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# Persuasion we live by: symbols, metaphors and linguistic strategies

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*Abstract:*

Persuasive discourse, typically in political communication, implies arousing adherence. Persuasion aims to bring out a shared semantic territory in the audience, a common, often hidden or unconscious, worldview. Naturally, persuasion is the privilege of a person someway associated with signs denoting "power, commitment, fairness, and social attractiveness". Substantially, persuasion is a cognitive process triggered or implemented by messages capable to influencing the attitudes of persons and their representation of the world. Thus, language of persuasion involves linguistic and pragmatic tools effective in influencing the collective imaginary and the feelings and beliefs of the people. Argumentative and rhetorical devices, metaphors, the structure of the sentence, lexical selection, symbols and images contribute to achieving persuasive effects by evoking a common cognitive ground as the basic dimension of legitimization and identity. This theoretical framework is tested on the basis of the political communication of some leaders which played or currently play an important role in the past or current Italian politics, such as Mussolini, De Gasperi, Togliatti, Berlusconi, Salvini and others. Their rhetorical choices and the symbols they rely on will be analyzed with the purpose of investigating the concealed or implicated semantics of their messages.

Keywords: *argumentative procedures, linguistic devices in discourse, persuasive discourse, political communication, symbols and metaphors*

## *1. Persuasion*

Defining persuasive communication, and specifically persuasive discourse, implies eliciting compliance. In this direction, Bülow-Møller (2005: 28) recalls that persuasion aims at creating a common ground, a sort of "shared territory" favoring possible "common visions and solutions". Together, persuasion is the privilege of a person connoted by "linguistic signals denoting power, commitment, fairness, and social attractiveness". So, persuasion is a cognitive process responding to the communication of a message whereby interlocutors or an audience change their "attitudes or be-

havior regarding an issue" (Perloff 2003: 34). According to Perloff (2003: 8) persuasion includes linguistic and non-verbal symbols and involves the deliberate intention to influence. Moreover:

> People persuade themselves to change attitudes or behavior. Communicators provide the arguments' and the influence is freely accepted by the receiver. Self-persuasion is the crucial mechanism. It is no accident if theoretical models foreground the crucial role of the audience, in other words they are concerned with 'how sender and receiver come together to create a shared reality. (Borchers 2013: 17)

Persuasion is, ultimately, the "coproduction of meaning", the issue that this contribution aims to investigate along the lines of analysis in Baldi (2017, 2019).

Is a very special use of language necessary for persuasion to take place? Virtanen and Halmari (2005: 5) note that an intrinsic property of language use is being persuasive, since any linguistic interaction entails some sort of change in the thought of interlocutors. However, persuasion strictu sensu is associated with "linguistic choices that aim at changing or affecting the behaviour of others or strengthening the existing beliefs and behaviors of those who already agree". As underlined by Sperber and Wilson (1996: 57-58) the interpretation of a linguistic act combines the content of a proposition with the propositional attitude of the communicator and the implementation of implicatures and inferences:

> informative intention is better described as an intention to modify directly not the thoughts but the cognitive environment of the audience. The actual cognitive effects of a modification of the cognitive environment are only partly predictable.

This definition of the way in which language influences the informative contents of interlocutors seems to be suitable to characterize the basic effect of persuasive language in "strengthening" the beliefs and symbolic universe of the audience rather than changing their thinking and behavior. This to say that persuasion, however conceived, is a property inherent in the way of using language by humans, insofar as natural language semantics is based on and mediated by mental operations (Chomsky 1988, 2004, 2005) underlying the conceptualization of experience and the world.

Turning to political language, a longstanding question is how it is able to change or re-elaborate the worldview of persons, and affect their beliefs and values. Naturally, we know that linguistic expressions have the effect of transferring pieces of a semantic representation into the mind/brain of the recipient, insofar as speaker and hearer share the common language faculty and a common conceptual model of the world and the mind. The point, here, is how, through the ability to interpret a sentence, in the particular language known by the interlocutors, the ideas of one can (possibly) migrate into the worldview of the other. We move here at the interface between linguistic knowledge (I(nternal)-language) as establishing a specific lexical-syntactic level of meaning, and the use of language in discourse, where the intentions of the speaker shape a particular representation of reality. More to the point, the sharing of thoughts and beliefs is the result of the communicative process, whereas linguistic expressions, in themselves, do not imply the strict correspondence of meanings and sounds in the speaker and the recipient, as highlighted by Chomsky (2000: 30):

> Successful communication between Peter and Mary [two interlocutors] does not entail the existence of shared meanings or shared pronunciations in a public language (or a common treasure of thoughts or articulations of them), any more the physical resemblance between Peter and Mary entails the existence of a public form that they share.

As to the internal properties of language, mutual comprehension among speakers, i.e. the assumption that speakers know the same I-Language, corresponds to the condition that the interlocutors establish a relation of congruence between the sentences that they enounce. More precisely, each interlocutor, listening to the other, assumes identical basic properties underlying the structure of the linguistic expressions as formed by the same combinatory operation, substantially the coincidence of the language faculty:

> The only (virtually) 'shared structure' among humans generally is the initial state of the language faculty. Beyond that we expect to find no more than approximations, as in the case of other natural objects that grow and develop. (*Ibidem*)

We must conclude that the semantic import of the linguistic forms relies on other interpretive means driven by our cognitive capabilities. In fact, the notion of conceptual common ground is very elusive, as suggested by Chomsky:

> It may be that a kind of public (or interpersonal) character to thought and meaning results from uniformity of initial endowment, which permits only I-languages that are alike in significant respects, […] But […] the character of thought and meaning varies as interest and circumstance vary, with no clear way to establish further categories, […]. (*Ibidem*)

It is no accident if the theories on interpretation must not dispense with the connection to conversational mechanisms, contextual implicatures and belief systems. As claimed by Sperber and Wilson (1996), the basic requirement in the exchange of information is that it be compatible with human cognitive organization. The activation of implicatures not directly associated with the context and suggested by lexical and rhetorical choices intentionally made by the speaker, enhances the semantic potential of the message (Sperber and Wilson 1996). This result is surely also based on illocutionary force and other pragmatic tools. Nevertheless, more covert and sophisticated linguistic (lexical and syntactic ones), pragmatic and semantic properties are involved, that bridge the divide between language and symbolic representation of feelings, beliefs and often unconscious cognitive systems of values. The latter underlie the frames feeding the interpretation of the world, society and human relationships. The crucial role of the Principle of Relevance for the argumentative theory of reasoning, supports a Post-Gricean theory whereby pragmatic interpretation is necessary for a full comprehension of the message (Reboul 2017).

The process of interpretation, in turn, implies the distinction between 'persuade/convince' on the basis of a coherent argumentation, bringing to comprehension (cf. Zanacchi 2006), and 'persuade' by means of simple cues and unanalyzed information. This difference is evidenced in the classical psycho-social framework (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), and is frequently implied in the study of communications inducing attitude change in the audience. By the way, human minds encompass two systems of reasoning: the heuristic system, "fast and frugal, made of heuristics (or biases […]), which, while they may occasionally be wrong, deliver correct answers most of the time"; the analytic system, cognitively costly, used for detecting what appears wrong or doubtful in the conclusions reached by the heuristic system (Reboul 2017: 212). However, argumentation is frequently based not on logic but on biases and heuristics. So, only a social perspective of the role of reasoning is adequate to account for the fact that it is used not for proving the logical nature of an assertion but for adducing elements – argumentation – in favour of the validity of one's own point of view, substantially for persuading the recipient.

