



## Analysis and didactics of political discourse.

### Análisis y didáctica del discurso político.

DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxv. n80. 21b21

**Luisa A. Messina Fajardo**

Università di Roma Tre. (ITALY)

CE: lmessinafajardo@uniroma3.it / ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2795-1175

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

**Received:** 08/09/2020

**Reviewed:** 18/04/2021

**Accepted:** 06/16/2021

#### ABSTRACT:

In this study we propose to fundamentally analyze two aspects of political discourse: First, the characteristics of the language used by politicians in their speeches. On this occasion we will analyze the speeches by Cristina Kirchner, José "Pepe" Mujica, Mariano Rajoy, Pablo Iglesias, Jordi Hereu, Felipe VI, Paolino Rivero, Matteo Renzi and Sergio Mattarella. In particular, we propose to test the use of metaphor. Metaphors have the merit of simplifying concepts, transforming them into more cognitively accessible situations, but they are also important due to the argumentative and evaluative load thanks to the subjective associations to which they give rise. Second, we want to defend the usefulness of the analysis of political discourses in the teaching of languages.

On the other hand, we think that, since the politicians who speak the Spanish language are not all Spanish –many of them are Latin American– the linguistic study is also interesting from the point of view of variety. It is important that the student of Spanish study a living, real language, an authentic Spanish that, despite its heterogeneity, has a strong linguistic unity.



Beyond this didactic aspect, the analysis of political discourse is important due to its social role; it must be recognized that it seeks to educate the student so that he can competently recognize and interpret the reality painted by politicians.

Finally, we want to emphasize the educational value that this type of study represents, and its value as a useful instrument to recognize and competently interpret the actions of men and women capable of changing the history and destiny of humanity with their words.

**Keywords:** Language. Political. Rhetoric. Metaphor. Power. Persuasion.

## RESUMEN:

En este estudio nos proponemos analizar fundamentalmente dos aspectos del discurso político: primero, las características del lenguaje empleado por los políticos en sus discursos. En esta ocasión analizaremos los discursos de Cristina Kirchner, José “Pepe” Mujica, Mariano Rajoy, Pablo Iglesias, Jordi Hereu, Felipe VI, Paolino Rivero, Matteo Renzi y Sergio Mattarella. En particular, nos proponemos comprobar el empleo de la metáfora. Las metáforas tienen el mérito de simplificar conceptos, transformándolos en situaciones más asequibles cognoscitivamente, pero también son importantes por la carga argumentativa y valorativa gracias a las asociaciones subjetivas a que dan lugar. En segundo lugar, queremos defender la utilidad del análisis de los discursos políticos en la enseñanza de las lenguas.

Por otro lado, pensamos que, visto que los políticos que hablan la lengua española no son todos españoles –muchos de ellos son latinoamericanos–, el estudio lingüístico se presenta interesante también desde el punto de vista de la variedad. Es importante que el estudiante de español estudie una lengua viva, real, un español auténtico que, a pesar de su heterogeneidad, posee una fuerte unidad lingüística. Más allá de este aspecto didáctico, el análisis del discurso político es importante por su papel social; se le debe reconocer el pretender educar al estudiante para que pueda reconocer e interpretar con competencia la realidad pintada por los políticos.



Queremos, en fin, resaltar el valor educativo que representa este género de estudio, y su valor como instrumento útil para reconocer e interpretar con competencia las acciones de hombres y mujeres capaces con sus palabras de cambiar la historia y el destino de la humanidad.

**Palabras clave:** Lenguaje. Político. Retórica. Metáfora. Poder. Persuasión.

## Introduction

As we can see, the points we intend to address are fundamentally two. We will deal, firstly, with the analysis of political discourse and the characteristics of the language used by politicians in their speeches; we also propose to check the use of metaphor, since this rhetorical figure is important due to the argumentative and evaluative load it has and also thanks to the subjective associations to which it gives rise (Fernández, 1999b). For this work, our corpus consists of nine speeches issued by nine politicians (five Spanish, two Latin American and two Italian): Kirchner, Mujica, Rajoy, Iglesias, Hereu, Felipe VI, Rivero, Renzi and Mattarella.

