence someone's outlook or behaviour regardless of the degree of truth or value contained in the message. For this reason, persuasion can sometimes morph to a form of manipulation. As van Dijk (2006) observes, there is a fine line between (legitimate) persuasion and (illegitimate) manipulation. Both are discursive and both involve an asymmetrical relationship between the interlocutors. The difference is, however, in the outcome(s) for the hearer. In general, legitimate persuasion attempts to alter the hearer's attitude or behaviour with the intention to benefit the hearer (Harrè, 1985); the relationship between the persuader and the to-be-persuaded is based on a free choice in that the hearer does not have to accept the arguments of the persuader (van Dijk, 2006). Manipulation also tries to influence the hearer's attitude or behaviour, but the difference is that its outcomes benefit only the persuader (Harrè, 1985); the hearer is therefore assigned a more passive role in that he or she may not be fully aware of persuader's real intentions or their consequences because of e.g. lack of knowledge – a situation which the persuader might exploit (van Dijk, 2006). For this reason, manipulation almost always involves a reproduction of inequalities, power and control to the detriment or against the will of the hearer, whereas persuasion aims to bring about some positive changes to e.g. hearer's life (Ferrari, 2018).

There are two areas of public communication, in which persuasion (sometimes turned manipulation) plays the key role: advertising and politics. Since politicians (at least in the

¹ Although there is a semantic, distinction between ‘persuasion’ and ‘conviction’ (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) from the perspective of the persuader or convincer both processes are similar in that the goal is to induce a change in the outlook or behaviour of the audience. It is only the audience who is then able to confirm whether a message persuaded or convinced or both (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Since this study is concerned with a discursive action of a politician and not with audience responses, both terms are used here interchangeably.

democratic societies) need to win voters or nudge citizens in a particular direction, persuading is their bread-and-butter activity. There is now a large body of research that has explored persuasion in political discourse underpinned by frameworks and concepts developed in pragmatics and critical discourse analysis. By far, most studies have been dedicated to metaphors, which emerged as powerful devices of persuasion in politics (e.g. Charteris-Black, 2014; Musolff, 2016). Other studies followed the model of Aristotelian rhetoric and investigated appeal strategies in political speeches or other forms of political discourse (e.g. Halmari, 2005). Another body of research explored larger discursive devices including formality and informality (Reyes, 2014), humour and irony (Partington, 2008) and various argumentation strategies (e.g. Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou, 2017).

While this research has brought to light a range of discursive resources used by politicians to persuade, rarely persuasion has been linked with successful political leadership. Charteris-Black (2014) offers here some useful directions in that he emphasises that political leaders need to balance two dimensions of persuasion: the dimension of *tasks* or the *ideational* persuasion and the dimension of *relationships* or *interpersonal* persuasion. The former utilises the ideational potential of language, which in political speeches is often ‘done’ through concrete lexical items describing tasks and actions, and lexico-grammatical resources pertaining to logical argumentation, while the latter exploits interpersonal language resources including personal pronouns, affective and evaluative expressions as well as general nouns expressing ethical or attitudinal meanings to establish a relationship with the audience, for example, of honesty, empathy or affection (Charteris-Black, 2012; see also Partington and Taylor, 2018). While this distinction offers a useful analytical anchor to identify forms of persuasion as manifest in language use, the relationship with successful leadership is less clear partly because the definitions of what a success means in leadership vary and are contingent upon the context of national and organisational culture as well as the context of situation (House et al., 2004).

In a health crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, we can assume that successful leaders swiftly develop and implement measures to halt the spread of the pandemic, protect citizens and minimise harm. But this would not just work on its own; measures, especially ones that require a substantial change in behaviour, need cooperation on the part of citizens who have to be persuaded and/or convinced by the leader to do so. Here, persuasion and successful crisis leadership coincide in that successful crisis leaders would use language and other semiotic resource in a way that helps accomplish these aims. It would, of course, be naïve to claim that language alone could stop the pandemic. Yet, “adherence of the mind” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 4) and cooperation are necessary prerequisites for the measures to work and one of the ways to achieve this is through language because of its intrinsic capacity to do persuasion (Soring, 1989).

Merkel’s communicative style at the beginning of the pandemic seems to ‘have worked the trick’; despite the resistance in some corners of the society, most citizens of Germany adjusted to the restrictions, which, in turn, was a large contributor to the reduction in the number of infections and deaths. Hence, an analysis of the discourse that she used in her speeches given at the beginning of the pandemic can shed light on some of the persuasive techniques that were effective in managing this health crisis. Yet, an analysis of discourse in that particular moment of time would not be sufficient to fully understand Merkel’s persuasive achievements. It needs to be set against the background of her leadership and rhetorical style before the pandemic. Therefore, the next section offers a summary of features that have been associated with Merkel’s style as a political leader and public communicator.

3. The ‘silent’ chancellor: Angela Merkel’s leadership and communicative style

Angela Merkel is a unique political figure in many respects. She is the first female Chancellor in the history of Germany. She was elected to the office in 2005 having previously been the Leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). She grew up in East Germany during the communist regime. Initially, she embarked on a scientific career holding a PhD in quantum chemistry but left science for politics following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Following the 2005 general election, Merkel became the first woman, the first East German, and, at the age of 51, the youngest person to hold the Chancellor’s office.