An aspect of persuasive discourse is manipulation, not necessarily occurring, although many of the linguistic or symbolic devices of persuasion are manipulative, as, for instance, the recourse

to religious symbols or to apodictically presented arguments, that are rhetorical means able to distort the argumentation. In manipulative discourse the cognitive process of information is "perturbed" by misuse of words, more generally, by the use of semantic vagueness and vacuity, so crucially betraying the Gricean maxims, mainly the one of quality. Interestingly, Saussure (2005: 119-121) observes that manipulative discourse is not "about using metaphors" and other syntactic or semantic solutions, but about how these devices play a particular pragmatic role. Manipulative discourse is a particular type of persuasive discourse based on propositions:

> truth-functionally defective (roughly, they are *wrong* in some way: false, unlikely, doubtful, inaccurate, inconsistent with the common ground; and therefore should be rejected by the hearer under normal circumstances.

The conclusion of Saussure is that this type of discourse has to do with moral statements concerning desirable states of affairs and not with actual states of affairs. We might wonder when political discourse reflects or expresses actual states of affairs, since it typically expresses ends and purposes, and tends to investigate and depict persons and society. So, manipulation is committed to figure a new or alternative world, a different moral culture. Escaping the evaluation of the hearer is obtained by fuzziness, and vagueness renders the rules of interpretation impossible or difficult to be applied, thus coercing reliance on the general values and beliefs shared by speaker and hearers. Methods for leading the audience to an 'irrational consent' include textual genres based on an excess of metaphors, recourse to mystical or religious language and images and vagueness activating strong presuppositions, i.e. self-evident assertions, possibly tautological, that cannot be negated.

A result of this model is that any expressive means helping one consolidate and improve argumentation is properly a part of argumentative discourse, including metaphors (Ervas *et al.* 2016). Their crucial property resides in opening a conceptual frame, thus leading to the cognitive multiplication of interpretive spaces. Chilton (2005) speaks of the blending effect, whereby a metaphor can trigger a cluster of properties derived from metaphoric meaning. Blending reveals the cognitive entrenchment whereby a particular metaphor generates mapping from the source of the metaphor to the relevant semantic domain and, as a consequence, leads people to unconsciously draw conclusions and decisions.[1]

Persuasive procedures are implemented by resorting to manipulation and argumentation, implying the interaction of many linguistic and discourse means. Besides, modern political discourse cannot dispense with non-linguistic ways of communication, based on visual symbols and images, crucial in a social reality governed by mass- and social-media, and technological networks. In what follows three faces of persuasion in political discourse will be discussed, i.e. argumentation, metaphors and symbols. In these domains, symbolic representations such as images and concrete signs, acquire a central role in conveying the stigma of a common belonging and moral categories. see that a sharp boundary between argumentation and manipulation

[1] The effects of metaphorical framing are investigated in relation to two main perspectives, the critical-discourse approach (CDA) and the response-elicitation approach (REA) (Boeynaems *et al.* 2017). CDA is focused on the "real world changes" in relation to metaphorical framing", while REA is interested in the responses of "participants exposed to language stimuli in a research situation". These analyses show that CDA frames engender negative interpretations more systematically than the ones occurring in REA experiments. Boeynaems *et al.* (2017: 130) note that this discrepancy could be due to the nature of the approach. In other words, CDA could be more oriented to discover the association between metaphorical frames and certain pre-defined aspects of society, whereby "Moreover, an interest in the role of discourse on social inequality and power dominance suggests a tendency to look for effects of metaphorical frames used by power elites that are in line with the frame".

is difficult to find and that symbols, figurative speech, appeals and systematic research for a common worldview create a single interpretive texture combining lexicon, syntax, prosody, images and gestures.

## *2. Political discourse*

Political discourse contextualizes social practices (Leeuwen 2008); it narrates and expresses the contents underlying the shared symbolic universe. In political discourse, therefore, pragmatic procedures have a decisive role associated with the production of meanings, as they represent the system of beliefs and convictions of the recipients. Although these procedures do not necessarily aim to construe self-identification, they generally have the effect of introducing ideas, messages and content that enrich the shared cognitive space. The representation of the relationship of trust with the voter or, in general, with listeners has a central role in these shared values and a feeling of belonging to the same symbolic network produces persuasion, i.e. the acceptance of a particular representation of individuals, events or states of affairs by the audience. Mental states of receivers are involved inasmuch as the semantics, although concealed or ambiguously expressed, introduced by the message needs to be integrated in the "system of expectations of the receivers" (Eco 1968: 140). This, let us remember, is a property from the beginning associated with classical rhetoric, whereby:

> Rhetoric proceeded to review these ways of thinking, these common and acquired opinions, and these arguments already assimilated by the social body, responding to pre-established systems of expectations. (Eco 1968: 140)

Desideri (1984: 19) identifies some of the typical features of political discourse: relation with the social ways of production and reception of messages, the relevancy of the ritual traits of the enunciation, the recognizability of this common ground of meaning by the addressee. Political communication is basically organized in order to construct or evidence the relationship of trust and agreement that the sender assumes there be with the addressees (Baldi 2007, 2012, 2018, Baldi and Savoia 2017). A crucial property of political discourse is the ability to replace the experience of reality with its representation by means of the semantics, the symbols and beliefs of the recipients. Edelman (1977: 26) reminds us that it is political language that creates the cognitive structures hosting the knowledge of events:

> Only rarely can there be direct observations of events, and even then language forms shape the meaning of what the general public and government officials see. It is language that evokes most of the political "realities" people experience. The challenge is to learn how language and gestures are systematically transformed into complex cognitive structures.

So, mastering political discourse means having the capability of exercising control over people's thought or at least having the tools necessary for doing so. Linguistic expressions, therefore, are interpreted as they are able to introduce meaning structures and cognitive environments. The tie between language and political discourse is subtler than is generally assumed, insofar as language incorporates pre-political meanings and beliefs that influence explicit political rhetoric:

> The *fundamental* influences upon political beliefs flow, however, from language that is not perceived as political at all but nonetheless structures perceptions of status, authority, merit, deviance, and the causes of social problems. (Edelman 1977: 35)

Although the pragmatic perspective concerning the construction of meanings helps us account for the way in which persons interact by means of utterances in communicative situ-

ations, it is still true that there are uses of language, including political discourse, that show a particular status. Not surprisingly, political discourse favours or, better, relies on sharing beliefs rather than understanding facts. The irrational nature of this type of discourse is outlined in a precise and acute way by Leibniz (1982: 255-258) in *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humain* (1765) in which he considers "the authority, the party, the custom" the cause of a "kind of madness" that distorts the reasoning processes and identifies in the "search for truth" the only possible solution. This property of political language is one of the characteristics studied by Critical Discourse Analysis, as noted by van Dijk (2001: 357):

> […] recipients tend to accept beliefs, knowledge, and opinions (unless they are inconsistent with their personal beliefs and experiences) through discourse from what they see as authoritative, trustworthy, or credible sources, such as scholars, experts, professionals, or reliable media.

However, there is a basic dimension in political discourse that calls into question both the "kind of madness" invoked by Leibniz and the issuer's authority, in the sense of van Dijk. Chilton (2005), examining a propaganda text such as Mein Kampf asks himself "How do the ideas get transferred from mind to mind?" and points out that the recipient has sufficient interpretive means to decide whether to believe or adhere to the assertions contained in a text:

> Of course, no-one *has* to accept as true any of the virtual worlds set up in discourse. But in so far as propositions come as social transactions claiming *prima facie* to be true, people are inclined to accept them as true, initially, […]. Still, because human language users are also good at detecting deception, speakers may want to take preemptive measures. This means that speakers often seek to build in guarantees, authorisations and assurances as to their veracity, seeking to appeal to whatever they believe their interlocutors believe to be veracious. (Chilton 2005: 22)

In other words, cognitive components underlying the organization of human mind are involved:

> Some of the cognitive components that make up political ideologies are 'parasitic' on basic modular knowledge, […] The cognitive components in question are both representational in nature and procedural. The representational part belongs to different modules – e.g., intuitive physics, intuitive biology, intuitive physiology modules. (*Ibidem*: 18)

Hence, the recipient has interpretive means sufficient to decide whether to believe in or adhere to the assertions presented in the text. When we speak of manipulation of consciences by political propaganda, we have to take into account the fact that the recipient has intellectual and interpretive capabilities neither smaller than nor different from the ones of the sender.

