

70 years of Christmas speeches by the late Queen Elizabeth II

Digital Humanities: Tools & Methods

Group project: Team H

S3584674/Miriam Weigand, S5286530/Mengying Xu,
S5700353/ Yunchi Liu, S5724090/Bente van Ingen
S5747937/Réka Jurth, S5486211/Shiyan Jiang,
S5705312/Mathilde Contreras Latorre

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Introduction

The Royal Christmas Messages have become a cherished tradition that dates back to 1932 when King George V delivered the very first Christmas message on the radio. Interestingly, it was Rudyard Kipling, the esteemed author of "The Jungle Book," who penned this inaugural Christmas speech. The King himself was not the originator of the idea; credit goes to Sir John Reith, a prominent figure at the British Broadcasting Company (Hajkowski, 2010).

Sir John Reith, played a pivotal role in shaping the monarchy as a symbol of British national identity. Starting in 1924, the media gradually convinced King George V to embrace the potential of the new medium of radio. This mutually beneficial relationship offered the radio a newfound authority while simultaneously bolstering the popularity of the monarchy by providing it with a powerful means of communication (Hajkowski, 2010).

However, it was not an easy task for Reith to persuade the King to deliver a Christmas Speech. He persistently championed this proposal for several years before King George V finally agreed to make the historic address in 1932. This marked the establishment of a new tradition that has continued to this day.

The tradition of the Royal Christmas Messages was reluctantly carried on by King George VI, the successor to the throne due to his well-known stutter. Despite his initial reservations about broadcasting, King George VI continued the tradition initiated by his father. However, it was during the reign of his granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth II, that radio, and later television became an integral part of the Royal Family's communication methods.

There are two annual speeches given by the monarch: The Christmas Message and the Speech from the Throne. However, these two speeches differ significantly in their form and purpose. The Speech from the Throne, also known as the Queen's (now King's) Speech, is written by the government and read by the monarch in the House of Lord Chambers. Its primary objective is to outline the government's agenda for the upcoming session of Parliament.

On the other hand, the Christmas speech carries a more personal touch. It is crafted by the monarchs themselves, sometimes with assistance from their family and advisors (Switzer, 2023), and serves as a heartfelt message addressed directly to the people. This annual tradition allows the monarch to connect with the public in a more intimate and personal manner.

In 1957, the Royal Christmas Message took another significant leap forward with the first-ever televised broadcast. From then until 1960, these Christmas speeches were broadcast

live on television. However, starting in 1960, the messages were pre-recorded to allow for wider distribution across the Commonwealth.

The setting of these broadcasts played a crucial role in their impact. Not only could people see the Queen delivering her message, but they were also treated to a warm and inviting "homely" setting adorned with Christmas decorations. This deliberate choice of setting was part of the communication strategy, as it aimed to create a sense of relatability and connection with people throughout the country. By presenting herself in a familiar and festive environment, the Queen fostered a sense of intimacy and closeness with the viewers.

It is worth noting that the first televised Christmas broadcast coincided with the 25th anniversary of the very first Christmas radio message in 1932. This convergence of milestones further added to the significance of the occasion. Christmas became a pivotal moment that brought together the state, religion, and the home.

The Corpus of Royal Christmas Speeches consists of a total of 70 speeches, encompassing the entirety of Queen Elizabeth II's reign up until her last Christmas speech in 2021. We have also gathered the first two speeches of the current monarch, King Charles III (2022 and 2023). This extensive collection provides a valuable resource for studying the evolution of the monarchy's communication practices during the festive season. Additionally, the inclusion of the two speeches by King Charles III marks a significant transition within the monarchy, offering insights into the shifting dynamics of royal addresses.

The aim of this research

As described above, the significance of the Christmas speeches is enormous. This is further confirmed by the amount of research that has been done on not only the speeches of Queen Elizabeth II, but her Christmas speeches in particular. (Chen & Zhang, 2020). The aim of our research is to perform research on the style of the Christmas speeches given by Elizabeth II. As mentioned in the introduction, they are not entirely written by the monarch alone which could predict uniformity of the style, but on the other hand, the 'personal touch' might be measurable. We will analyse the stylistic similarity of the completed corpus of Queen Elizabeth II aided by our overarching research question: 'Does Queen Elizabeth II have a consistent style in her Christmas speeches?'

Researching style

It would be problematic not to address what we mean when we say we are researching style. Therefore, we employ an article by Hermann et al. (2015) to clarify what we are researching and how in our view. In this article, Hermann et al. provide a brief history of the development of the term 'style'. The history of the term style comes from a self-proclaimed ability to identify it, differing per author. According to Hermann et al. (2015), many definitions were not well-defined and were based on aesthetics. With the emergence of computational methods, the focus is mainly on the quantitative aspect of style. In Hermann et al.'s attempt to pose new definitions to style, we will be focused on his sixth aspect of style which is categorised by computational quantitative measurability (2015). This is precisely the style we aim to research. As our method of measuring

stylistic similarity will be the stylo package in the R software, we will not attempt to find aesthetic similarity in the corpus, we aim to measure if the Christmas speeches are stylistically similar to each other.