The second topic we want to address is related to the didactics or teaching of political language. At present, the knowledge of languages is a sure promotion factor for insertion into the world of work. The management of international scenarios in constant evolution and expansion is facilitated precisely thanks to the knowledge of one or more foreign languages. The situation of paralysis that economic sectors face today requires knowledge of languages, which not only translates into the ability to maintain diplomatic relations or entertaining conversations. In the professional field, speaking a foreign language implies speaking with competence, using a technical language corresponding to the field of work itself. In this study we propose to defend the didactics of special or sectoral languages, especially we deal with political language. We should promote the usefulness of the analysis of political discourses in language teaching for the following reasons: the analysis of political discourse is important for its social role; it must be recognized as trying to educate the student so that he can recognize and interpret with competence the reality painted by politicians. We want to emphasize the educational value that this kind



of study represents, and its value as a useful instrument to interpret with competence the actions of men and women capable with their words of changing the history and destiny of humanity.

Felipe VI, when speaking of the reign of his father, emphasizes this historical value of politics: "An exceptional reign today becomes part of our history with an extraordinary political legacy" [...] "A nation forged over centuries of history by the shared work of millions of people from all places" [...] "He appealed to the values defended by my grandfather, the Count of Barcelona, and summoned us to a great project of national concord that has given rise to the best years of our contemporary history." (2014).

Pablo Iglesias is also aware of that commitment to history: "How nice it is to see people making history" [...] "It is now up to us Spanish citizens to be protagonists of our history, and we are going to dream, but seriously believing in our dreams" [...] "We love our country, which has its roots in a history of struggle for dignity." (2015).

Paolino Rivero confirms the concept when he points out: "Spanish politics is making history." (2015).

On the other hand, we must consider that the politicians who speak the Spanish language are not all Spanish, many of them are Latin American, so the linguistic study is interesting, also from the point of view of linguistic variety. It is important that the student of Spanish studies a living, real language, an authentic Spanish that, despite its heterogeneity, has a strong linguistic unity.

## **Analysis of political discourse**

Not all scholars agree that political language is a "special language." Some of them think that there are only "political uses" of language and that there is no real political language.

The doubts about whether or not there is a political language are many, and include research that is reflected in the works of scholars of great caliber such as Eugenio Coseriu (1987), Fernando Lázaro Carreter (1987), Manuel Alvar (1987, 1988, 1989), and, even, are manifested even in recent publications of researchers specialized in the field such as Marina Fernández Lagunilla (1999a, 1999b), Miguel Rebollo Torío (2002) or Vincenzo Lo Cascio (1998), among others. Lo Cascio, in



particular, includes political language in the types of special languages and identifies its own lexicon and its own interlocutors. We agree with him.

With regard to the interlocutors, usually the politician, in search of votes, addresses the whole society. That is why their language is often ambiguous; its objective is to convince the largest number of interlocutors. It is a category of different people who find themselves in totally dissimilar situations. The moment the politician is in an institutional environment and addresses his colleagues directly, his language becomes more formal and ritualized. Since the media are present in all public spaces, even in Parliament, all political discourses are also addressed to an indirect recipient, that is, society.

Former Uruguayan President José "Pepe" Mujica is aware of this during his state visit to the White House. At the beginning of his speech to President Obama, Mujica does not forget the American public that is watching him on television: "Our recognition of the American people and their institutions represented by you, Mr. PresidentObama" [...] But convey a hug to all the farmers in your nation." (2014).

They know that the entire Spanish population is listening to their speeches, so they also address minorities. So does King Felipe VI during his coronation and Pablo Iglesias during the "March of Change"; they greet and say goodbye using other co-officio languages (Catalan, Galician and Basque): "Thank you very much. *Moltes gràcies. Eskerrik asko. Moitas grazas*" (2014) "Bonatarda. *Arratsaldeon. Boas afternoons. Welcome to Madrid.*" (2015).

Despite the oral nature of the speech, the text is pre-prepared. That is why in the discourse we find a mixture of characteristic aspects of oral and written discourse.