Even if manipulative properties seem to characterize persuasive speech, the latter aims however to include argumentative properties as well. The evocation of feelings, fear, aversion, patriotism, i.e. the substance of manipulation, can be part of an argumentation. In keeping with Mercier and Sperber (2011) reasoning is argumentative and, in this, it is adaptive insofar as reasoning fulfils "the exceptional dependence of humans on communication and their vulnerability to misinformation". In their framework, the role of reasoning is primarily social, in the sense that it provides people with expressive means necessary to support and justify a conclusion or decision. In other words, it does not ensure the reliability of argumentation but aims at strengthening claims and opinions introduced by persons:

> the function of reasoning is primarily social: In particular, it allows people to anticipate the need to justify their decisions to others. This predicts that the use of reasoning in decision making should

increase the more likely one is to have to justify oneself […] In all these cases, reasoning does not lead to more accurate beliefs about an object, to better estimates of the correctness of one's answer, or to superior moral judgments. Instead, by looking only for supporting arguments, reasoning strengthens people's opinions, distorts their estimates, and allows them to get away with violations of their own moral intuitions. In these cases, epistemic or moral goals are not well served by reasoning. By contrast, argumentative goals are: People are better able to support their positions or to justify their moral judgments. (Mercier, Sperber 2011: 10)

Therefore, in argumentation all means become useful as means for supporting one's claim, including confirmation bias, as available arguments or justification for the argumentation, regardless of their truth value and the poverty of the results they bring.

All in all, persuasion strategies rely on crucial discourse and linguistic properties embedding a covert link with a cognitive deep level, activating the unconscious sentiments and beliefs of the audience, "the value that we place on ideas and beliefs on a scale of goodness and badness" (Charteris-Black 2005: 13). In this, metaphors are the essential device, in discourse as well as in symbolic procedures (images, posters, behaviors), as far as they awaken our deep moral categories underlying the frames that give sense to our experience of the world and society. In keeping with Sebera and Lu (2018), it is this linking that triggers feelings of legitimization or de-legitimization with regard to the consenting groups or the opponents and objector and critical stands:

The essence of legitimization by political leaders is to identify a set of values regarding what is good and bad because these beliefs as to what is good and bad form the basis for political action. Communication style is essential to legitimization. (Charteris-Black 2005: 22)

An interesting point is that the reference to ideologies is apparently conscious, at least to the extent that they are sets of ideas:

that explain and justify ends and means of organized social action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order. (Seliger 1976: 14)

On the other hand, ideologies give shape to imaginary worlds and moral roots otherwise generally unexpressed or only intuited. The semantic force of the discourse and symbols are able to convey concepts related to these values and moral obligations, i.e. 'ought', 'duty', 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong'. Inglehart (1977, 2018) proposes the distinction between materialist and post-materialist values, where the symbolic system of materialism is concerned with securitarian matters, the rejection of modernization, suspicion of scientific knowledge and education, i.e. contrary to the symbolic post-materialist background, implying a critical vision of society and the world and free expression attitudes.

However, these categories are not univocal, in turn stemming from existential and elementary behavioural and conceptual primitives such as parental influence on personal identity construction (Lakoff 1996, 2008). Lakoff (1996, 2008, 2016) connects our models of society, morality and role of individuals with the styles of family, the Strict Father model and the Nurturant Parent, which give rise to two kinds of framing of social relations and worldviews. Specifically, these different models "provide" metaphors for morality: the conservative moral categories such as strength, authority, self- discipline and responsibility, reward and punishment, upholding moral order, protecting moral people from external evils contrast with progressive categories such as nurturance,

empathetic behaviour and promoting fairness, helping and protecting those who cannot help and protect themselves, promoting fulfilment in life. These oppositions are rooted in the profound moral content that everyone adheres to, consciously or not, and influence our moral worldviews "encapsulated in two very different common forms of family life: The Nurturant Parent family (progressive) and the Strict Father family (conservative)" (Lakoff 2016: 2).

The different forms of political discourse as well as of commercial advertising explore atavistic and profound emotional contents, such as the patriarchal/natural family, the fears triggered by diversity, and the inequality of civil rights and personal liberties. We are talking about the pre-conscious or basic perceptions that inspire many stereotypes concerning society and reality. Moreover, globalization phenomena have caused a crisis of the identity of persons and new apparently available freedom has made social and life conditions less defined and more uncertain (Bauman 2003, 2009). As a consequence, fear of the unknown seems to be an efficient feeling stirred up by political language in recent years. This contributes, for instance, to enhancing the particularistic and ethnic right-wing linguistic approach of Salvini, in Italy, or Le Pen in France, but, more usually, is a sort of subtext generally underlying much political discourse in Western society which is struggling, on the other hand, to foreshadow a clear perspective of progress. Fears strengthen persuasiveness as a powerful key of interpretation of the people.

Stereotyped imagines permeate all the dimensions of persuasive communication. Suffice it to think of commercial advertising, where covert or explicit use of the more easygoing and lenient representations of common feelings and imaginary substantiates the process of argumentation and persuasion. Institutional communication is no exception, insofar as it needs to affect or change the convictions and thoughts of the people. In this sad hour, where Italy (and the world) is hit by an epidemic, the Italian Prime Minister, in his messages concerning the measures to contain the epidemic, used the consoling slogan, then resumed and translated into the figurative scheme in (1) where the rainbow is above the lettering.

(1) *Tutto andrà bene* 'Everything will be all right'

Like any slogan, this is also based on a common framework implying the manner of facing the difficulties in terms of confidence in a "good father of a family", in Lakoff 's (2008, 2016) sense. It is reasonable to conclude that it is precisely because it intercepts a profound feeling of the people that it has great popularity and becomes a sort of series of keywords in the social media and in other forms of communication.

So, persuasiveness is, in itself, non-rational precisely because it cannot avoid evoking the unconscious basis of our worldviews, if it aims to be successful. This also explains why metaphors generally are so crucial in language and specifically in persuasive styles of discourse. Metaphors have the capacity to multiply and create conceptual and symbolic relations through the connection between the source, a concrete, generally sensorial or elementary experience, and the target, the world of social relations and expectations.

### *3. Argumentations and claims: emotive language*

Starting from the Fregean distinction between meaning (Sinn) and denotation (Bedeutung) (Frege 1862), the truth value of an expression separates descriptive sentences associated with a verifiable state of affairs from sentences introducing possible worlds, not reducible to truth criteria. Nevertheless, although this distinction captures the two semantic faces of natural language, the reference to individuals or events/states of affairs is however filtered through interpretive processes of which linguistic expressions are only one of the components. What is more, the utterances implement illocutionary processes such as exhortation, persuasion, command etc.

Logical validity and truth-conditions of sentences are only a part of argumentative discourse (Mercier and Sperber 2001, Reboul 2017, D'Agostini 2010), that, in itself, is essentially pragmatic in nature. Arguing means justifying conclusions reached starting from the premises, i.e. the arguments introduced in order to define the cognoscitive background of interlocutors and the topics of the discourse. The effectiveness of an argumentation is, therefore, something different from its truthfulness as referentiality, i.e. the ability of an expression to be applied to individuals or a state of affairs. If we are on the right track, we expect that argumentative discourse should have an identifiable illocutionary force (Austin 1962), such as, for instance, persuasion, on a par with other types of act, e.g. request, order, promise. In political discourse a key role pertains to argumentative procedures insofar as they confirm and enrich the belief and conviction system of the recipients. However, the argumentative texture of political discourse is frequently elliptic, insofar as it exploits the hidden logic introduced by implicatures, i.e. the ability of utterances to enhance the information provided by linguistic expressions by means of the contents evoked and implicated by the communicative context (Grice 1993 [1975], Sperber and Wilson 1996).