Hypothesis

As we have mentioned, The British monarch's Christmas speeches have a strong personal touch although the writing process is aided. The amount of second opinions and edits the monarch receives is not known to us. Nevertheless, it could greatly influence the measurable style. We hypothesise that the queen has a consistent style, seeing as she writes the speeches herself. She is the most consistent factor in the Christmas speeches after all.

Analysis

In the following section, we demonstrate how we answer our research questions.

We are using the stylo package of R to compare Christmas speeches given by leading figures of the British monarchy; Queen Elizabeth II (speeches from 1952 to 2021) and King Charles (speeches in 2022 and 2023). We aim to explore the relatedness of the speeches along the lines of stylistic similarity, that is how similar the speeches are to each other regarding their style. The reason we also compare King Charles III's speeches is as follows; should Queen Elizabeth II's speeches have a unique style, then King Charles III's speeches will be stylistically dissimilar.

Research questions:

1. Does the style of the Queen's Christmas speeches evolve over time or does it stay the same?
2. Are King Charles III's Christmas speeches quantitatively stylistically similar or dissimilar to Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speeches?
3. Are King Charles III's Christmas speeches qualitatively similar or dissimilar to Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speeches?
 - a) What are the most used words by the Queen in 1952, 1953 and by the King in 2022, 2023? (a comparison of the Queen's and the King's first two speeches)
 - b) What are the most used words by the Queen in 2020, 2021 and by the King in 2022, 2023? (a comparison of the last two speeches of the Queen and the first two speeches of the King, from the perspective of continuity)

RQ 1. Does the style of the Queen's Christmas speeches evolve over time?

Comparing Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speeches; the complete corpus

In the following part, we analyse the similarity of the Queen's Christmas speeches to other ones within the corpus of all her Christmas speeches. In order to analyse this, we activated the stylo package in R with the command 'library(stylo)' and then set the working directory to our corpus. We made a corpus with all the Christmas speeches from Queen Elizabeth II. We set the primary set to roughly the first half of the late Queen's Christmas speeches (from 1952 until 1987) and the secondary set to the rest of her Christmas speeches (1988 until 2021).

The first step was to set the parameters with `stylo()`. We used the command `stylo()` and then set the following parameters in the menu:

- INPUT & LANGUAGE:
INPUT: plain text
LANGUAGE: English (ALL)
- FEATURES:
FEATURES: words, ngram size 1
MFW SETTINGS: min 100, max 1000, increment 100
CULLING: min 0, max 0, incr 0, list cutoff 5000
- STATISTICS:
STATISTICS: Cluster Analysis
DISTANCES: Classic Delta
- SAMPLING: No sampling

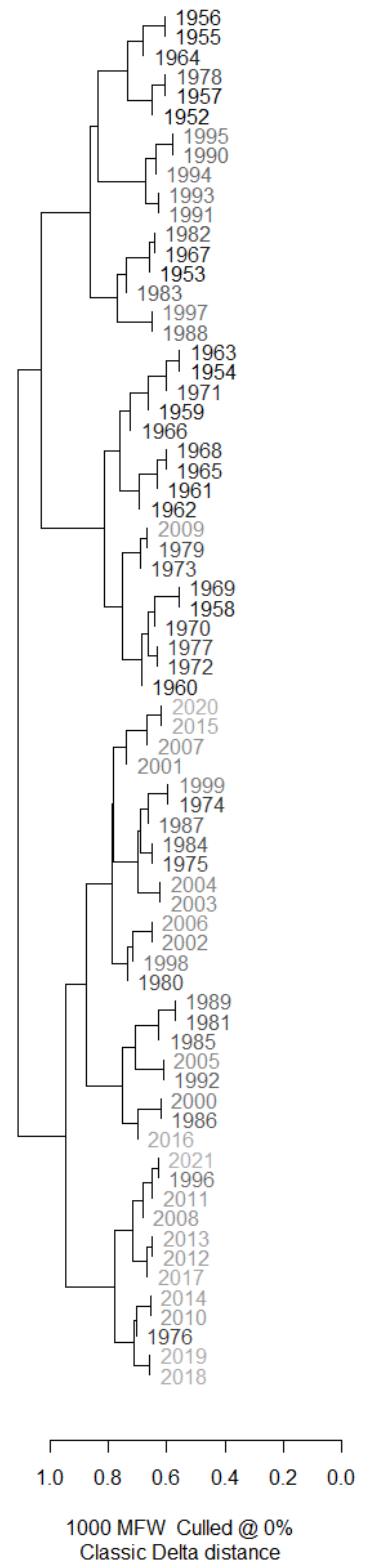
We set the parameters in FEATURES to words and the ngram size to one, so that sentences are split into individual words. In the case of words, the lower number we set as the size of the ngram, the better statistics are produced. Moreover, our aim being making a robust claim, we set the MFW from 100 to 1000 with an increment of 100, meaning that the analysis will be repeated 10 times and the size of the word list will be increased.

It resulted in the graph on the right side. One of the first notable results is that there seems to be a big separation between older and more recent speeches. We used grayscale settings in order to make the difference between older and recent speeches more conspicuous; the older speeches are darker whereas the more recent ones are lighter grey.

The use of different n-grams increases the accuracy of stylometric tests, therefore in our next step, we set the parameters in FEATURES to words and the ngram size to two, so that sentences are split into bigrams; the combination of two consecutive words.