A female scientist who rose to become a powerful leader was unique in Germany as it was in the rest of the world. The uniqueness of her biography has, as many believed, shaped her public image including her style of leadership and communication. In contrast to her predecessors, Merkel has been perceived as restrained and unemotional. In fact, her decision not to speak out on certain but crucial occasions have earned her the nickname of a *schweigende Kanzlerin* (silent chancellor) and Merkel’s silences have become something like a legendary topos in her media coverage (Schröter, 2013). As Schröter (2013) has shown in her comprehensive study of media representations of Merkel’s communicative style, her ‘silent’ approach has sometimes been seen as a failure to address matters head-on. Other commentators emphasised her pragmatism arguing that silence can be a form of deliberate communicative tactic enabling Merkel to avoid open confrontations and focus on the bigger picture of politics (Schröter, 2013). Merkel herself described her approach to leadership as ‘think, consult, decide’ or ‘step by step’ (Mueller-Haerlin, 2007), which has been widely attributed to her background in science as well as her upbringing in East Germany, where one had to be extra careful when speaking out (Yoder, 2011).

Silence can also be the other side of listening and letting others speak. The German weekly broadsheet newspaper *Die Zeit* commended Merkel’s approach and contrasted it with the loud communicative style of her male predecessors, which, as the newspaper argued, led to their inability to listen to the electorate and consequently to their demise:

“Schröder and Kohl were in the end so loud that they could hardly hear anyone but themselves. But they were unaware that the Germans had already turned down the volume. Merkel is more silent, this way she can hear more. When she raises her voice, it is noticed. (Zeit, 10.9.2009, cited in Schröter, 2013: 127)

The last point is important to note if we want to better understand the effectiveness of Merkel’s speeches at the beginning of the pandemic. Her usual silent stance amplifies, by a way of contrast, her voice; when she speaks, people listen.

The perceived communicative restraint has also to do with her choice of media and media platforms. Unlike many other world leaders, Merkel does not use social media extensively to communicate with the public. Thus, she has not ‘capitalised’ on the affordance of social media sites that have enhanced some politicians’ public image and allowed them to influence citizens’ attitudes in more direct ways. Merkel is also known for her selective approach to interviews, which she gives very rarely. When she chooses to address the nation, she does so via a TV broadcast, typically once a year on New Year’s Eve. The 18th of March 2020 marks a turning point in her media ‘strategy’, in that Merkel, for the first time, addressed the nation with an unscheduled TV speech and this was not about seasonal greetings but to deliver a public health policy in a crisis situation. The speech was preceded and followed by a range of shorter addresses, which she gave as part of regular press briefings throughout the months of March and April 2020. These media events merit particular attention given their significance as unique media performances of Merkel’s leadership in the evolving health crisis.

Against this background, the current study attempts to shed light on the strategies of persuasion used by Angela Merkel in her unique televised media performances in the first two months of the pandemic. It aims to identify: 1) what kind of frequent lexico-grammatical devices she employed to deliver the public health measures and 2) what kind of dimension of persuasion (ideational vs interpersonal dimension) she utilised to persuade German citizens to follow them. To understand the novelty of her style during the health crisis, her Covid-19 speeches are compared to speeches given during her first and second term in the office.

4. Data and methods

The study consists of two parts; the first part is interested in identifying salient lexico-grammatical features in speeches and statements given by Merkel in the first two months of the pandemic. The second part compares the saliency of identified features with their occurrence in Merkel’s speeches given in the pre-pandemic times. Both parts employ the tools and methods of a corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Partington et al., 2013). The first part is based on an analysis of a specialised corpus of Merkel’s Covid-19 speeches (the AM-Covid-19-Corpus) delivered from mid March until 23 April 2020. Specifically, the corpus consists of two longer addresses delivered on 18 March and 23 April 2020 and ten press briefings, which Merkel gave at regular intervals during that time. Table 1 below shows the total corpus size (16,576 words; 19,652 tokens) and the size of each subcorpus presented in chronological order as the communicative events were broadcast. The data were sourced from the official website of the German Chancellery (bundesregierung.de). Although small, the data set constitutes a specialised corpus of all public statements on the topic of the Covid-19 pandemic given by Merkel in March and April 2020. The software programme Sketch Engine was used to interrogate the corpus, as it enables processing and tagging of German language data.

Table 1: The AM-Covid-19-Corpus

Media event	Date	No. of words	% of the corpus
1. Press briefing	11/03/20	1,443	8.7
2. Press briefing	16/03/20	1,124	6.8
3. Press briefing	17/03/20	1,065	6.4
4. Address to the Nation	18/03/20	1,632	9.8
5. Press briefing	22/03/20	1,006	6.1
6. Press briefing	26/03/20	1,101	6.6
7. Press briefing	01/04/20	695	4.2
8. Press briefing	06/04/20	1,234	7.4
9. Press briefing	09/04/20	1,210	7.3
10. Press briefing	15/04/20	1,446	8.7
11. Press briefing	20/04/20	1,233	7.4
12. Government statement	23/04/20	3,387	20.4
Total corpus size in words		16,576	100

In order to identify the extent and distribution of salient lexico-grammatical features, a frequency-based approach was adopted. A frequency list was retrieved from the corpus which included items that were mentioned six or more times to highlight lexico-grammatical patterns that were used frequently as opposed to those that occurred occasionally. Initially, all inflected word forms were included in order to capture and disambiguate between different parts of

speech² and spelling variants³. Subsequently, all words on the frequency list were scrutinised and items that performed a purely grammatical function (e.g. articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, some indefinite pronouns) were removed. Next, the list was sorted alphabetically to identify words that belong to the same part of speech, had the same meaning but were, at times, capitalised because they were used at the beginning of the sentence. They were combined into one entry (e.g. ‘Wir’ and ‘wir’ were joined together). Also, inflectional variants of the same morphological form were merged, for example, ‘letzte’ (last) and ‘letzter’ (last) or ‘können’ (can, first and third person plural) and ‘kann’ (can, first or third person singular). This produced a frequency list with 206 content items (total frequency of 4,427) that represent the dominant lexico-grammatical devices and topical words employed frequently by Merkel in her Covid-19 speeches and statements. Finally, the items were scrutinised by exploring their dominant function in the discourse and categorised into functional domains, whether an item was used primarily to express interpersonal relationships, evaluation or simply pointed to a concrete measure or policy. This categorisation allowed for gauging the extent of interpersonal and ideational persuasion in Merkel’s speeches and highlights the most frequent forms that were used to do persuasive work. Yet, assigning a word to a functional category is not an easy task and requires a careful consideration of the use of the word in context. Therefore, concordance lines of all 206 items were checked in order to determine the primary function and meaning of a word. In some cases, one form could perform more than two functions. In such a case, the most dominant function was considered. For example, ‘jede*’ (each or everybody) was mostly used to refer to people and was therefore classified in the category interpersonal relationship.