Argumentative organization is able to define the premises and justifications in favor of the veracity and strength of the thesis, thus prompting the recipients to opt for a politician, an object or idea. Even if this is not always the case in ordinary discussion between persons or political oratory, nevertheless there are examples of language structured on the basis of arguments supporting the thesis and justifications of sorts. An emblematic case is the discourse announcing the decision of Silvio Berlusconi to participate in the political struggle in 1994, in (2):

(2) a. L'Italia è il Paese che amo. Qui ho le mie radici, le mie speranze, i miei orizzonti. Qui ho imparato, da mio padre e dalla vita, il mio mestiere di imprenditore.
'Italy is the country that I love. Here I have my roots my hopes, my horizons. Here I learnt, from my father and life, my profession as a businessman.'

b. Qui ho appreso la passione per la libertà. Ho scelto di scendere in campo e di occuparmi della cosa pubblica perché non voglio vivere in un Paese illiberale, governato da forze immature e da uomini legati a doppio filo a un passato politicamente ed economicamente fallimentare.
'Here I learnt the passion for freedom. I chose to take to the arena and enter public affairs because I do not want to live in an illiberal country, governed by immature forces and by men closely tied to a politically and economically unsuccessful past.'

c. Per poter compiere questa nuova scelta di vita, ho rassegnato oggi stesso le mie dimissioni da ogni carica sociale nel gruppo che ho fondato. Rinuncio dunque al mio ruolo di editore e di imprenditore per mettere la mia esperienza e tutto il mio impegno a disposizione di una battaglia in cui credo con assoluta convinzione e con la più grande fermezza.
'In order to make this new choice in life, I resigned this very day from every official position I held in the group of companies I set up. I am resigning my role as publisher and businessman to offer my experience and all my commitment in favor of a struggle in which I believe with total conviction and firmness.'

In (2), (a) is the premise circumscribing the symbolic universe of the politician and fixes the boundaries of agreement with the audience; what we see are statements entirely based on confidence in the sender: what is more important than a father, roots of one's own life, one's profession? Obviously these are apodictic *topoi* unfailingly common to and approved by all people. (b) sets the target, the thesis, i.e. 'to enter public affairs' as a historical necessity, in relation to the "passion for freedom" and other supporting arguments. (c) introduces further justifications and motivations in support. Each paragraph in turn takes on the form of an argumentation, where the main thesis, *Italy is the country that I love* in (a)*, I chose to take to the arena and enter public affairs* in (b) and *a struggle in which I believe with total conviction and firmness* in (c), are supported by motivating or justifying propositions. For instance, (c) may be construed as in (2'), where (2'i) introduces the thesis, justified by other propositions:

(2') i. I make a new choice in life: political struggle
ii. This requires total dedication and commitment
iii. I resigned from every official position I held
iv. The struggle is tackled with conviction and firmness

More to the point, not verbalized and someway hidden interpretive factors come into play, i.e. presuppositions and, more crucially, pragmatic implicatures (Sperber and Wilson 1996). These additive but not less important meanings, generally triggered in ordinary speech, become crucial in political discourse. So, in (2'), a lexical choice such as 'struggle', a rather conventional metaphor concerning political debate, introduces the presupposition that there are enemies taking part in the struggle, and that the nature of a struggle is such as to require 'total dedication'. The implicature is that the total dedication of his life is in the interest of the people. The appropriateness of (2'i) depends on the probability of realization. According to D'Agostini (2010) the effectiveness of an argumentation is determined by combining the two properties of validity and truth, that make it persuasive.

An interesting point is that argumentation, although someway implemented by premises, justifications and conclusion, is frequently undermined by rhetorical fallacies, so that the true means are almost totally implicit and carried out by what is implicated in the discourse. It is the symbolic and cognitive universe shared by the audience that provides the interpretation. For example, in (2), the arguments a. *Italy is the country that I love* and b. *Here I learnt the passion for freedom* do not justify the conclusion concerning the necessity of 'taking to the arena' on the part of Berlusconi. In the sense that there is no consequentiality between (2a)-(2b) and the decision of Berlusconi: what is important is the implicit content activated by implicatures (Lombardi Vallauri and Masia 2014), as for instance that this choice is the guarantee in order to prevent a possible success of the left-wing parties.

### *3.1 Words and worlds: expressive language for persuading*

Much political discourse is based on partial or fallacious argumentations, i.e. argumentations starting from dogmatic or asserted premises involving adhesion on the part of the audience. Generally, this approach is strongly emotional and inclusive. A classical instance is the evocation of a conspiracy, a key for opening up an alternative world. A different type of power, different beliefs and values are dreamed of and pursued in crisis periods, when the rules of traditional power are negated or questioned. The political symbols and discourse are not particularly interested in the veridicality, evoking or envisaging different moral or social conditions, as highlighted by Saussure (2005: 124):

> […] economic recession, war, and post-war situations are factors that favor less stable moral judgement for individuals and open the way for a change in moral values. The fact is that when a society or system has not been able to provide appropriate quality of life and the possibility of human relations, individuals are likely to conclude that the values that ground that particular society or system are not appropriate. This plants the seed of doubt and the will to change societal conditions. Needless to say, such change is not trivial.

Conspiracy thinking is a powerful tool for attacking the social order. The phantom of a conspiracy aimed at annihilating European peoples (white? Aryan?) has been taken up with particular insistence by the Italian Lega, under the leadership of Matteo Salvini, who, during the gathering of the Italian public holiday of 15 August 2015, in Ponte di Legno (Valtellina, Northern Lombardy), denounced the *tentativo di genocidio* (attempt of genocide) of the populations who live in Italy, supplanting them with *decine di migliaia* (tens of thousands) of people coming from abroad. Similarly, in his live broadcast on Radio Padania on 15.5.2017, in (3), he describes the essential steps of the Kalergi plan,[2] which assumes that any incentive for immigration in Europe would have as its main purpose the replacement of its population:

(3) Vedremo di adottare ogni mezzo possibile, oltre a quelli che già abbiamo percorso, per fermare questa invasione. E quando dico ogni mezzo dico ogni mezzo, ovviamente legalmente permesso o quasi, perché siamo di fronte a un tentativo evidente di pulizia etnica, di sostituzione etnica ai danni di chi vive in Italia. (Matteo Salvini, Radio Padania 15.5.2017, Post 15.5.2017)
'We will try to deploy any possible means; besides those we have already used, in order to block this invasion. And when I say any means I say any means; obviously legally permitted or nearly so, since we face an evident attempt at ethnic cleansing, ethnic substitution harming those who live in Italy.'

If we explore the grammar of this text (Caiani and Della Porta 2011), we see that certain grammatical roles encode ideological and symbolic values. The plot is lexicalized by indefiniteness, whereby, for instance, the agentive argument of the eventive noun 'attempt' is omitted (Danler 2005). Who uses these expressions knows that their efficacy resides in evoking the innermost feelings, here the fears of the individual, and the completeness of the argumental structure is unnecessary in order to obtain this result. Indeed, a certain degree of vagueness increases the communicative power of these sentences. On the other hand, the impossibility of resorting to definite descriptions, endowed with referential content, betrays the artificiality of the semantic construction.