- INPUT & LANGUAGE:
INPUT: plain text
LANGUAGE: English (ALL)
- FEATURES:
FEATURES: words, ngram size 2

Queen Elizabeth corpus Cluster Analysis



MFW SETTINGS: min 100, max 1000, increment 100
 CULLING: min 0, max 0, incr 0, list cutoff 5000

- STATISTICS:
 STATISTICS: Cluster Analysis
 DISTANCES: Classic Delta
- SAMPLING: No sampling

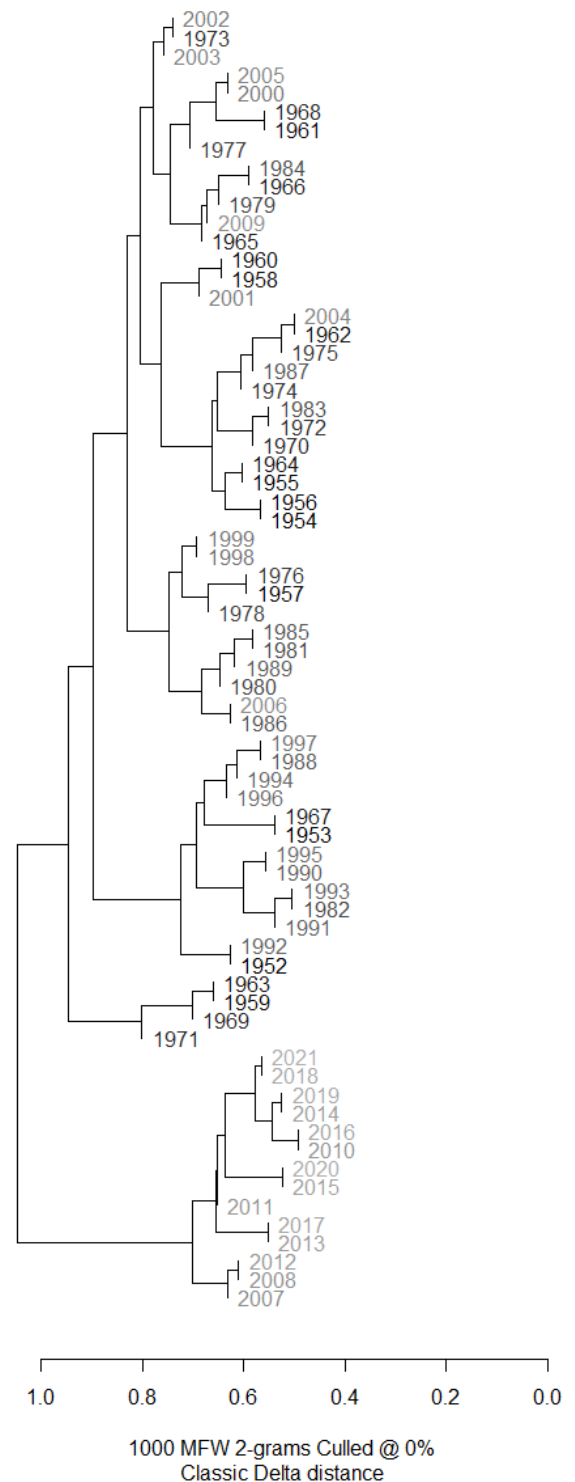
The results are vastly different from the first attempt. Noticeably, there seems to be a similarity between Christmas speeches from years chronically close to one another. This seems especially so for the most recent 20 years, with some exceptions such as 2002, 2003 and 2005. We interpret this as a stylistic similarity between speeches. The more speeches are chronologically close, the more stylistically similar they are to each other. With the chronological appearance of the speeches in the cluster analysis, there seems to be an evolution of the Queen's Christmas speeches over time.

RQ 2. Are King Charles III's Christmas speeches stylistically similar or dissimilar to Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speeches?

For the second part, we aim to analyse the similarity of the current King Charles III's Christmas speeches to the late Queen's speeches. In this step, our corpus includes all the speeches given by the Queen from 1952 to 2021 and the King's two speeches from 2022 and 2023. For this step we changed the file names to better distinguish between the Queen and King's speeches for stylo so that there are only 2 colours.

Initially, we hypothesised that Queen Elizabeth had a personal style to her Christmas speeches. In order to prove this, her

**Queen Elizabeth corpus
Cluster Analysis**



Christmas speeches would have to be stylistically different from what another British royal wrote. To this end, we used two speeches of the current King Charles III who has as of yet given two Christmas speeches. Therefore, we changed our directory to include Charles III's speeches in the corpus. We set the following parameters in stylo:

- INPUT & LANGUAGE:
INPUT: plain text
LANGUAGE: English (ALL)
- FEATURES:
FEATURES: words, ngram size 1
MFW SETTINGS: min 100, max 1000, increment 100
CULLING: min 0, max 0, incr 0, list cutoff 5000
- STATISTICS:
STATISTICS: Cluster Analysis
DISTANCES: Classic Delta
- SAMPLING: No sampling