As for the lexicon, we must distinguish the "key words" from the "witness words" (Lázaro Carreter, 1987). Unlike the former, which are quite universal, the latter have a definite meaning (they derive from a historical context). Due to the rapid evolution of language, a witness-word in a few years may disappear from the political context, although it will always be tied to that historical moment it has witnessed.

For Fernando Lázaro Carreter (1987, p.34), there is a "strong core" (better to use English quotation marks) and a "periphery" in political language. In the strong core it places the lexicon that



is established in the domain of the political (such as democracy, nation, country, social classes). The problem that arises is that this lexicon is not interpreted in the same way, neither by the senders nor by the recipients, and its meaning is different according to the historical moment; hence the ambiguity and polysemy that characterizes political language. Let us think of the words *democracy* and *republic*, and how they have changed their meaning throughout history (Rebollo Torío, 2002, p.13); think, in addition, of the difficulties involved in forms as a *nation* and *nationality* in Spain today.

The peripheral core, on the other hand, is usually constituted by a series of more fleeting words, coming from the sphere of general language and that can become the key to a given historical moment. Rebollo Torío (2002, p.17) states in this regard that: "Its ascription to the sphere of the political is motivated by several unequivocal factors: its use by political announcers in political spheres with purposes of political significance". Rebollo Torío (2002, p.17) also proposes some examples, namely: consensus, roller, globalization, dedazo. The ascription to the political language of these words is motivated by concrete factors and very specific purposes. Just to give an example, the word *globalization* is a ubiquitous term in the political lexicon that began to be used in the late 90s. We think that, without any doubt, this word can be considered a witness of the time in which we live, since the degree of penetration and the use of the term are quite high. On the other hand, and here we move on to another important linguistic aspect, we refer to neologisms, the word has allowed to create new terms such as *globaliphobic* to allude to those who are against the IMF and the World Bank. Nowadays you only need to look at the pages of any newspaper to come across the word globalization or other related ones (globalization, transnationalization, multiculturalism, multimegamuchaglobalization, Euroland and mcdonaldizzazione). The latter is justified by the fact that the use or creation of long words can create in the recipient the illusion of the great wisdom and deep knowledge of the politician, in fact they often resort to this technique.

The creation or only the use of neologisms makes the discourse current and "fashionable". Pablo Iglesias uses the term "yayoflautas", created in 2012. The word is still associated with the context of the "march" and the political demonstration of the retirees who go out to demonstrate in the streets to protest, not for them, but for the futuro of their children and grandchildren: "Those



tireless grandfathers and grandmothers whom they call "yayoflautas", who defend their dignity defend that of their children and that of their grandchildren". (2015).

Scholars of political language insist that lexical selection is a fundamental weapon in political strategy and is almost always explained by the relevance of the axiological in political discourse. Axiological marks have been considered as argumentative marks; its function is to orient towards a favorable or unfavorable conclusion (Moeschler in Igualada, 2006, p.1.407). The frequent use of some terms that express value judgments, positive or negative, has marked the transformation of some words of simple technical terminology into keywords. The use of axiological marks to make value judgments about the political opponent in order to defame his image and clearly favor his own is therefore very frequent. Negative judgment (negative axiological marks) about the opponent can be expressed in thousands of ways. One of those that President Kirchner chooses to criticize, not only her direct attendee, but the governments, is the rhetorical question: "Who were the ones who fed the opponents and gave them weapons and gave them resources like Freedom *Fighters*, freedom fighters?" (2014).

This aspect is most evident in the statement of Pablo Iglesias: "Mr. Rajoy's policies do not create employment, they distribute misery, temporary and precarious jobs for unworthy wages. Is that his recovery, is that his recovery?" (2014).

To them we have to add hundreds of thousands of self-employed and false self-employed, small merchants and entrepreneurs who juggle to make ends meet. It is the defenders of the totalitarianism of cuts and austerity who are breaking Spain. (2014).

Political language is very productive, too, in terms of metaphors, which reinforce argumentation, expressiveness and persuasive effectiveness, while simplifying understanding. There are metaphors that belong to different semantic fields; many of them are classified as "structural metaphors" by Lakoff and Johnson (1986).