Not applying an overt argumentative structure, traditionally tied to the slogans and claims of politicians and parties, is now increasing as a general way to communicate ideas through social

[2] The Austrian-Japanese politician and philosopher Richard Nikolaus Coudenhove-Kalergi was one of the founders of European integration. Extreme right-wing forces and Lega attribute to him a plot for replacing the European populations with Asian and African immigrants (Quattrociocchi and Vicini 2016).

media such as Twitter and Facebook. The short-circuit between media and degree of truth is a consequence of the fact that the new social media are intrinsically available to the uncontrolled and unconditioned expression of ideas and opinions by the individual. Interestingly D'Agostini (2010) and Ferraris (2017) warn that a new type of absolutism is born, that is assertions devoid of falsifiability, new true dogmas. As to politicians, they know that proposing truths alternative to the established ones leads to the triggering of the innermost feelings and fears of individuals, and for this reason, it is very powerful. The symbolic world alternative to European politics, globalization, immigration processes, recognition of civil rights, is the final thesis shared with the audience. It is suggested in the attacks on the establishment, presented as inaccessible, a cluster of lobbies and interests extraneous to the citizens. In the extreme right, ethno-pluralism and securitarian, racist/xenophobic components are involved (Rydgren 2008), whereas in the case of left-wing ideologies, the economic powers of the multinationals and international finance have inspired political controversy for decades (cf. Ventrone 2005).

Let us begin with the strategy adopted in order to depict the imagined relation between a supra-national power and the individual in some tweets by Matteo Salvini (in (4); from the corpus in Giovinazzo 2020) in the years preceding the government of 2018:

(4) a. In Europa comandano banchieri, finanzieri e massoni, è presa d'atto. Io sto dall'altra parte (29.5.2016)
'In Europe it is the bankers, the financiers and freemasons that are in charge. I am on the other side.'

b. Ma dove siamo finiti in Italia? Libertà per i nostri simboli e la nostra cultura. No al pensiero unico! (23.9.2016)
'But where have we ended up in Italy? Freedom for our symbols and our culture. No conventional wisdom.'

c. Che Futuro abbiamo in testa? Partiamo dalla difesa delle nostre RADICI, dalla nostra tradizione e dalla nostra cultura (24.2.2018)
'What Future do we have in our heads? Let us start from the defence of our Roots, our traditions and our culture.'

Two issues are recalled, encompassing crucial ideological contents: the real nature of Europe, otherwise kept hidden by the establishment, in (4a), and the notion of freedom, understood as an ethnocentric consideration of the cultural specificity of Italians, (in 4b,c). Freedom and culture introduce an alternative interpretation compared with the one generally advanced by the pro-Europe faction and at least by a part of liberal, progressive thought. In (4) they have a very precise reference to ethnic separation from the culture of migrants and the political design followed by the European Union, and to the alleged different ways of thinking of Italians. The Tweets in (4b,c) clarify this implicit level by detailing the fundamental points with recourse to key-words such as *Italy*, *symbols, conventional wisdom* (also known as *pensée unique*), *future, roots*, sufficient to evoke the deep fears, values and attachment of the audience.

Impoliteness is a rhetorical device frequently adopted in the recent political debate. It, together with the assertive and apodictic force of the type of messages, may be connected with the contrast between powerful and powerless speech, where generally powerful speech is devoid of the discursive forms of attenuation or uncertainty, as disclaimers and indefinite expressions. In this line, "emotionally charged words" (Perloff 2003: 202) increase the persuasive power of language, so that the argumentative weakness of the exclamatory expressions can turn out to function as a special form of intense language insofar as it activates subliminal meanings and other symbolic values. By way of example, the lexicon of Beppe Grillo, the head of the so-called Five Star Movement, is character-

ized by a mix of political technicalities, semantic changes - 'democracy' means 'direct democracy' - and metaphors, including a large use of profanities. Petrilli (2018) notes the high frequency of scurrilous, insulting and "bad" language , such as *fuck, ass, shit*, combined with or alternating with descriptive terms such as *previous offender*, *mouse*, *pig*, *bitch*, *dwarf*, *talk*, *army*, *Bocconi (i.e. from a privileged background) student*, *populism* (Ondelli, 2016). Resorting to an irrational categorization of politicians by means of scurrilous metaphors creates a debate which is only apparent, based on the identity of thought between the leader and his followers. These irrational properties occurring in Grillo's discourse are also manifested in the use of insulting terms applied to the opponents, no longer indicated by their name but designed with disqualifying and ethical metaphors, such as *psiconano* 'psycho-dwarf' (Berlusconi), *ebetino* 'little idiot' (Renzi), *Big Loden* (i.e. a reference to the smart conventional overcoat worn by ex-Premier Monti). Conceptual frames are triggered, and, for instance, Big Loden implicates the formal world of Bocconi the prestigious private university in Milan, the social and directive position of the élites, distance from the common people.

Even the public discourse of Salvini often includes forms of coercive impoliteness (Culpeper 2011) exploiting vulgar expressions, and offensive terms. As noted for Grillo's rhetoric, impolite and vulgar expressions can be a powerful instrument of rupture with the values of civil life, denying the current state of affairs and introducing a different social and moral view based on hidden or unconscious feelings. The few examples we will examine are provided by the messages written by Matteo Salvini, the Lega secretary, on Twitter and other social media (cf. Baldi, Franco and Savoia 2019). What is interesting is that they translate the same contents as the ones in (4) into a vulgar language intended to reach and directly affect the people's cultural and emotional space and implicit thought. These messages consist of claims introducing the tassels of an allusive and embracing symbolic system immediately reached by means of the communicative effectiveness of sexual or scatological expressions. The latter behave like other metaphors, i.e. they open a frame of connected semantic representations.

The excerpts in (5) (from Ondelli 2017, 2018) illustrate the assertive style in messages immediately introducing that deep cultural humus, including the patriarchal/natural style of life, (5a,b), the fears engendered by diversity, (5a,c), the connection of civil and personal liberties to personal responsibility and identity, (5b), and suspicion of conspiracies against the "pure" identity of a given nation (Caiani 2011) suggested by migratory and globalization processes, (5c).

(5) a. … la cultura unica, la scuola unica, la magistratura unica. Che palle. Piccolo è bello, diverso è bello!
'A single culture, a single school, a single judiciary. Bollocks. Small is fine, different is fine!'

b. No, diritti a tutti un par de palle. Se tu non rispetti l'essere umano io non ti do mezzo diritto.
'No, rights for everybody – my ass! If you don't respect human beings I won't even give you half a right.'

c. Stiamo subendo una sostituzione etnica programmata
'We are undergoing programmed ethnic substitution.' (Twitter 3.12.2017)

d. Perché l'Europa è infame, perché la moneta unica è l'anticamera del pensiero unico...
'Because Europe is infamous, because a single currency is the prelude to single thought (i.e. pensée unique)...

e. Vaffanculo Bruxelles e tutti i burocrati! Dalla Merkel all'euro, a questa gentaglia che vuole comprarci e ci vuole schiavi!
'Fuck off Brussels and all bureaucrats! From Merkel to the Euro, to the mob who want to buy us and make us slaves!'

The 'single thought' attributed to Europe is rejected in the name of different national cultures. The recourse to coarse expressions replaces the motivations introducing a direct identity

recall for all people that share the same values. In other words, profanity is a figurative means endowed with several positive effects, substantially able to introduce a direct call to common feelings. The exclamatory structure excludes the predicative part of the clause, i.e. the argumentation supporting the thesis; similar to vocatives and allocution formulas, exclamatory sentences have a syntactic organization that lacks the representation of the event, as in 'Fuck off Brussels and all bureaucrats!'. The consequence is that only the symbolic and perlocutionary delegitimizing intentions and their expected effects support the lexical designation of the enemy. Nevertheless, what is the real conclusion? In (3a) the exclamatory status of the thesis "Small is fine, different is fine" suggests that what is presupposed by 'single', is the conventional wisdom favored by the economic and political establishment, contrasting with small, different values underlying "the search for identity". The use of coarse expressions thus becomes a link with all people that share the same values, by manifesting its disquiet.