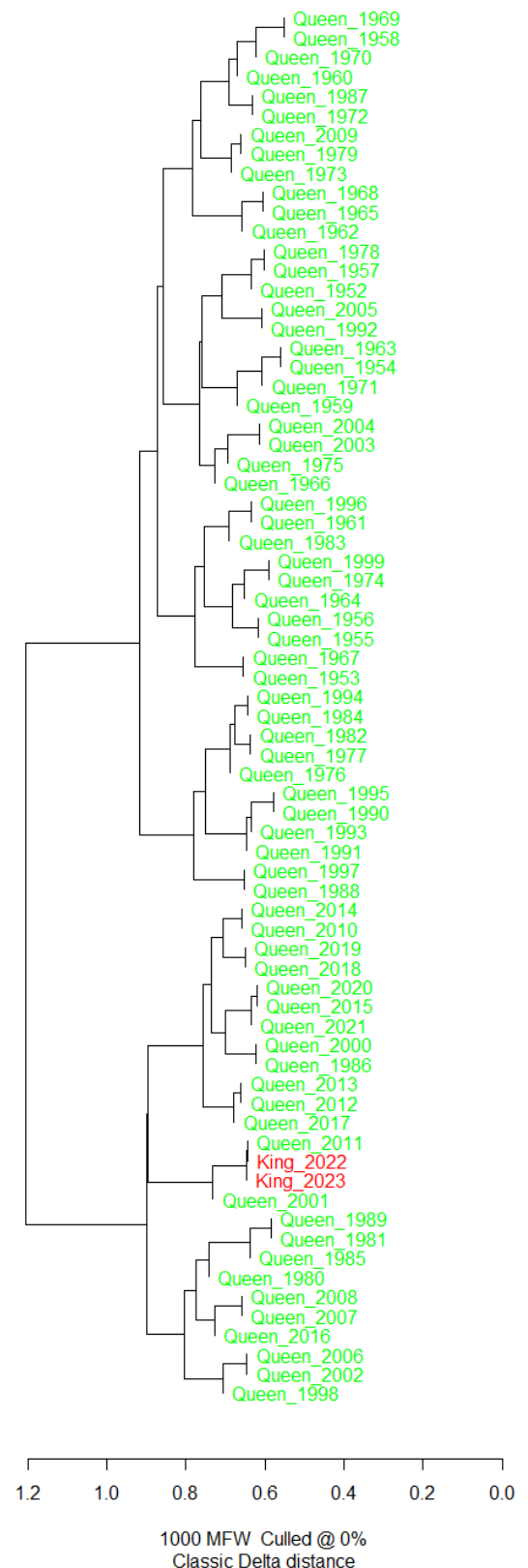
We set the parameters in FEATURES to words and the ngram size to one, so that sentences are split into individual words. These settings have yielded the following result.

As the graph shows, the King's two speeches appear in the same branch, meaning that they are very similar to each other. Furthermore, they show high similarity with the Queen's relatively recent speeches from 2011 and 2001.

In our next step, we set the parameters in FEATURES to words and the ngram size to two, so that sentences are split into bigrams; into the combination of two consecutive words.

- INPUT & LANGUAGE:
INPUT: plain text

Queen Elizabeth corpus Cluster Analysis



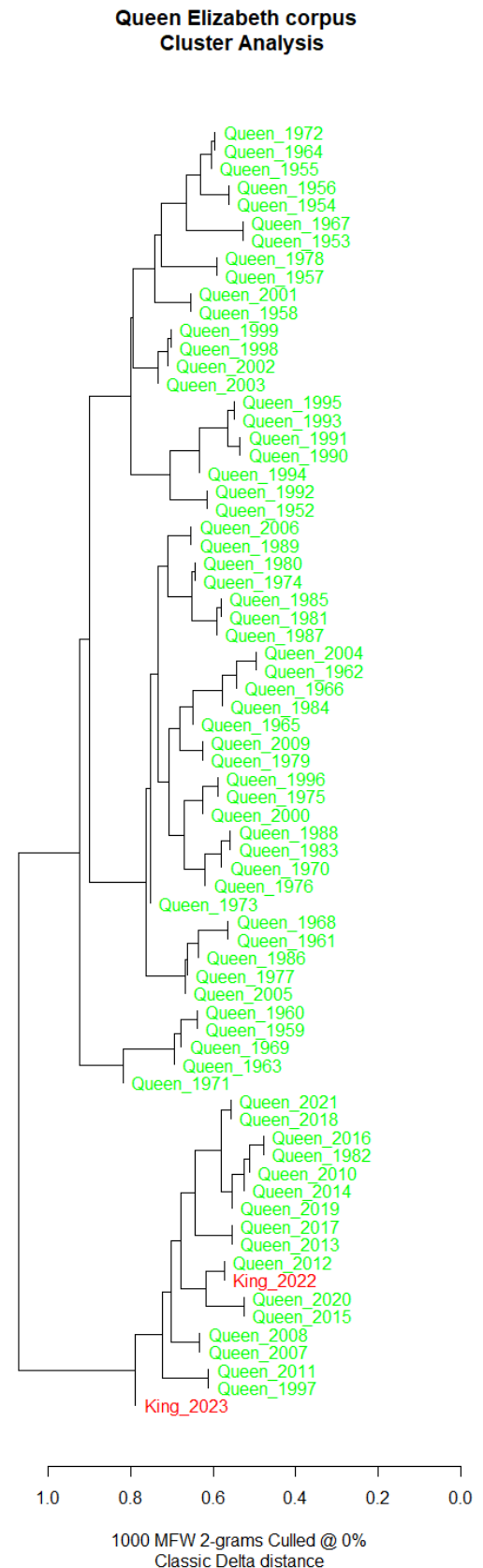
- LANGUAGE: English (ALL)
- FEATURES:
 - FEATURES: words, ngram size 2
 - MFW SETTINGS: min 100, max 1000, increment 100
 - CULLING: min 0, max 0, incr 0, list cutoff 5000
- STATISTICS:
 - STATISTICS: Cluster Analysis
 - DISTANCES: Classic Delta
- SAMPLING: No sampling