Claiming importance based on raw frequencies can lead to overinterpretation, since an item can be frequent, but its use concentrated in one part of the corpus (i.e. in one speech). To avoid such overinterpretations of importance, the dispersion value (D value) of some of the very frequent items is reported too. It was obtained using the Juilland’s D statistic. The value is a number between 0 and 1 with values closer to 0 indicating a very uneven distribution and values close to 1 an even spread. We can assume that content items that are frequently used and evenly spread across the subcorpora are relevant in Merkel’s speeches.

The second part of the study compares the occurrence of the identified features with their occurrence in Merkel’s speeches given in the pre-pandemic times to gauge the extent of their novelty in her communicative style during the first wave. To do so, a keyword analysis was employed to compare the AM-Covid-19 Corpus with a corpus of Merkel’s speeches available as part of the German Political Speeches Corpus (Barbaresi, 2018). This corpus is a large compilation of political speeches delivered by the top 71 German politicians from 1984 to 2017. From this large data set, only speeches by Merkel were retrieved and compiled into a smaller AM-Corpus. The size of the corpus is 1,445,153 words (1,672,243 tokens) spanning speeches from 2005 to 2017. Sketch Engine was used to perform a keyword analysis, which is a useful way to identify distinctive items in one corpus as compared to another. In the context of this study, items identified as keywords in the AM-Covid-19-Corpus can be interpreted as being salient or characteristic in Merkel’s speeches during the first wave of the pandemic as opposed to her pre-pandemic speeches. Sketch Engine calculates a keyword score based on a normalised frequency ratio ‘word W is N times as frequent in corpus X versus corpus Y’ with a simple math parameter added to account for the zero problem in divisions.

² As a default, Sketch Engine combines lowercase and capitalised word forms and displays them in lowercase. This could be problematic for German, since all nouns are capitalised and some have the same morphological form as other parts of speech, for example the noun ‘Leben’ (life) has the same form as the verb ‘leben’ (to live). In order to disambiguate between such cases, the lowercase default was switched off.

³ For example, ‘Sie’ is an equivalent of ‘you’ and a formal address; written with a small ‘s’ as in ‘sie’, it can be the feminine pronoun in the third person or the plural pronoun ‘they’. If the lowercase option has not been switched off, all the forms would have been merged into ‘sie’ in lowercase.

5. Results

After exploring and categorising the words that remained after removing pure grammatical items, the major functional domains could be revealed. These are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The most frequent lexico-grammatical items in the AM-Covid-19-Corpus categorised into functional domains

Functional domain	Items	Total freq.
Interpersonal relationships	wir (512), ich (162), uns (126), unser* (100), alle* (80), Sie (58), Menschen (57), jede* (34), mich (30), Bürger* (26), Ihnen (22), gemeinsam (21), Bürgerinnen (21), mir (18), meine (16), danke* (13), Damen (10), Herren (10), Dank (9), miteinander (7), Kinder (6), Kollegen (6), zusammen (6), Dankeschön (6)	1356
Evaluation	so (77), sehr (65), ganz (48), natürlich (53), mehr (32), gut (31), wichtig* (26), weiter (23), schnell (17), insbesondere (15), wirklich (15), deutlich (12), besonders (11), große* (11), notwendig (13), schwer (11), einfach (10), genau (8), hart (7), lange (7), leider (7), weit (7), besser (6), ernst (6), freie (6), stark (6), ähnliche (6), überzeugt (6)	542
Time expressions	heute (60), jetzt (62), dann (57), Tag (39), wieder (38), schon (35), Woche* (34), Zeit (31), immer (29), gerade (24), Anfang (15), weiterhin (10), Augenblick (7), gestern (7), nie (7)	455
Modality	können (85), müssen (82), kann (38), möchte (28), wollen (22), muss (19), könnte* (12), soll (11), vielleicht (11), möglich (10), möglichst (10), dürfen (7), sollten (7), darf (6)	348
Activities	machen (26), tun (22), arbeiten (21), helfen* (21), kommen (17), vorgehen (14), folgen (13), leisten (11), halten (10), einhalten (10), brauchen (10), handeln (9), beschlossen (11), befasst (8), stattfinden (7), treffen (7), gewährleistet (7), zeigen (7), geschlossen (6), bewältigen (6), geeinigt (6), gefasst (6), gestellt (6), bewältigen (6), unterstützen (6)	273
Europe/EU Politics	europäische* (53), Europa (38), Union (18), Mitgliedstaaten (10), Kommission (15), Regierungschefs (13), Rat (10), Eurogruppe (7), Gemeinschaft (7)	171
Germany /German Politics	Deutschland (47), Länder* (42), Bundesregierung (22), Bundesländer* (13), Bund (10), Ministerpräsidenten (10), Beschlüsse (6), Bundesrepublik (6), staatlichen (6), Entscheidungen (6)	168
Measures/rules	Maßnahmen (35), Einschränkungen (12), Kontakte (12), Regeln (12), Aufgabe (10), Kontaktbeschränkungen (8), Masken (8), Versorgung (8), Verfügung (7), Abstand (6), Geschäfte (6), Leitlinien (6), Mittel (6), Produktion (6), reduzieren (6), Sicherheit (6), Hause (6), Solidarität (6)	166
Communication	sage* (48), Frage* (29), gesagt (15), gesprochen (15), Videokonferenz (14), informieren* (10), beraten (8), Beratungen (8), sozusagen (8), Diskussion (6)	161
Pandemic related	Virus (41), Pandemie (27), Zahlen (12), Coronavirus (12), Ausbreitung (10), Epidemie (7), Coronapandemie (6)	115
Cause-effect/reason	deshalb (49), denn (30), weil (20)	99
Medical facilities and personnel	Gesundheitssystem (18), medizinische* (15), Einrichtungen (12), Krankenhäuser* (12), Impfstoff (7), Ärzte (5), Schutzausrüstung (6)	75