"Ethno-pluralism" characterizes right-wing ideologies, according to which each community must remain separate in order to preserve their national identity (Rydgren 2008). Italian extreme right-wing discourse depicts the fear of globalization in documents such as Foglio di lotta (A Pamphlet on Struggle) of Forza Nuova, the Veneto Fronte Skinhead VFS network, and l'Inferocito (The Enraged) of Camerata Virtuale (i.e. the Fascist equivalent of Comrade) where external, mysterious and indefinite conspiratorial factors are involved intent on creating an "undifferentiated, atomized, consumerist society" (Caiani 2011: 140). In the plot in (6) below, Caiani shows the 12 most recurrent actors (among 200 in total) that represent the figures, entities and situations engaged in a global fight for power.

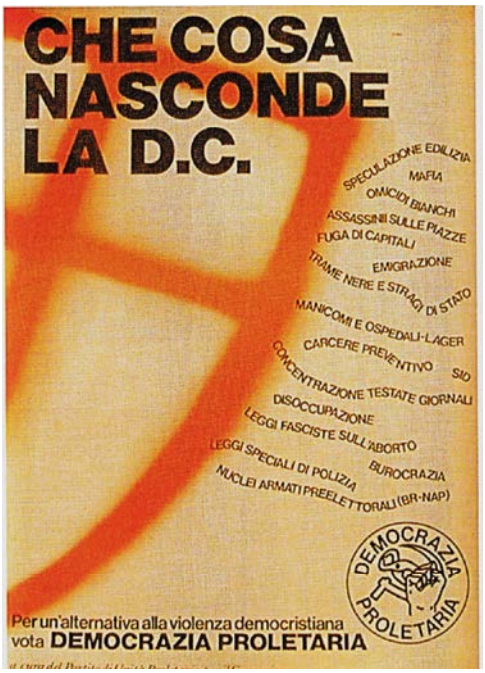
(6)

Table 1. The 12 most recurrent actors in a global fight for power (Caiani 2011:140)

It may be interesting to compare the rhetorical and semantic procedures of the right-wing with the conspiracy thinking of the left (Baldi, Franco and Savoia 2019). An electoral poster of 1976 by Democrazia Proletaria (Proletarian Democracy), an extreme left-wing party, equated Democrazia Cristiana and State violence inspired a long propagandistic constant of PCI the Italian Communist Party. The list of the responsibilities and the alleged plots and conspiracies attributed to DC also included the instrumentalization and manipulation of terrorist groups such as the Brigate Rosse and Nuclei Armati Proletari, as in (7) (Ventrone 2005: 242). The role of conspiratorial thinking is one of the dangerous drifts denounced in Pombeni (2018) as regards

the libertarian ideals of 1968, ultimately leading to the dogmatic tone of the communiqués of the Red Brigades. Crippled information and hate as political praxis shown in the anti-system formations (Lotta Continua, Brigate Rosse, Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari, etc.) today no longer needs underground presses or gathering places.

(7)




'What the D.C. conceals
building speculation - mafia – fatal accidents in workplaces - murders in the streets – illegal capital transfers - emigration - Fascist plots and State massacres - psychiatric hospitals and concentration camp-hospitals - preventive detention - SID (secret service) - newspapers' concentration - joblessness - Fascist laws on abortion - bureaucracy - police special laws - pre-electoral armed groups (Red Brigades, Proletarian armed nuclei) - For an alternative to DC violence
vote Proletarian Democracy'

As we note, some referential domains are similar in left- and right-wing positions however pointing out the role of obscure economic and external forces presented as a motivating mythology. Resorting to the rhetorical artifice of the conspiracy by occult powers and, in some cases, the same supranational entities, is a strategy shared by opposite extreme ideological positions (van Prooijen *et al.* 2015: 576):

> One might speculate that the extreme 'left' particularly perceives conspiracies about issues concerning – for instance – capitalism (e.g., multinationals), and that the extreme 'right' particularly perceives conspiracies about topics such as science (e.g., evolution and climate change) or immigration. Research confirms that specific ideologies may drive specific conspiracy theories […] More important for the present purposes, however, is the observation that both extremes share a general proneness to conspiracy beliefs about societal events.

Coming back now to the new media, the latter make individual, uncontrolled and emotional forms of communications possible. Hate speech, fake news and other delegitimizing rhetorical tools occur within the messages in social media on the part of politicians, providing the pragmatics of delegitimization of the opponent with a formerly unknown strong power of expression and dissemination through which they contribute to re-shaping reality and introducing an alternative representation of facts. Indeed, the reduced argumentation enabled by social media favours contents entirely based on the immediate expression of opinions and feelings, easily interpreted by the recipients, thus proposing alternatives to the knowledge legitimized by the power of the educated élites and by the socially recognized interpretation of the world. An unstoppable swarm of unfalsifiable messages gives rise to representations of reality and society different from those consciously controlled by the institutions and instruments available in Democratic states.

All in all, lexical choices, as highlighted by content analysis, are able to circumscribe the symbolic world of the politician. This possibility is exploited by politicians insofar as the very act of using specific terms is an important value, a sort of password, creating a covert and negotiable relation with experiences and beliefs. Vocal passwords function, ultimately, like other visual or concrete devices, in this, leaving out the predicative reading of actions and events. Let us briefly consider the frequency of the lexical elements in a wide corpus of documents written by Matteo Renzi from 2012 to 2016 presented in Pratellesi (2016: 4).[3] The research dealt with the speeches by Renzi, starting from the initial phase, where he proposed himself as the *rottamatore* 'demolisher', reaching a period of Government and the next one, entirely devoted to the Constitutional Referendum concerning the setting up of a single chamber parliament and the electoral law. The semantic arrangement of Renzi's discourses is crucial insofar as the Referendum contents involve delicate and structural elements of Italian democratic organization. So, they are oriented to establish and manifest the symbolic components of the new foreshadowed system. The differences among the three phases are identified on the basis of the frequency of some terms, able to represent the evolution schematized in the plots (Wordle) in (8a), *demolisher (rottamatore)*, (8c), *government*, (8b), *referendum*:

(8) a. Demolisher (Rottamatore)

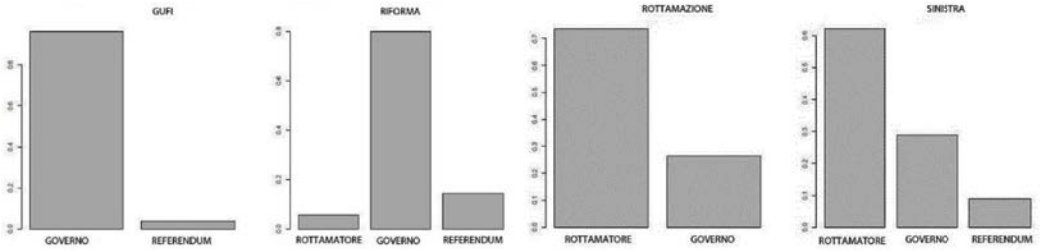
[3] The frequency analysis of the lexical items in this corpus has been applied under the direction of Alessandro Lenci in the Computational Linguistics Laboratory of the University of Pisa.

b. Government

c. Referendum

In (8a) the stress is on 'public financing for parties', 'change', 'old' vs 'new', i.e. all values of a strongly critical and anti-politics movement. In (8b), when Renzi was the head of the government, the values are 'job', 'Europe', 'school', 'future and reform'. Finally, (8c) focuses on 'changing the country' and 'constructing the future' (Pratellesi 2016). These differences also influence the frequency distribution of the slogan-words used by Renzi, such as *owls* – the dehumanizing metaphor applied to the critics of his political action as the head of government (see section 5.1) – *reform, demolishing, left*, which, as shown in (9), have very different occurrences among the phases. Moreover, the referendum tends to eliminate all the polemical and identitarian references, such as *owls*, *reform* and *left*, abandoning the storytelling linked with overt ideological worldviews and favouring a more inclusive approach.