This yielded the following result:

Contrary to our hypothesis, the Christmas speeches given by King Charles III seem similar to the late Queen's speeches. Moreover, they are clustered together with her most recent speeches. This might be due to the fact that the speeches, while having a 'personal touch' are not solely written by the monarchs as mentioned before. However, with 1 ngram the speeches by King Charles III were grouped together more closely.

Character n-grams have proven to be very robust. Therefore, to further increase the accuracy, we set the parameters in FEATURES to characters and the ngram size to 4, so that combinations of four consecutive characters can be investigated. So, for our next step, we used the command stylo() and set the following parameters in the menu:

- INPUT & LANGUAGE:
 - INPUT: plain text
 - LANGUAGE: English (ALL)
- FEATURES:



FEATURES: characters, ngram size 4

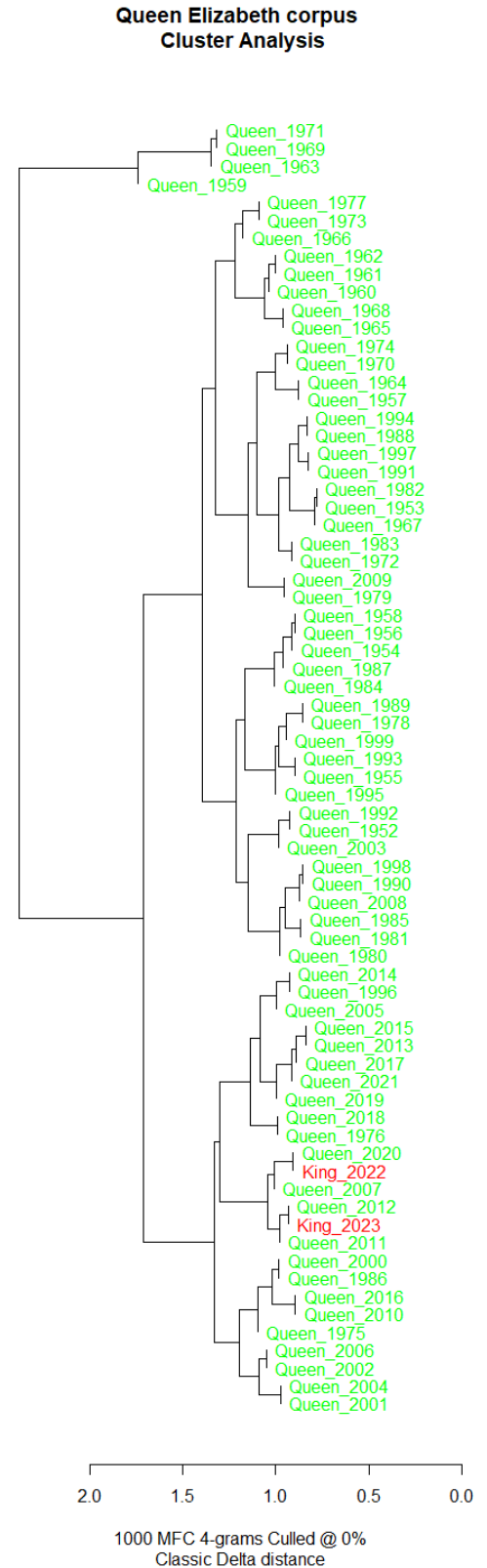
MFW SETTINGS: min 100, max 1000, increment 100

CULLING: min 0, max 0, incr 0, list cutoff 5000

- STATISTICS:
STATISTICS: Cluster Analysis
DISTANCES: Classic Delta
- SAMPLING: No sampling

The difference here is that R analyses character combinations of four characters as opposed to word combinations of two for the last Cluster Analysis. This yielded the following result:

Interestingly, Charles III's speeches are even closer together, showcasing that the stylistic differences between Elizabeth II and Charles III are quite small, and again, they show stylistic similarity with recent speeches.



RQ 3. a) What are the most used words by the Queen in 1952, 1953 and by the King in 2022, 2023? (a comparison of the Queen's and the King's first two speeches)

In our third step, we intend to take a closer look at the lexical content of the speeches.

First, we examine the first two speeches given by the Queen and the King. Hence, we add the Queen's first two speeches to the primary set folder and the King's two speeches to the secondary set folder. We include only two speeches given by the Queen to ensure a balance between the primary and the secondary sets. Once the primary and secondary sets have been created, we use the `oppose()` command to compare the speeches in the primary and the secondary sets, that is to compare the Queen's and the King's first two speeches.