Description of the situation	Situation (27), Krise (16), Not (10), Lage (9), Herausforderung (6), Bewährungsprobe (6)	74
Place expressions	hier (20), da (19), dort (13), Welt (8), außerhalb (7)	67
Human life and health	Leben (31), leben (13), schützen (7), Gesundheit (6)	57
Economy	Wirtschaft (13), wirtschaftlichen (11), Euro (10), Unternehmen (10), Finanzminister (7), Höhe (6)	57
Contrast	aber (28), sondern (28)	56
Science/scientists	Experten (7), Robert-Koch-Institut (7)	14
Other	sie (52), viele* (33), wissen (15), Bereich (13), Ebene* (13), erst* (12), Weise (10), Dinge (7), Thema (6), Weg (6), Ziel (6)	173

By far the most important domain was that of interpersonal relationships as evidenced by the very frequent use of personal pronouns, direct forms of address and references to fellow citizens, children and colleagues. This suggests that Merkel placed emphasis on interpersonal persuasion in her speeches and on building connections with her audiences. The second most important domain was that of evaluation, which comprises mostly adjectives and adverbs describing situations and actions. The top items in this category are adverbs that point to a manner such as ‘so’ (so) or function as intensifiers ‘sehr’ (very), ‘ganz’ (quite/completely). Adjectives in this category highlight the importance and urgency of the measures and include items such as ‘wichtig’ (‘important), ‘notwendig’ (necessary) and ‘schnell’ (fast). The seriousness of the situation is further intensified through describing it as ‘Krise’ (‘crisis’), ‘Not’ (hardship), ‘Herausforderung’ (challenge) and ‘Bewährungsprobe’ (important test). It is also worth noting that from the end of March, Merkel changed the terminology from ‘Epidemie’ (epidemic) to ‘Pandemie’ (pandemic) to signal the scale of the escalating rise in infections and seriousness of coronavirus. This follows the WHO’s official announcement of the Covid-19 outbreak as a pandemic on 11 March 2020⁴.

The third most important domain was that of time, especially the focus on the present moment, on ‘heute’ (today) and ‘jetzt’ (now). The time domain was closely followed by markers of modality; in this category, two modal verbs ‘können’ (can) und ‘müssen’ (must) emerged as the most frequent items also belonging to the top 10 content words in the whole corpus (see the frequency list in the Appendix). ‘Müssen’ was used by Merkel mostly in its deontic function emphasising necessity and obligation, while ‘können’ was employed in its dynamic modality to highlight ability. Comparatively, markers of epistemic modality, which are normally used to express hesitation or uncertainty, were rare.

What is also salient is the relative importance of Europe with ‘europäisch’ (European) being the top adjective and ‘Europe’ belonging to the top 30 content words (see the Appendix). Merkel was clearly framing the pandemic as not just a national but also international matter, though the internationality of the crisis was limited to the European Union (see below). Contrary to some general assumptions about the importance of Merkel’s background in science when handling the pandemic, there was relatively little focus on scientific vocabulary in her speeches. Merkel seems to have abstained from using scientific terminology and mostly referred to SARS-CoV-2 simply as ‘Virus’ (virus). While references to specific scientific terms are rare in the corpus, Merkel drew recurrently on devices of logical reasoning, as evidenced by the high frequencies of conjunctions of reasoning/causal relations such as ‘deshalb’ (because of that), ‘denn’ (because) and ‘weil’ (because). Almost every decision and action was justified by providing reasons; these were not grounded in complex scientific facts but rather in common sense understanding of the spread of the virus:

⁴ <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>

1. All das wird in diesem Jahr nicht stattfinden können, weil sich eine Pandemie leider nicht an solchen Feiertagen orientiert. (1 April)
[All of this will not take place this year because a pandemic does not orient itself to such holidays]
2. und deshalb müssen wir schrittweise, langsam und vorsichtig vorgehen. Denn es wäre jammerschade, wenn wir sehenden Auges in einen Rückfall gingen ... (20 April)
[and therefore we must proceed gradually, slowly and carefully. Because it would be a shame if we saw a relapse]

The distribution of the connectors of cause-effect and reason shows the continuous importance of this kind of argumentation in Merkel speeches. The dispersion of the conjunctions is fairly even in the corpus (D value for 'deshalb' is 0.804, for 'denn' 0.841 and for 'weil' 0.656). The following sections explore in more detail two of the most prominent functional domains: the interpersonal relationships and time expressions.

5.1. Interpersonal relationships

Looking at the top 100 content words, the prominence of devices used to do relational work is striking and suggests that interpersonal persuasion was indeed the main focus in Merkel's mediated speeches. The top five words are almost exclusively personal pronouns, of which the most frequent items are the first person pronouns 'wir' (we) and 'ich' (I). Personal pronouns, and 'we' in particular, have been identified as some of the most widely used discursive resources to do involvement in political discourse (Fetzer, 2014; Tyrkkö, 2016; Jaworska and Sogomonian, 2019). Yet, apart from 'I', which is unambiguous, most pronouns have a wider referential range and flexibility. 'We' is especially versatile in that it can refer to the speaker and the hearer or to many other people, larger groups and entities such as governments or nation states. It can equally exclude and include. This flexibility of 'we' makes it a 'convenient' tool to involve, address and mobilise larger or smaller audiences (as required).