Here are some examples:

**1. Scope of the building:**

"built the foundations of a political edifice"; "never break the bridges of understanding" (FelipeVI, 2014).

"build together a better future" (Iglesias, 2015).

**2. Military or war field:**

"winning the battle for job creation" (Felipe VI,2014).

"the fight against climate change" (Hereu, 2009)

"freedom fighters"; "a battle was fought" (Kirchner, 2014)

"In this battle for life" (Mujica, 2014)

Also in Italian: "*arrenderci all'inerzia*"; "*La sfida comincia da noi cittadini*"; "*La lotta alla povertà*"; "*una sfida per tutti*"(Mattarella,2015).

**3. Field of anatomy, human body and health:**

"wounded in their dignity" (Felipe VI, 2014)

"Those brave and humble people are in our DNA"(Iglesias, 2015)

"*che il dialogo produca un contagio positivo*" (Mattarella,2015)

**4. Dream or dream field:**

"Dreams must be pushed"; "it is a tale that has become a nightmare"(Iglesias, 2015)

**5. Field of nature:**

"sinks its roots" (speech by Pablo Iglesias at the end of the "March of Change" in Madrid, 2015)

"drawing a panorama"; "it will not be a path of roses"(Rivero, 2015)





"following the creation of a Special Prosecutor's Unit" (Kirchner)

"Siamo orgogliosi che la nostra Esposizione sia parte di questa semina. E vogliamo che produca frutti importanti" (Mattarella, 2015)

## 6. Scope of the trip:

"those who have been forced to leave can get a return ticket" (Iglesias, 2015)

"before one of those crossroads" (Rajoy, 2011)

"getting to Copenhagen" (Hereu, 2009)

"cambiare rotta" (Mattarella, 2015)

## 7. Field of economics:

"buy and sell dignity and beauty"; "buy and sell smiles"; "sovereignty is not sold" (Iglesias, 2015)

"put their hand in the box" (Iglesias, 2015)

## 8. Scope of the game:

"our destiny is at stake in and with Europe"; "where our interests are at stake" (Iglesias, 2015)

"*In gioco ci sono le nostre responsabilità*" (Mattarella, 2015)

The use of metaphors is more common among oppositions than among presidents. It is as if rhetoric is a means of trying to attain power, and not to preserve it.

Other rhetorical devices used in political discourses are similarity, metonymy, personification, and paremias. It seems that quoting numerical data, recalling historical events and pronouncing quotes from famous people makes the politician more cultured and educated.

The use of redundancy, coordination and juxtaposition in political discourse only serve to decorate it, since they do not add any additional information.



The repetition of words or concepts is typical of these texts of political discourse. A study by Núñez Cabezas and Guerrero Salazar (2002) tries to answer the question "Why does the politician resort to redundancy?". Scholars have identified three possible reasons:

- To extend the discourse, as the leader of *Podemos* does: "a serious government, a responsible government, a government that works for its people";
- To attract attention through hyperbole. An example is that of Felipe VI: "times of tragedy, silence and darkness";
- To use infrequent words.

Repetition does not always reach its goal. It often does not create any persuasive effect and turns out to be a useless extension. This is what happens, for example, when Cristina Kirchner repeats at the United Nations Council: "With surprise really, but not with disgust, with surprise, but not with disgust" (Kirchner, 2015).

Coordination and juxtaposition have no purpose, except to seek emotional reactions or psychological effects on the listener. Sometimes politicians prefer not to be concise and direct, because what they say is something controversial, controversial or delicate, or simply because they realize that they are talking about something very simple and need to mystify reality. That is why they employ the stylistic strategy of the circumlocution. Circumlocutions create a bombastic and formal nominal effect consisting of nouns or pronouns and adjectives that replace a single noun.

Felipe VI refers to his father saying: "In the person of King Juan Carlos" (2014). The same strategy can also be used with an interpelator function.

Marina Fernández Lagunilla (1999a) underlines the fact that the stereotype of the manipulation of truth is not exclusively typical of political language. It is a characteristic found in other languages as well, but in the political context manipulation is aimed at the largest audience of all, that is, the entire society.