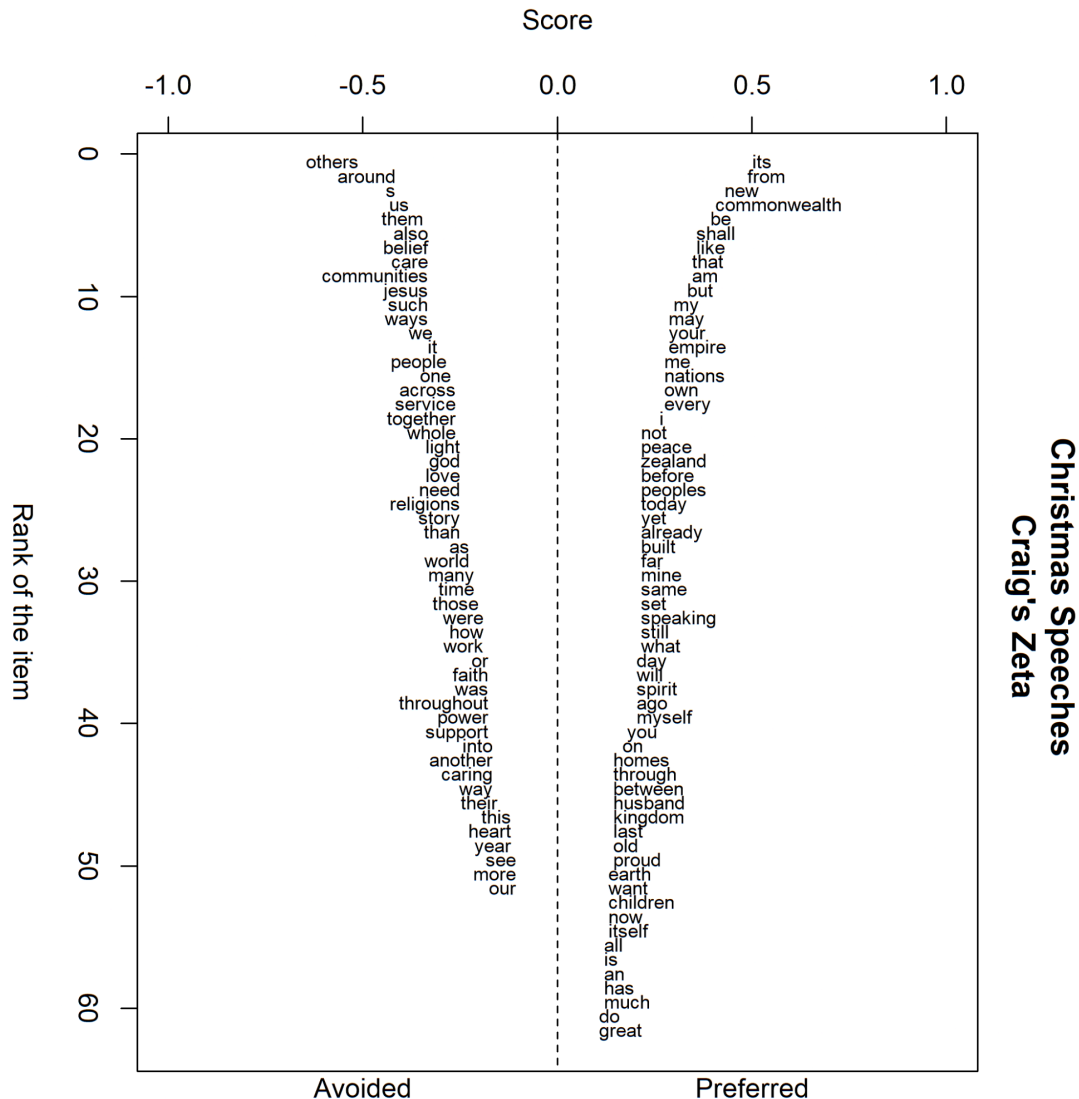
primary_set = speeches given by the Queen in 1952 and 1953

secondary_set = speeches given by the King in 2022 and 2023

In the menu we set the following parameters:

- INPUT:
 - Slice Length: 100
 - Slice Overlap: 0
 - Occurrence Threshold: 2
 - Filter Threshold: 0.1
- METHOD: Craig's Zeta
- VISUALIZATION: words

We set the Slice Length to 100 as the speeches are relatively short.



As opposed to simply looking at the similarity on surface level, as we have up until this point, Craig's Zeta score gives insight into the differences between the content of the speeches. The 'Avoided' words denote Charles III's most frequently used words and 'Preferred' Elizabeth II's. It seems as though King Charles uses more words that are related to religion such as 'Jesus', 'faith' and 'belief'. It is also noteworthy that Elizabeth's speeches contain the words 'husband' and 'children' whereas 'wife' is not apparent in King Charles' most used words, seeming as though Queen Elizabeth speaks more of family. This is interesting, however, not significant enough to generalise across the corpus. Moreover, to truly explain the stylistic difference between the late Queen's and the current King's Christmas speeches, we would need a larger corpus of Charles III's Christmas speeches which is not existent yet.