When Merkel uses 'wir' in her Covid-19 speeches, she does so almost always in an inclusive manner evoking three distinctive groups: all citizens of Germany, the federal government and political leaders of the local state, and the European Union. Interestingly, evoking each group involves different linguistic devices. The use of 'wir' to include citizens occurs mostly with two modal verbs 'müssen' (must) and 'können' (can) in the present tense. 'Müssen' is almost exclusively used in its deontic meaning signalling the necessity and obligation, and mostly in appeals to follow the new rules. 'Können', on the other hand, evokes the sense of ability. The use of both modal verbs together with the pronoun 'wir' implies that all citizens can have control over the necessary actions, which makes them therefore possible and doable:

3. Wir haben ein Mittel dagegen: wir müssen aus Rücksicht voneinander Abstand halten. (13 March)
[We have a remedy: we have to keep our distance from one another out of consideration.]
4. Wir können jetzt, entschlossen, alle miteinander reagieren. (13 March)
[We can all react now in a determined manner]
5. Das heißt, wir müssen diese Regeln auch ganz besonders über die Osterfeiertage weiter einhalten. (1 April)
[That means that we have to follow these rules especially over the Easter holidays.]

On two occasions, Merkel uses a metacommentary to highlight that she uses ‘we’ inclusively:

6. Damit meine ich alle - uns alle in Deutschland, ohne Ausnahme. (9 April)
[By that I mean everyone - all of us in Germany, without exception.]
7. Wenn ich von "wir" rede, dann sind das wir alle, die Bürgerinnen und Bürger dieses Landes. (20 April)
[When I speak of "we", it is all of us, the citizens of this country.]

Other less prominent uses of ‘wir’ refer to the federal government. Here the pronoun is often followed by verbs signalling actions that were completed or will be completed in the near future, as Extracts 8 and 9 below illustratively demonstrate. In this way, she presents her government as actively working on measures to deal with the crisis:

8. Wir haben diese Beschlüsse nach intensiven Abstimmungen und Beratungen gefasst. (12 March)
[We took these decisions after intensive agreements and debates.]
9. Wir werden dann am Donnerstag im Coronakabinett den Punkt der Eigenherstellung von persönlicher Schutzausrüstung [...] beratschlagen. (6 April)
[We will deliberate the issue of in-house production of personal protective equipment in the corona cabinet on Thursday.]

Oftentimes, the political ‘wir’ includes both the federal government (‘Bund’) and the local states (‘Länder’). In doing so, Merkel highlights the importance of political unity (see Extract 10). Now is not the time for tensions that sometimes occur in political debates between the federal and local governments:

10. Wir wissen, dass unsere Politik nur dann wirksam sein kann, wenn wir das zwischen Bund und Ländern [...] gut abstimmen und mit gleicher Entschlossenheit vorgehen ... (16 March)
[We know that our policy can only be effective if we coordinate it well between the federal government and the federal states [...] and act with equal determination ...]

The third membership which Merkel evokes through the use of ‘wir’ is that of the European community. Here, she clearly frames the pandemic as a European crisis but also an opportunity to strengthen solidarity within Europe:

11. Es wird darum gehen zu zeigen, dass wir bereit sind, unser Europa zu verteidigen und zu stärken. (6 April)
[This is about showing that we are ready to defend and strengthen our Europe.]
12. Wir haben in dieser Krise auch die Aufgabe, zu zeigen, wer wir als Europa sein wollen. (23 April)
[In this crisis we also have the task of showing who we want to be as Europe.]

Yet, when Merkel talks about Europe, she means the European Union or institutional bodies of the EU as well as the EU economy. Although she projects the pandemic as a wider European crisis, ‘unser Europa’ is restricted to the geopolitical borders of the EU. She frames the crisis as an opportunity to consolidate solidarity within the EU, which has, in recent years, been undermined by Eurosceptic governments in the East of the EU and by Brexit. Similar to the way she calls for a national unity and sharing responsibility within Germany, she expects other EU nations to make their contributions (see Extract 13).

13. Deshalb geht es hier in Europa um ein koordiniertes Vorgehen, bei dem jeder Mitgliedstaat seinen Beitrag leisten muss. (11 March)
[This is why we need coordinated action here in Europe, to which every Member State must make its contribution.]

The sense of unity and solidarity is also reinforced through the frequent use of the possessive determiner 'unser' (our). What is conveyed as 'our' is mostly the health system ('unser Gesundheitssystem'), the country itself ('unser Land') and measures ('unsere Maßnahmen'). While Merkel justified the restrictions as a necessary protective measure to ensure that, among other things, the health system is not 'overburdened' ('überlastet'), towards the end of April, she did not hesitate to highlight temporary successes (see Extract 15).

14. So können wir heute feststellen: Unser Gesundheitssystem hält der Bewährungsprobe bisher stand. (23 April)
[Today we can say that our health system has withstood the test so far]

Another prominent device of relation work in her speeches is the frequent employment of the first person pronoun 'ich' (I). Using 'I' in political speeches is a paramount device of interpersonal persuasion. It gives a speech a personal tone and is a way to show compassion and a commitment creating a bond with the audience (De Fina, 1995). It can also be used to display power status and authority. Politicians often use 'I' to describe themselves in a positive light and to emphasise their personal qualities.