(9) owls reform scrapping left




The discussion in the present section has focused on the different non-argumentative modalities that political discourse puts in place as interpretive devices addressed to the audience. The quest for elementary and, together, strongly evoking linguistic tools and expressions is generally also reflected in the structure of sentences. So, the linguistic and expressive choices of Matteo Salvini are limited in comparison both with Italian political rhetoric and also with the rich and articulate speech of Berlusconi and Renzi (Ondelli 2018). This property can be due to the prevalent use of tweets and posts on Facebook, however like other 5S politicians such as Luigi Di Maio; in this context, his way of speaking is congenial to the pragmatic modalities of social networks. The point is that the measure of the readability of his speeches done with *Corrige! (Readability index and lexical filter)* reveals that Salvini's speeches are the easiest to understand even for the people who have a Middle school diploma: the *Gulpease* index is 62 for Salvini compared to 56 for Renzi (the value 100 indicates the highest readability and the value 0 the lowest readability; Lucisano and Piemontese 1988). A value lower than 80 is difficult to read for those with an elementary diploma. As we saw, Salvini's short messages on social media present facts as apodictic, obvious, and natural, like reality. This way of communicating gives rise to an emotional type of truth as a typical cognitive abbreviation that combines, at least, two properties: expressing judgments and conclusions without providing arguments, and suggesting common belonging.

## *4. Symbols*

Symbols are one among the main filters through which we assign a meaning to the things around us and we are able to interpret reality. More precisely, the knowledge of the world is organized by means of symbols, including linguistic expressions, based on a genetically fixed human faculty, as well as other symbolic systems, just as gestures and other visual tools and the wide system of cultural symbols linked to the attitudes and imaginary of particular communities. Politics does not escape this human capability of translating and incorporating knowledge into symbolic forms: gestures, imagines, colors, pictures, designs, meaning-full objects, posturing, the manner of behaving and speaking. It is political discourse that creates an irreplaceable symbolic force. A crucial property of political discourse is the ability to replace the experience of reality with its representation by means of semantics, symbols and beliefs of the recipient.

Authors such as Edelman, Lasswell, and Kaplan, highlight the role played by the values sharing and "preexisting predispositions" (Cavazza 2002: 790), which symbols represent by disregarding rational or utilitarian considerations. One solution instead of another, one photo rather than others, act as symbolic devices insofar as they convey more general contents concerning society, its fears, its expectations and myths, and cause deep, not necessarily overt, adhesion. The spectacularization of politics which derives from this has meant the enhancement of the symbolic import of actions, behaviors and clothing. The body, posturing, gestures, dress has always played a role in human history, at least in the contrast between the natural and political body, where the first is fragile and perishable while the second is imagined and represented (Parotto 2007).

Emblematic cases are numerous, starting from Matteo Renzi, while still mayor of Florence, who in 2013 appeared in a popular television show dressed as Fonzie, (in (10)), the hero of the television series of the eighties, *Happy Days*, the rebel boy, loved by teenagers, who was self-confident but respectful of values: Renzi was one of them, with the same desires and expectations. Like Fonzie, he wanted to rebel against the distortion or the betrayal of the behaviors perceived as right and shared among people, in compliance with the fundamental principles of a traditional morality.

(10)

Here emerges the rhetoric of anti-politics, the search for symbols and meanings apparently as far as possible away from the traditional semantic spaces of politics. They are, ultimately, symbols evoking pre-political contents with which engaging in politics and politically communicating are imbued. After all, the representation of the body of the leader as the symbol of a particular worldview was already widely implemented by other political leaders. A well-known example is the bandana worn by Silvio Berlusconi in (11), in the meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Blair in his villa in Sardinia, in August, 2004.

(11)

The contradiction between one's own identity and the new, public, interpretation can refer to the analysis in Goffman (1959, 1967), whereby the self-representation of persons, the face shown, responds to social attributes acknowledged and understood by others:

> The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes - albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. (Goffman 1967: 5)

Body, gestures and clothing of the political leader are typically connected with the ritualistic manifestation of totalitarian or despotic organizations. On the contrary, these signs also provide a crucial source of interpretive tools in democratic states, besides, naturally, the level of ordinary interpersonal relations. As well as language, images and other physical signs give shape to the contents of knowledge, culture and society (Cassirer 1944). Meaning takes form in recognizing themselves in the same face, in sharing the value of determined social attributes. What is interesting is how physical symbols manifest the changes in the persons' way of feeling. So, the powerful head of the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) party Aldo Moro in (12), shows himself in suits and ties in any situation, including the beach, thus preserving the message of a substantial ideal remoteness of politicians from other citizens, and as a sign of respect for the common values of discretion and severity. The seriousness of behavior – official locations and dress representing social distinction – is an important symbolic system put in place by the economic, political and cultural establishment.

(12)

New symbols for new values are now dominant. The photos in (13a, b) illustrate the negation of the alterity or the professionalism of politicians that inspires the myth of politicians as common people. The semantic space goes from the immediate identification with common behaviour through the signs of the way of dressing and gesturing, to the abandonment of the more formal signs, such as the tie. So, in summer 2019 the then Minister of Internal Affairs and secretary of the Lega party, Matteo Salvini, in the beach resort Papeete at Milano Marittima, makes political statements while showing himself as a bather engaged in fun activities.

(13)

a.

b.

Analogously, even if the desecration is less explicit, taking off one's tie is a sign of closeness to the people. Renzi, in announcing the creation of the party Italia Viva in September 2019, in (14), presents himself without this distinctive sign, and Di Maio, in (15), the Foreign Ministry of Italy, takes off his tie in a meeting of his party, the Movimento 5 Stelle in February 2020, in order to signify his belonging to the common persons.

(14)

(15)

Clothing, gestures, bodies recall the common values and belief universe of the common people, the popular classes, a new undetermined crowd, a sort of "all we" only united by distrust of politicians.

A call to recondite but identity meanings deeply rooted in a particular tradition of thought is introduced in gesture and posture. The examples in (16) and (17) are telling. In the poster in (16) – 2010 communication campaign – the then secretary of the Democratic Party (PD), Luigi Bersani is photographed in a calm pose, without a jacket and with a tie and his sleeves rolled up. The caption says: 'For better days'. 'Roll up our sleeves'. Everything in this picture suggests calm and rationality, promising better times. The tie recalls the institutional role of the politician, suggesting reliability and self-consciousness. However, traditional and old meanings of the left-wing are introduced by the rolled up sleeves, a subtle but not insignificant and negligible reminder of Giovanni Pellizza da Volpedo's Quarto Stato painting, where the rolled up sleeves characterize the manner of dressing of proletarians, workmen and artisans. The secular creed of the left-wing is celebrated in this way.

(16)

(17)

On the other hand, in several electoral meetings the leader of the Lega Matteo Salvini holds a Rosary, in the photo in (17), as the symbol of fidelity to the Catholic tradition and vindication of a society preserving its identity against the danger of religious and ethnic replacement. The reference to basic values is triggered, this time in an overt and flaunted way, with the effect of multiplying implicatures such as the threat caused by the imagined number of migrants with a different culture, religion and language. The messages on Twitter accompany the gestures, spelling out this important

semantic nucleus of the persuasive strategy of Salvini, as illustrated in (18), connecting it with an ethnic approach to migration and, crucially, with the rejection of an intellectualistic attitude towards the obscuration of its own tradition.

(18) Secondo qualche radical chic indossare il crocifisso "fa impressione". Sì al velo, no alla croce. Siamoalla follia (19.06.2019) (from Giovinazzo 2020)
'According to some radical chic individuals to wear a crucifix is "disturbing". Yes to the veil, not to the cross. This is madness'

The synthetic contraposition between 'veil' and 'cross' evokes a strong emotional motivation justifying the conclusion, 'This is madness', associated with strong implicatures and experienced situations.