RQ 3. b) What are the most used words by the Queen in 2020, 2021 and by the King in 2022, 2023? (a comparison of the last two speeches of the Queen and the first two speeches of the King, from the perspective of continuity)

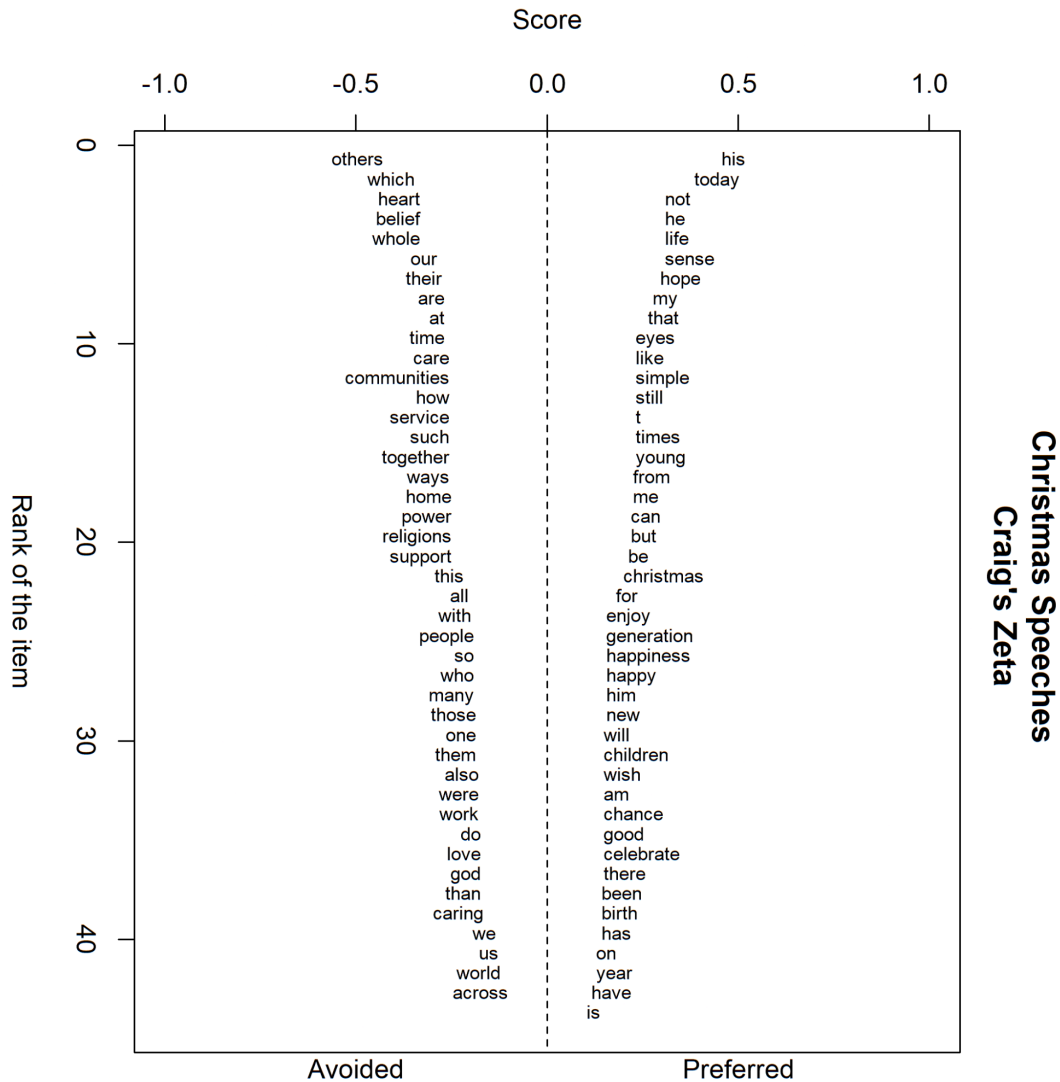
To answer our final research question, we created a primary set folder containing speeches given by the Queen in 2020 and 2021. The contents of the secondary set folder remained unchanged with the King's speeches from 2022 and 2023. Finally, we used the `oppose()` command to compare the speeches in the primary and the secondary sets, utilising the late Queen's last two speeches from 2020 and 2021 and the current King's first two speeches from 2022 and 2023, in order to observe a degree of stylistic continuity.

primary_set = speeches given by the Queen in 2020 and 2021

secondary_set = speeches given by the King in 2022 and 2023

In the menu we set the following parameters:

- INPUT:
 - Slice Length: 100
 - Slice Overlap: 0
 - Occurrence Threshold: 2
 - Filter Threshold: 0.1
- METHOD: Craig's Zeta
- VISUALIZATION: words



Naturally, there is no significant change in the ‘Avoided’ words as we used the same speeches from Charles III. However, in Elizabeth’s (‘Preferred’) most frequent words, there seems to be a different tone than in her first two speeches. The focus seems to be more on the festiveness of Christmas. In these four speeches both the King and the Queen focus on Christmas, but while the Queen highlights its festive and celebratory nature, the King emphasises its religious aspect. We do not claim this as proof of continuity but it is worthy of consideration.

The most used word by the Queen is the topmost pronoun ‘his’. As the close reading of her speeches reveals, she uses this word in both speeches; three times in 2020 and seven times in 2021. While in her 2020 speech ‘his’ refers first to Jesus, then to a man in the parable of the Good Samaritan and finally to an unnamed combatant of the First World War, in 2021 the Queen refers to Prince Philip five times with the use of ‘his’, once to King Charles III and once to Jesus. The reason why the Queen mentions Prince Philip several times is that she reminisces about her husband and his achievements as he passed away in that year, 09 April 2021. She highlights

Prince Philip's 'life and work', 'sense of service', 'presence', 'faith in the future' and 'pioneering work' in her speech. Below, we list the occurrences of 'his' and who it refers to.