Merkel used 'ich' in her Covid speeches 162 times and she did so to do four 'jobs': to express thanks, to report on what she has done, to communicate empathy and to draw on her own biography. The most frequent collocate of 'ich' in Merkel's speeches is 'möchte' (26 times) corresponding to the English 'would like to'. It is mostly used to express a wish or a polite request. When Merkel uses the phrase 'ich möchte', she does so to express verbal processes mostly saying 'thank you'. The relevance of personal thanks is reinforced through the use of the verb 'danke' (to thank) as a distinctive collocate of 'ich' (used on 11 occasions). She thanks not only the governmental officials, cultural institutions, churches and medical personal, but extends her thanks to citizens but only to those who follow the rules (Extracts 15 and 16):

15. Ich möchte deshalb einen Dank an die Bürger sagen, dass sie diese doch sehr erschwerten Bedingungen annehmen(1 April)
[I would therefore like to say thank you to the citizens for accepting these very difficult conditions....]
16. ... ist es mir wichtig, mich direkt an all diejenigen zu wenden, die sich jetzt an die notwendigen Verhaltensregeln halten. Ich danke Ihnen dafür. (22 March)
[it is important to me to address directly all those who now adhere to the necessary rules. I thank you for that.]

Merkel also turns to the personal stance to express solidarity and empathy and all occurrences of the collocation 'ich' + 'weiss' (I know) point to this pattern. Every time she talks about the restrictions, she emphasises that she is aware of the hardship and sacrifice which they require from all citizens and specific groups such as parents who are not able to send their children to schools (Extract 17) or people who live by themselves (Extract 18). While the restrictions and the sacrifices are hard, they are necessary to save lives (Extract 19).

17. Ich weiß ja um die Not vieler Menschen. Ich weiß um die Not von Eltern und Kindern, um die Not gerade auch von Alleinerziehenden (20 April)
[I know about the plight of many people. I know about the plight of parents and children, especially of single parents ...]
18. .. ich weiß auch um die Not einsamer Menschen, die ihre Einsamkeit jetzt noch viel, viel stärker als sonst spüren. (20 April)
[I also know about the plight of lonely people who now feel their loneliness much, much more strongly.]
19. Ich weiß, dass das hart ist, aber es rettet Menschenleben. (1 April)
[I know this is tough, but it saves lives.]

As someone who grew up in a communist country, where international travel was heavily restricted and only possible to a small number of people, she highlights that she knows what it means for the citizens of a democratic country to be suddenly confronted with curbs on the freedom of movement (see Extract 21):

20. Ich weiß, wie hart die Schließungen [...] in unser Leben und auch unser demokratisches Selbstverständnis eingreifen [...] Für jemandem wie mich, für die Reise- und Bewegungsfreiheit ein schwer erkämpftes Recht waren, sind solche Einschränkungen nur in der absoluten Notwendigkeit zu rechtfertigen. Sie sollten in einer Demokratie nie leichtfertig und nur temporär beschlossen werden - aber sie sind im Moment unverzichtbar, um Leben zu retten.
[I know how hard the restrictions [...] impinge on our lives and our democratic self-image [...] For someone like me, for whom freedom of travel and movement were a hard-won right, such restrictions can only be justified if absolutely necessary. In a democracy they should never be decided lightly and only temporarily - but at the moment they are crucial to save lives.]

Evoking the historical and biographical experience, she justifies the introduction of the restrictions as an absolute necessity; they are not a policy to control citizens (as in the former GDR) but temporary measures to save lives.

The importance of interpersonal persuasion and building connections with the audiences is evidenced through the dispersion of the pronouns across the corpus; the D value for 'wir' stands at 0.935, for 'ich' at 0.908, 'unser*' at 0.832 and 'uns' at 0.9 suggesting an almost even distribution of the items in the corpus.

5.2. The nowness of events and actions

The second category which emerged as prominent in terms of overall frequency is the use of time deictics with heute (today) and 'jetzt' (now) topping the frequency list (see the Appendix). Use of time deictics is not surprising, since every communicative act is always anchored in space and time, and speakers need to position themselves in that spatio-temporal context. The 'importation of context' is especially pertinent to monologic discourse types because there is no opportunity to directly negotiate it with the interlocutors (Fetzer, 2011). Yet, not all elements of the context are equally evoked or 'imported', and speakers, especially in political speeches, strategically foreground some elements of space and time, while others are backgrounded or excluded. This is often done with the view to create a shared social space and/or support speaker's line of argumentation (Fetzer, 2011).

Through the frequent use of 'heute' and 'jetzt', Merkel chose to emphasise the nowness of the situation, which gave her speeches a sense of immediacy and urgency. 'Jetzt' is mostly

used in direct appeals to the audience urging them to take action now or in descriptions of the situation (see Extracts 21 – 22):

21. Bitte ziehen Sie alle mit. Tun Sie jetzt das, was richtig ist für unser Land. (22 March)
[Please pull all along. Do now what is right for our country.]
22. Aber wir haben auch nicht viel Spielraum, sondern wir müssen jetzt ganz konzentriert weitermachen. (15 April)
[But we don't have a lot of leeway, we have to carry on with full concentration now.]

‘Heute’ can refer to today; it can also point to present times in the sense of ‘nowadays’. When Merkel deploys ‘heute’, it is mostly in references to actions that happened or were happening on the day (see Extracts 23 – 24):

23. Deshalb haben wir uns heute auf folgende ergänzende Leitlinien verständigt ...(22 March)
[We have therefore agreed today on the following additional guidelines]
24. Meine Damen und Herren, wir haben heute wieder eine Beratung des Coronakabinetts gehabt, ... (9 April)
[Ladies and gentlemen, today we had another meeting of the corona cabinet....]

Both words ‘heute’ and ‘jetzt’ are fairly equally distributed throughout the corpus; the D value for ‘heute’ stands at 0.772 and for ‘jetzt’ at 0.851 suggesting their overall significance in the Covid-19 speeches.

