

# REVIEW

of the habilitation thesis submitted for the conferment of the  
academic title of Associate Professor in the field 2.1.29 –  
Non-Slavic Languages and Literatures

Candidate: **Mgr. Július Rozenfeld, PhD.**

Institution: Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Faculty of Arts, Department of British and American Studies

Date of submission: September 1, 2025

## 1. Contextualization

The habilitation thesis *Cultural Schemata in Political Discourse: An Analysis of the Impact of Cultural Messages in American Political Campaigns*, submitted for evaluation within the field 2.1.29 – Non-Slavic Languages and Literatures, is situated at the intersection of cultural linguistics, discourse studies, and political communication, and English language pedagogy. The thesis examines how cultural schemata—understood as culturally grounded conceptual structures that shape collective cognition—inform the persuasive mechanisms of contemporary political rhetoric. In recent decades, cultural linguistics has established itself as a strong analytical framework for exploring the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisation, providing valuable tools for investigating how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and contested in public discourse. Political communication, particularly in the context of U.S. presidential campaigns, represents a fertile ground for such inquiry, as political actors systematically activate culturally salient narratives to mobilise support and frame ideological positions.

Against this backdrop, the thesis focuses on the 2024 U.S. presidential election as a significant communicative event in which cultural knowledge, public emotion, and political persuasion intersect. By analysing acceptance speeches and a nationally broadcast presidential debate, the work situates itself within contemporary interdisciplinary debates on how culturally embedded conceptual structures shape not only rhetorical production, but also voter interpretation and ideological alignment. As such, the thesis contributes to ongoing scholarly interest in the cultural underpinnings of political discourse and provides a timely exploration of how language functions as a carrier of cultural meaning in high-stakes democratic processes.

## **2. Presentation and Analysis of the Habilitation File**

### **Structure of the file**

The documentation submitted by the candidate is complete and well-organized: application for conferment, GDPR consent, CV in the required format, certified copies of diplomas, confirmations of teaching activity, detailed tables of courses and seminars, lists of publications and citations, records of lectures (domestic and international), research projects, and annexes required by Rector's decisions (minimum indicators, lists of teaching and research outputs, student feedback evaluations).

### **Teaching activity**

The candidate presents a rich portfolio of courses at both bachelor's and master's levels: History and Institutions of the EU, European Studies, Language Skills – Conversation, Email English; English Language Didactics 1/2, Methods of Teaching English for the 21st Century, Intercultural Communication, EU Institutions and Policies, Contemporary USA. The file documents semester hours per course, coordination of research projects, membership in examination boards, and supervision of theses: 43 bachelor's theses supervised, 25 master's theses supervised, 36 bachelor's theses reviewed, 29 master's theses reviewed, plus involvement in supplementary pedagogical studies. Student feedback, confirmed by the Head of Department, is consistently positive, highlighting high standards, supportive approach, and teaching quality.

### **Scientific output**

Monograph: *Intersections of the Global and the Local in Slovak Immigrant Communities in Britain* (Cambridge Scholars, 2023); Indexed articles (SCOPUS/WoS): contributions in *In Esse* (2018), *Ostrava Journal of English Philology* (2023; 2024), *British and American Studies* (2025), complemented by articles in regional journals (*Studia Culturae*, 2021; *Edukacja. Terapia. Opieka.*, 2024). Book chapters and conference proceedings: papers in peer-reviewed volumes (*Uzhhorod*; Cambridge Scholars; SKASE), addressing topics such as digimodernism, redefining the local in a globalized world, and religion in British education. Teaching resources: co-authorship of the university textbook *Developing Academic English in Speaking and Writing* (SafarikPress, 2021) and contributions to aggregated teaching materials (2024), used in academic courses.

### **Visibility and citations**

The candidate reports 5 citations in WoS/SCOPUS databases and 35 citations in international publications outside citation indexes, including academic reviews (e.g., Prof. Marie José Coperias Aguilar's review of the 2023 monograph). Invited lectures (Seoul, Vlore, Santa Monica) and conference presentations (Budapest, Ostrava) confirm international recognition.

### **Projects and mobility**

The candidate acted as co-investigator in structural projects (EXPERT; RIFIV), contributing to curriculum modernization, establishment of a language testing center, and support for TOEFL iBT certification for over 100 students. ERASMUS+ mobilities and the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship (Fulbright) (Vanderbilt University; RAND Corporation internship) further strengthen the international and managerial profile.

### **Quantitative indicators** (documented):

Teaching experience post-PhD: 13 years – met; Educational activities: 16 activities (164 semester units) – met; Supervised master’s theses: 25 – met; Scientific output: 29 items (24 publications + 5 projects); 1 monograph, 5 SCOPUS/WoS publications, 17 scientific papers – met; Citations: 5 in WoS/SCOPUS; 35 in international publications – met.

### **3. Evaluation of the Thesis**

Built on this solid scholarly file and following a consistent academic track, the thesis demonstrates the author’s ability to approach a complex topic with scientific rigor, conceptual clarity, and analytical depth. It presents a coherent, well-structured, and methodologically solid investigation situated at the intersection of cultural linguistics, discourse studies, and political communication, and English language pedagogy.

#### **Thematic relevance and originality**

The chosen topic is timely and highly relevant, addressing how cultural schemata operate within contemporary American political discourse. The thesis offers an original contribution by integrating cultural schema theory with the study of political messaging, illustrating how political actors draw upon culturally embedded conceptualisations to enhance persuasive impact. The corpus—including the acceptance speeches of Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, as well as the presidential debate—is well-chosen, representative, and conducive to identifying contrasting rhetorical strategies.