2020:

1. his birth - Jesus
2. his religion or culture - the man who is robbed and left at the roadside in the parable of the Good Samaritan
3. his name - unnamed combatant of the First World War

2021:

1. his life and work - Prince Philip
2. his sense of service - Prince Philip
3. his presence - Prince Philip
4. his faith in the future - Prince Philip
5. his pioneering work - Prince Philip
6. his eldest son William – King Charles III
7. his birth - Jesus

Influential factors

In our analyses, we have perceived several interesting results such as chronological stylistic relatedness of the speeches but equally interesting is the unrelatedness, there is a separation between the Christmas speeches before and after the 2000s. We have also found outliers that are for some reason stylistically separated. Unfortunately, we cannot draw conclusions as to why that is with qualitative research, but in this section we will explain what the influential factors could be.

Changes in the tone, themes and lexical choice of the speeches may be attributed to multiple factors, such as changes in the royal family and historical events. The royal family had experienced a series of challenges, scandals, divorces, financial issues, which lead to the formation of the 'Way Ahead Group' in 1992¹. Its objective was to modernise the royal family and keep it up-to-date, to improve its image in line with the public opinion as the royal family's values had proved to be outdated. This shift in communication strategy may have influenced the style of the speeches.

A further key event in the royal family's life was Princess Diana's tragic death in 1997, which could have also impacted the tone of the royal Christmas messages.

¹ For more details on the 'Way Ahead Group', see <https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/1004982/Royal-family-way-ahead-group-queen-prince-philip-prince-charles-diana-windsor-castle-fire>

There had also been changes regarding the position of the Lord Chamberlain of the Household, whose main role is to oversee the departments that provide support and advice to the monarch. In 2006 William Peel, 3rd Earl Peel, became the Lord Chamberlain of the Household, and held this position until 2021. He might have had an impact on the Queen's speeches, which could explain why speeches after 2006 tend to cluster together.

Last but not least, certain recent events, such as the outbreak of the global pandemic in 2019 and Prince Philip's death in 2021, among others, have likely also played a role in the shaping of the tone and style of the speeches.

Limitations

Although our research so far has yielded interesting results, in this section we acknowledge the limitations of our research, corpus and stylo. One of the strong suits of this project is that we have gathered the complete corpus of Christmas Speeches of late Queen Elizabeth. Nevertheless, our research would have been even more robust if we would have been able to compare our corpus to a similar one of another British monarch. Naturally, this is not yet possible as the tradition of Christmas speeches does not exist long enough to yield a similar corpus for another British monarch. It would have been interesting if the size of the corpus we gathered for King Charles III would have been larger. As for the limitations of our qualitative stylistic research, stylo is a good starting point to prove style, but as mentioned earlier in this report, there is no unanimous definition of style, thus there are complementary ways to analyse our results, close reading being one of them. Another limitation our research faced is that we can never know for certain how much assistance has been given to the monarch to write the Christmas speeches. Although we know the Christmas speeches are more personal than 'normal' speeches, we will never know the exact amount of lines the monarch wrote, which lines were substituted or even left out completely. Stylistically analysing the Christmas speeches is not as straightforward as stylistically analysing a literary author. Even though the latter has likely also had an editor, the Queen will likely have a PR team as well. Lastly, there is the limitation of the contextual nature of the speeches. Because they are Christmas speeches, related words are naturally in the text with a higher frequency than if it were a speech given in July for example. Having said that, the Christmas speeches are the most personal speeches the British monarchs give and therefore still worthy of academic interest.

Conclusion

In this article we have quantitatively analysed the late Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speeches through the stylo library in R. Our hypothesis was that the Christmas speeches would be stylistically consistent, given that the British monarch writes the speeches themselves, albeit with assistance. In stylo we tested several settings, changing the n-grams and accounting for words and characters to make a more robust claim. To our surprise, as our analysis showed, there was a separation between most speeches before the 2000s and after the 2000s. Due to the scope of our

research, it is not possible to ascribe this finding to one factor. However, we find it plausible that the stylistic change may be due to a perhaps necessary image change of the British royal house after the last decade of the 20th century, which was filled with hardships, as described in the influential factors. After performing analysis on the late queens' corpus we also included the first two speeches of the current King. The results of this analysis were equally surprising as we found that the Christmas speeches by Elizabeth II and Charles III were stylistically closely related. Especially the most recent of Elizabeth's speeches. This suggests that rather than a personal style, there exists a British monarch style of Christmas speeches. However, as our corpus included two speeches solely, there is still time for King Charles III to develop his own style and it is too early to conclude that the Christmas speeches are stylistically British monarchical rather than personal. Another interpretation is that the influence of editors of the Christmas speech is larger than the monarch's. Again, the scope of our research is limited to the question of similarity or dissimilarity rather than how the styles of the two monarchs differ. We have, however, finished with a close reading comparison of the first and last two speeches of Queen Elizabeth and the first two speeches of King Charles. This revealed the possibility of a slight difference in preferred themes to talk about, however our corpus of King Charles is as of yet too small to generalise such claims.

In conclusion, we have uncovered a stylistic evolution of the late Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas speeches. Furthermore, we have discovered a stylistic continuity of current King Charles III's speeches.

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