5.3 Comparison with Merkel’s pre-pandemic speeches

Table 3 shows the top 50 keywords retrieved in Sketch Engine using the AM-Covid-19-Corpus as the focus corpus and the AM-Corpus as a reference corpus. It is not surprising to see items such as ‘Virus’, ‘Pandemie’ or ‘Maßnahmen’ (measures) at the top of the list since these were topical in the context of the pandemic. Also, there is a number of novel items such as ‘Coronavirus’, ‘Coronapandemie’ or ‘Videokonferenz’ because of the newness of the virus and

Table 3: Keywords in the AM-Covid-19-Corpus (Focus Corpus) as compared to AM-Corpus (Reference Corpus)

Item	Freq. in the Focus Corpus	Freq. in the Ref. Corpus	Norm. Freq. in the Focus Corpus	Norm. Freq. in the Ref. Corpus	Score
1. Virus (virus)	41	1	2,086.30	0.6	3.1 ⁵
2. Pandemie (pandemic)	27	1	1,373.90	0.6	2.4
3. Maßnahmen (measures)	35	298	1,781	178.2	2.4
4. Gesundheitssystem (health system)	18	60	915.9	35.9	1.8
5. Woche (week)	19	144	966.8	86.1	1.8
6. Situation (situation)	27	531	1,373.90	317.5	1.8
7. Bürgerinnen (female citizens)	21	262	1,068.60	156.7	1.8

⁵ The score means that the item Virus was mentioned three times more frequently in the Covid-19 speeches as compared to speeches given in the pre-pandemic times.

8. alle (all)	63	2,298	3,205.80	1,374.20	1.8
9. jetzt (now)	62	2,343	3,154.90	1,401.10	1.7
10. leben (life/live)	44	1,464	2,239	875.5	1.7
11. Videokonferenz (video conference)	14	0	712.4	0	1.7
12. unser (our)	36	1,105	1,831.90	660.8	1.7
13. Bürger (citizens)	19	340	966.8	203.3	1.6
14. vorgehen (proceed, act)	14	82	712.4	49	1.6
15. Coronavirus (Coronavirus)	12	0	610.6	0	1.6
16. Einschränkungen (restrictions)	12	10	610.6	6	1.6
17. Wochen (weeks)	15	171	763.3	102.3	1.6
18. Regierungschefs (heads of governments)	13	96	661.5	57.4	1.6
19. Kontakte (contacts)	12	82	610.6	49	1.5
20. Einrichtungen (facilities)	12	86	610.6	51.4	1.5
21. deshalb	49	16,907	2,493.4	1,310.3	1.5
22. Ausbreitung (spread)	10	3	508.9	1.8	1.5
23. Mitgliedstaaten (Member States)	16	346	814.2	206.9	1.5
24. folgen (follow)	13	192	661.5	114.8	1.5
25. Bundesländer (Federal States)	11	95	559.7	56.8	1.5
26. schnell (fast)	17	444	865.1	265.5	1.5
27. müssen (must)	82	4,274	4,172.60	2,555.80	1.5
28. beschlossen (decided)	11	141	559.7	84.3	1.4
29. Anfang (beginning)	15	378	763.3	226	1.4
30. medizinischen (medical)	9	43	458	25.7	1.4
31. Ministerpräsidenten (heads of federal governments)	10	103	508.9	61.6	1.4
32. Kontaktbeschränkungen (contact restrictions)	8	0	407.1	0	1.4
33. Masken (masks)	8	3	407.1	1.8	1.4
34. helfen (to help)	13	307	661.5	183.6	1.4
35. Regeln (rules)	12	249	610.6	148.9	1.4
36. uns (us)	126	7,172	6,411.60	4,288.90	1.4
37. jeder (everyone)	20	738	1,017.70	441.3	1.4
38. schwer (difficult)	11	201	559.7	120.2	1.4
39. notwendig (necessary)	13	328	661.5	196.1	1.4
40. wir (we)	512	31,058	26,053.30	18,572.70	1.4
41. Versorgung (supplies)	8	50	407.1	29.9	1.4
42. handeln (to act)	12	311	610.6	186	1.4
43. Epidemie (epidemic)	7	1	356.2	0.6	1.4
44. Robert-Koch-Institut	7	2	356.2	1.2	1.4
45. Impfstoff (vaccine)	7	3	356.2	1.8	1.4
46. Eurogruppe (Euro group)	7	3	356.2	1.8	1.4

47. können (can)	85	5,064	4,325.30	3,028.30	1.3
48. Bürgern (citizens)	8	115	407.1	68.8	1.3
49. Coronapandemie (Corona pandemic)	6	0	305.3	0	1.3
50. danke (thank, 1st person singular)	11	326	559.7	194.9	1.3

used technology. Yet, there are also many items that Merkel employed in her pre-pandemic speeches, but they occurred proportionally more frequently in the AM-Covid-19-Corpus; these include pronouns such as ‘unser’ (our), ‘uns’ (us), ‘alle’ (all), ‘wir’ (we) and mentions of citizens (‘Bürgerinnen’ and ‘Bürger’). She also seems to have used the verb ‘danke’ (to thank, 1st person singular) more often than in the pre-pandemic times. All these items point to the importance of interpersonal relationships and building connections with the audiences and hence, the saliency of interpersonal dimension of persuasion in her Covid-19 speeches. Another characteristic of the AM-Covid-19-Corpus is a more urgent and serious tone, as evidenced by the prominence of the time deictic ‘jetzt’ (now) and the adjectives such as ‘schwer’ (difficult) and ‘notwendig’ (necessary), which all have been used more frequently in the Covid-19 speeches. Also, the two modal verbs ‘müssen’ (must) and ‘können’ (can) made it to the top 50 keywords highlighting the emphasis on necessity and ability, while the conjunction ‘deshalb’ (therefore, because of that), which too belongs to the top keywords, suggests the prominence of cause-effect and logical reasoning in the AM-Covid-19-Corpus.