If we listen to Matteo Renzi's speech "*sulla fiducia al Senato*" of February 25, 2014, we can realize that in it all the aforementioned characteristics are present. In the speech delivered in the



Italian Senate, Prime Minister Renzi speaks of the need that Italy has to get out of the crisis, not only economic, but also institutional. A crisis that takes the places of bureaucracy, slow and tortuous; the struggle between political parties; of the reforms that the country has to face. A crisis that has "infected" the system. In his speech he refers to a whole series of objectives that the government has set itself: in the economy, in finances, in employment. That is why Renzi proposes that this be the last time that it is voted, so that the "road" to a new policy can be realized. The speech has been delivered in the Senate, but it has also been broadcast by the telecommunication media, so Renzi knows that his audience is much wider.

## **Didactics of political language**

Beyond the general objective that we propose when we teach analysis of political discourse, namely: to defend the usefulness of the analysis of political discourses for their social role, or to try to instruct the student so that he can recognize and interpret with competence the reality told by politicians, we want to emphasize the didactic value that the to be able to familiarize with the special languages, with the different linguistic varieties of Spanish, with the different cultural norms, dialectal, with the different languages (cultured and popular), with the different registers or styles (formal or informal) thanks to the study of political language.

It is important that the student of Spanish as L2 studies a living, real language, an authentic Spanish that, despite its heterogeneity, has a strong linguistic unity.

Developing this theme requires highlighting a few fundamental points:

1. Nowadays you cannot talk about teaching the Spanish language as L2 without being clear about the language model to teach.
2. The didactics of the language must give priority to the communicative and cultural aspects, since to speak is to communicate and to communicate means to use a functionally adequate language, as they lead us to sustain the current studies of the pragmatics of the language.



3. Currently, new technologies allow us to analyze the language more closely, the real, authentic language, thanks to the development of corpus linguistics. In addition, the *Internet*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *social nets* in general, bring us closer and closer to linguistic reality.

Political language is also affected by the phenomenon of globalization. Knowing that we live in a globalized world, our leaders now resort to means of communication never before used, and not even imagined, such as social networks (*Twitter* and *Facebook*, *Instagram*, among the best known), in order to convey to the citizens not only their proposals and achievements, but also their insults and disqualifications; sometimes, interestingly, the latter above all. This is how new forms of interaction with the audience and viewers have been treasured to achieve specific objectives within a globalized world. His speeches can now reach a much wider audience and have a faster dissemination thanks to these powerful new media.

Returning to the issue of linguistic variation, it is indisputable that the subject represents a reality of Spanish. Our language is subject to internal and external conditions that prevent absolute homogeneity. However, due to its heterogeneous nature, our language enjoys a system consisting of several subsystems with common features that allow us to speak of linguistic unity. This is evident when we do analysis of political language.

The choice of language model to be taught depends on the needs of the students. But let's also remember that it is important to choose between a functional language prototype in university courses.

## Conclusion

In the light of what we have studied, and as a consequence of the analysis of these six discourses, the fundamental role that language has played and has in the field of political communication is understandable. The decision to take into consideration speeches delivered by Latin American and Italian leaders proves important. The speeches employ emotionally charged language; in them the population is involved, identity is exalted, the idea of change, of protection of heritage and national cultures is manifested.



Leaders identify with the people, and therefore use terminology available to all; they often generalize, emphasize and simplify more complex concepts so as not to lose their influence, over the public and to obtain greater consent – especially in the middle stratum – lower population, more easily influenced by politicians. All this makes this type of analysis motivate the student.

The willingness of leaders to break with the past and initiate, or continue, a new path to changing the *status quo* has emerged quite evidently. We have been able to appreciate the effect that the manipulation of discourse and the emphasized use of certain syntactic and lexical characteristics – such as metaphor, personification, repetition and bombast – cause on the listener.

Finally, we can say that Latin American leaders, unlike Europeans, have a friendlier, popular, simpler and more direct language. In recent years, however, parties and movements that approach the style of Latin American leaders are also booming in Europe, such as *Podemos* in Spain or the *Movimento 5 Stelle* and the *Lega Nord* in Italy.