#### **Structure and argumentation**

The thesis is organized in a clear, logical progression. The theoretical chapters define and contextualize key constructs such as cultural schemata, cultural conceptualisations, political discourse, and rhetorical framing. These chapters demonstrate extensive engagement with current scholarly debates and provide a solid conceptual foundation for the analysis. The analytical chapters constitute the core contribution of the thesis. The identification and categorisation of 46 cultural schemata is carried out systematically, with each schema supported by authentic linguistic evidence and accompanied by clear explanations of its rhetorical and cultural significance. The analysis highlights differences in how the two political candidates employ culturally salient narratives to mobilise support, construct identity, or frame social issues. The author avoids ideological bias and maintains a balanced, text-focused perspective throughout.

#### **Methodology**

The methodological design is robust and appropriately aligned with the objectives of the study. The research combines qualitative discourse analysis with the principles of cultural linguistics, particularly schema identification and contextual interpretation. The corpus boundaries are well defined, and the analytic procedures are described in a transparent and replicable manner. The use of coding, examples, and tabular representations strengthens the clarity and reliability of the findings. The work demonstrates careful attention to linguistic detail, including lexical choices, conceptual metaphors, narrative structures, and evaluative expressions. The thesis successfully bridges empirical observation with broader cultural interpretations.

## Findings

The findings of the thesis show that contemporary American political discourse is shaped by a network of culturally embedded conceptual structures that inform both rhetorical practices and audience interpretation. Through the systematic identification of 46 cultural schemata, the study demonstrates how political actors draw upon widely shared cultural models—such as *freedom*, *the American Dream*, *family values*, *security*, *national identity*, and *economic fairness*—to frame societal challenges and anchor ideological positions. The contrastive analysis of the 2024 campaign discourse reveals that Kamala Harris and Donald Trump activate different clusters of schemata to construct divergent political narratives, with Harris foregrounding unity and collective progress, and Trump emphasizing security, tradition, and perceived national threats. The thesis further shows that the persuasive impact of these schemata is reinforced by their embedding in narrative patterns, metaphorical framings, and evaluative language that heighten emotional resonance. The examination of the presidential debate illustrates the dynamic nature of schema deployment, highlighting moments in which competing schemata collide, are reframed, or strategically contested. Overall, the findings establish that cultural schemata function as cognitive-discursive anchors that guide how political messages are shaped, communicated, and emotionally processed across different communicative contexts.

## Contribution to the field

The thesis advances the field by offering a structured and empirically grounded account of how cultural linguistics can be applied to the analysis of political discourse. First, it provides a comprehensive and documented inventory of cultural schemata relevant to a major contemporary political event, thereby expanding available resources for future research in cultural and political linguistics. Second, it demonstrates the analytical value of cultural schema theory for understanding how political actors mobilize shared cultural knowledge to influence public opinion, thus strengthening the methodological bridge between cognitive-cultural approaches and political communication studies. Third, the thesis enhances current understandings of persuasion in political discourse by explaining how emotional, narrative, and conceptual mechanisms operate in tandem to shape voter interpretation. Finally, it proposes a replicable analytical framework that can be adapted for the study of other political contexts, languages, or culturally embedded discourses, offering a versatile model for interdisciplinary research. As such, the work contributes meaningfully to ongoing discussions in cultural linguistics, discourse studies, and political communication, and meets the standards expected for habilitation-level research.

## 4. Conclusion

The habilitation thesis *Cultural Schemata in Political Discourse: An Analysis of the Impact of Cultural Messages in American Political Campaigns* is a coherent, original, and methodologically rigorous study that demonstrates the author's capacity to conduct independent, high-level research in cultural linguistics and political discourse analysis. The thesis provides a carefully structured examination of how cultural schemata guide the construction, activation, and interpretation of political messages, offering a detailed and well-substantiated account of the rhetorical strategies employed in a contemporary U.S. presidential campaign. Through the systematic identification and contextual interpretation of the cultural schemata, the author presents a nuanced understanding of how political actors mobilise culturally rooted conceptualisations to

shape public perception, frame policy debates, and build ideological narratives. The analysis is balanced, empirically grounded, and theoretically informed, meeting the standards expected for habilitation-level research.

Beyond the quality of the empirical findings, the thesis makes a significant scholarly contribution by demonstrating the explanatory potential of cultural linguistics for political discourse studies and by proposing an analytical framework that is both replicable and adaptable to other political and cultural contexts. Its integration of cultural schema theory with discourse-analytic approaches advances current knowledge on political persuasion and enriches interdisciplinary research at the interface of linguistics, culture, and communication. The work deepens our understanding of how culturally embedded meaning structures operate within public argumentation and provides valuable methodological tools for future inquiry in the field.

In light of the originality, conceptual rigor, and analytical precision demonstrated throughout the thesis, *I strongly recommend the conferment of the academic title of Associate Professor in the field 2.1.29 – Non-Slavic Languages and Literatures to Mgr. Július Rozenfeld, PhD.* The thesis fulfills the academic criteria associated with the habilitation procedure and constitutes a meaningful contribution to the study of cultural linguistics and political discourse, reflecting both research excellence and intellectual maturity.

Timișoara, December 19, 2025



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