6. Conclusions

The corpus-assisted discourse analysis of lexico-grammatical devices employed by Merkel in her speeches and statements during the first wave of the pandemic reveals the kind of discursive strategies that might lead to a successful leadership at times of a (health) crisis. First and foremost, a crisis situation, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, requires a fast response, which, in turn, depends on solidarity and collective action. This is the discourse Merkel drew on from the moment she took to the TV to deliver her press briefings and speeches. The extensive use of devices to index interpersonal relationships, specifically ‘wir’, is a paramount example of this strategy. While the use of personal pronouns is, in many ways, typical of political speeches, politicians often employ them to include some groups and exclude others contributing thus to the creation of divisions between us vs. them. This strengthens alliances, and is a strategic resource when it comes to, for example, elections or referenda (Fetzer, 2014; Tyrkkö, 2016; Jaworska and Sogomonian, 2019). However, this exclusionary function of pronouns does not appear in Merkel’s speeches studied here; they are perhaps a rare instance in political discourse, when ‘wir’ is used to mean everyone within the country. Politicians who have built their political career and alliances by solely emphasising divisions might therefore find it difficult to communicate effectively in a pandemic (see Jones and Seargeant in this issue).

Secondly, a health crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic requires adherence to the rules. This was again emphasised by Merkel through the frequent use of the modal verb ‘müssen’ (in its denotic meaning) and ‘können’ in the vicinity of ‘wir’ that highlighted the necessity but also doability of the required actions. While emphasising the need for discipline, she also regularly thanked citizens for their contributions to halting the spread of the virus.

Thirdly, decisions that lead to serious restrictions on personal freedom and sociality need to be justified by offering plausible reasons. This was again a prominent feature in Merkle’s speeches as evidenced by the frequent use of ‘deshalb’ (this is why), ‘denn’ (because) and ‘weil’ (because). Most of the justifications were not complex scientific facts but rather

common-sense reasons ('save lives', 'avoid relapse', 'every day counts') that explained in simple and clear German why it was necessary to follow the rules.

Fourthly, a pandemic requires a decisive and timely response of those in power; this was foregrounded by Merkel in her extensive use of time deictics signalling the nowness of the situations and the actions and decisions that were made at the time. The focus was on what to do today and tomorrow, and step by step.

It is also worth highlighting what kind of devices were absent or less prominent in her speeches. First, there is little scientific terminology. Perhaps Merkel was aware that the short televised speeches were not the spaces to 'do science' around Covid-19, which is complex and had many unknowns at that time. This could have further fuelled uncertainties and fears that were too spreading fast. Secondly, while the importance of building interpersonal relationships was the key, overall the language is factual and there is a lack of overtly emotional words. There is also a very little speculation about the future with Merkel situating her approach in today. Moreover, she also seems to have abstained from using metaphors and other figures of speech that often appear in abundance in political discourse (cf. Charteris-Black, 2014). What she had to say was expressed in a concrete manner with no need to make inferences.

The comparison with her speeches from the pre-pandemic times has shown that many of the lexico-grammatical devices were not entirely new in her repertoire but were certainly used with a much higher frequency during the first wave of the pandemic. This suggests a somewhat different communicative style in the evolving health crisis. It also provides compelling evidence for the discursive nature of (effective) leadership; in response to the crisis, Merkel chose particular devices such as pronouns, specific adverbs adjectives, conjunctions and modal verbs to do her convincing work; to connect with the audiences, generate a sense of unity, and encourage solidarity in an attempt to create the adherence of minds.

On the final note, Merkel's media performances in the first wave of the pandemic were rather unusual for a Chancellor who normally 'shies away' from media attention. They presented quite a contrast to what is generally assumed about Merkel's communications (Schröter, 2013). And it is this contrast that amplified the effectiveness of the speeches: a chancellor who normally remains silent or impersonal, took to the centre media stage and spoke, and did so in a personal but factual manner presenting herself as a competent but also understanding leader.

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Appendix

Item	Freq.	Item	Freq.
1. wir (we)	512	26. Tag* (day)	39
2. ich (I)	162	27. Europa (Europe)	38
3. uns (us)	126	28. kann (can, 1 st person sing.)	38
4. unser* (our)	100	29. wieder (again)	38
5. können (can, plural)	85	30. andere* (other)	36
6. müssen (must)	82	31. schon (already)	35
7. alle* (all)	80	32. Maßnahmen (measures)	35
8. so (so)	76	33. jede* (each)	34
9. sehr (very)	65	34. Woche* (week)	34
10. jetzt (now)	62	35. viele* (many)	33
11. heute (today)	60	36. mehr (more)	32
12. Sie (you, formal)	58	37. gut* (good)	31
13. dann (then)	57	38. Leben (life)	31
14. Menschen (people)	57	39. Zeit* (time)	31
15. europäisch* (European)	53	40. denn (because)	30
16. natürlich (of course)	53	41. mich (me/myself)	30
17. sie (they)	52	42. Frage* (question)	29
18. ganz (quite)	48	43. immer (always)	29
19. sagen* (tell)	48	44. aber (but)	28
20. deshalb (this is why)	49	45. möchte (would like to)	28
21. Deutschland (Germany)	47	46. sondern (but)	28
22. gehen* (go)	45	47. Pandemie (pandemic)	27
23. Länder* (federal states)	42	48. Bürger* (citizens)	26
24. Virus (virus)	41	49. wichtig (important)	26
25. einmal (one)	39	50. gerade (just)	26

* indicates the main word form together with inflectional forms.