To conclude, we wish to leave open a reflection on the second theme of this study, that is, the importance of the didactics of political language. To do this, we resort to a passage from the presentation of the book of the First Congress *Lingua e política* (Universidad Roma Tre. Roma, 2-3 maggio, 2012) that reads as follows:

Lo studio del linguaggio politico, e dell'analisi dei discorsi politici, rende lo studente (cittadino) capace di cogliere il vero significato dei messaggi trasmessi dai politici; in queste condizioni egli può riscattare la sua libertà di opinione, diventare il vero artefice delle scelte politiche in modo responsabile. Questo è forse l'aspetto sociale e umano più importante di questi studi. (Messina Fajardo, 2016, p. 12).

## References

- Alvar, M. (1987). *El lenguaje político*, Madrid: Fundación Friedrich Ebert.
- Equalized, D. (2006). Axiological marks in parliamentary discourse. In Manuel Casado Velarde, Ramón González Ruiz and M. Victoria Romero Gualda (eds.). *Discourse analysis: language, culture,*



values. Proceedings of the First International Congress. Madrid: Arco Libros. Vol. II, pp. 1405-1415.

Coseriu, E. (1987). Language and politics. In Alvar, Manuel (Ed.), *El Lenguaje político*, 1987, Madrid: Fundación Friedrich Ebert, Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, pp. 9-31.

Felipe VI (2014). *Coronation Speech*, read in: [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/06/19/actualidad/1403169017\\_929939.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/06/19/actualidad/1403169017_929939.html), June 19.

Fernandez, M. (1999a). *Language in political communication I: the discourse of power*. Spain: Arco Libros.

Fernandez, M. (1999b). *Language in political communication II: the word of power*, Spain: Arco Libros.

Hereu, J. (2009). *Welcome Speech. Barcelona Climate Change Talks*. Read in: <http://www.bcn.cat/climatechange/es/ben-hereu.html>

Iglesias, P. (2015). *Speech on the occasion of the March of Change*. Read in: <http://www.lamarea.com/2015/02/04/discurso-integro-de-pablo-iglesias-en-la-puerta-del-sol>, February 4.

Kirchner, C. (2014). *Address to the UN Security Council*. Read in: <http://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-cristina-fernandez-de-kirchner-en-el-consejo-de-seguridad-de-la-onu>, September 24.

Lakoff, G.; Johnson, M. (1991). *Metaphors of everyday life*. Spain: Chair.

Lazarus, F. (1987). Old language. New ideas? In Manuel Alvar (coord.), *El lenguaje político* (pp. 33-489). Spain: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Lo Cascio, V. (1998). *Grammar of argumentation*, Spain: Alianza Editorial.

Mattarella, S. (2015). *Speech at Expo Milan 2015*. Read in: <http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discurso&key=83>, June 5.

Messina L. (2016). *The political language. Characteristics and analysis of political discourse with exercises and key*. Italy: Maggiolo Editore.



- Mujica, J. (2014). *Speech at the White House*. Read in: <http://www.elobservador.com.uy/los-discursos-completos-mujica-y-obama-la-casa-blanca-n278325>, May 12.
- Núñez E. A. and Salazar, S. (2002) *El Lenguaje Político Español*, Spain: Cátedra.
- Rajoy, M. (2011). *Message to the Nation*. Read in: [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/11/21/actualidad/1321833683\\_582220.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/11/21/actualidad/1321833683_582220.html), November 21.
- Rebollo, M. Á. (2002). *Characterization of political language*, University of Extremadura. Cervantes Virtual Center.
- Renzi, M. (2014). *Speech to the Senate*. Read in: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/02/24/governo-renzi-il-discorso-per-la-fiducia-non-avete-avuto-il-coraggio-di-fare-le-riforme/892185/>, February 25.
- Rivero, P. (2015). *The Canary Islands are doing better than Spain*. Read in: <http://paulinorivero.com/2015/04/23/canarias-va-mejor-que-espana>, April 23.