The incomplete and allusive way of arguing favoured by social media is however not substantially different from the traditional style of advertising and political posters in electoral campaigns. In other words, the recourse to what is already felt by persons and included in their symbolic universe is an essential mechanism of persuasion. Not by accident, Chilton (2005) speaks of "propagation" rather than "propaganda" in political communication, so that what is exhibited is somehow substantially present in the symbolic universe of the addressee and only needs to be aroused. So, posters are able to introduce and arouse the values of a party (or a brand) by having recourse to few words (mottos and watchwords) and images that trigger feelings and ideological affiliations.

Let us consider some political posters, all relative to the campaign for the regional elections in January 2020, in Emilia the important, rich, industrialized, populous region of Northern Italy. The focus is on the format and the claim in each poster. (19) is the poster of the Lega, where the image of Salvini and of the Emilia candidate Borgonzoni stand out surrounded by the assertion, 'Stop PD! Let us free Emilia-Romagna', 'Sunday 26 January vote Lega'. We compare this message with the ones conveyed in (21) of PD, 'Bonaccini President. Emilia Romagna. One step ahead'. and in (20) of Movimento 5S 'Your useful sentinels'.

(19)

(20)

(21)

The target is the symbolic and semantic world of the political subjects:

(19'): 'Stop PD! Let us free Emilia-Romagna' directly identifies the enemy from which the electors must be freed. The evocation of a sort of long term slavery is recalled and put at the centre of interest for the citizens. The politician head of the party, Salvini, ensures the crucial ideological points.

(20'): The message of 5S is evoking the essential narration of this movement, i.e. the need for sentinels vigilant over distortion in political behavior and the administration of public welfare.

(21'): The storytelling of PD is didactic, suggesting the opportunity of some social or economic progress.

Any overt argumentative procedure is missing; the main supporting arguments are extra-linguistic implicatures, the reliability of PD, the ability of Lega in destroying traditional power, the obsession of M5S about suspect politicians and accusing the establishment of dishonesty in the handling of power. So Lega and M5S have in common self-representation as anti-system and anti-caste forces, oriented to subverting the current state of affairs. Voters know that behind the vote in Emilia-Romagna, the Lega party aims to cause a government crisis, while PD is worried about preserving a sufficient degree of representativeness. An electoral fight is the result of a chain of messages, events and narrations that accompany the life of persons. A symbolic process that expresses emotions and humors of the (parts of) society. Crucial symbols are mediated by the gestures and the body of politicians.

A successful argumentation includes validity, i.e. the logical connection between premises and conclusion, truth, i.e. the correspondence between the sentences and the world, force, i.e. its informational import, relevance of premises and fecundity, i.e. its informational potential (D'Agostini 2010). Slogans, claims, and other types of political messages do not instantiate these properties. So, in the messages in (16), (18), (19)-(21), validity as logical consequentiality is not involved; the conclusion is immediately offered. Nevertheless, force seems to gain from the weakness of validity, activating implicatures provided by the context. As far as they are familiar to the interlocutors, the common ideological universe as the conclusion of implicit argumentation is chosen (Sperber, Wilson 1996: 37). By way of an example, the ultimate thesis of (19) is the imagined, dreamed world, suggested by the sentences in (22):

(22) Premise/presupposition: we need new values
Supporting Arguments: citizens need to be liberated from the long term government of the left-wing parties/from the corruption and the exaggerated power of politicians/from uncertainty
Conclusion/implicatures: vote for me because we feel the same way and pursue the same world

Relevance and illocutionary force properties leave out both validity devices, such as syntactic connectors, and truth criteria; the latter are overridden by the implicit arguments introduced by the reduced syntax of the imperative, immediately involving the speaker and his interlocutors or a simple assertion, an exclamation, in turn inducing a direct implicature on the recipient.

### *5. Metaphors, narrative and lexicon. The interplay of rhetorical tools with images: A single imaginary*

Any proposition pronounced in the course of a linguistic interaction puts into play some type of persuasion, at least in the minimal sense that the recipient shares the meaning with the speaker, and, therefore, her/his cognitive environment is enriched and modified. Thus, Danler (2005: 62) highlights that discourse is a "form of power". The political speech is, in

this perspective, the "prototypical discourse as power", as far as it is aimed at changing or enhancing a certain worldview in the audience by means of discursive strategies oriented to manipulation and persuasion. These strategies include pragmatic, textual and strictly linguistic devices, such as morpho-syntactic, lexical and prosodic choices. Naturally, what is crucial is the semantics conveyed, the message as an assemblage of overt and hidden linguistic contents, presuppositions and implicatures (Lombardi Vallauri and Masia 2014).

We will focus on the strategies for obtaining generic and opaque messages, stimulating immediate adhesion to values and convictions and skipping over eventual evaluative procedures put in place by the recipient. For instance, Danler (2005) speaks of habituality, contrast and relevance for the present, emphasis of modifiers, avoidance of confrontation specifically by means of omission of complements, polarization/obviousness. These devices can be connected to the fuzziness effect observed by Saussure (2005), as a crucial tool of manipulation in political discourse. A special role is played by metaphors and other figures of speech by virtue of their ability to amplify the semantic import of an expression or a text giving rise to conceptual blending (Chilton 2005) and interpretive frames. Charteris-Black (2005: 13) compares ideology, metaphors and myth as sharing "the expressive potential for cognitive and emotional engagement". Sebera and Lu (2018: 66) note that:

> Metaphor within Critical Metaphor Analysis is understood as a linguistic device which can shape reality and frame it according to the persuader's goals, thus connecting their ideological agenda with the addressee's already deep-entrenched worldviews and beliefs on the basis of the pathos invoked by the culturally embedded meanings of the metaphors.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphorical representation is actually the way in which we conceptualize and categorize abstract experiences. The ability of lexical occurrences, in particular metaphoric uses, to project a system of semantic relations has the effect of creating a new semantics substituting the old meanings, or, as Lakoff and Johnson (1999, 1980) note, conceal new interpretations of the world and society. A direct correspondence between values and metaphorical concepts follows, and not surprisingly, metaphor is central to language and the ideology of politics, which can play an ambiguous role, implying opaque meanings or hidden systems. The neo-semantics of the sort introduced by figured uses or by even only subtle, not literal occurrences does not necessarily derive from the media. The media generally use it for adhering to a collective imagination associated with a political-cultural line or uncritically repeat it.

According to Gentner and Bowdle (2001), and Bowdle and Gentner (2005) metaphor is the result of a cognitive process that establishes correspondences between the partially isomorphic conceptual structures associated with two terms. In this sense, metaphor is a source of polysemy, as it generates an additional abstract meaning in addition to the literal meaning of a term. As they recall, metaphor gives rise to an abstract category that includes both terms, with the result that this new category can be conceptualized separately from the original ones of the two terms. Even the difference between conventional metaphors and new metaphors, considered important by some authors, seems to be devoid of real importance from the point of view of interpretation (Bowdle and Gentner 2005; Chilton 2005). The multiplicative effect of metaphor is pointed out by Sperber and Wilson (1996) whereby, like the poetic and stylistic effect, an expansion of the meaning is obtained by means of implicatures.

Charteris-Black (2005: 22) recalls that:

> However, because metaphor draws on two domains by relating abstract notions to our experience of concrete realities, it is an effective way of making an abstract ideology accessible because it is affective.

Political leaders are usually very effective at making the abstruse and abstract seem personal and responsive to real human emotions and it is this skill that enhances their legitimacy.

The communicative force of metaphors in political discourse is specifically associated with (de)legitimization of companions and partners vs opponents and the audience. In fact, metaphors are able to place, on the basis of our experience of the world, attitudes and values 'on a scale of goodness and badness' (Charteris-Black 2005: 13-4), thus providing political discourse with a semantic instrument able to immediately represent political actors, events, facts and beliefs in a positive or negative light. In what follows we will examine three crucial points, among others, i.e. the use of narrative texts, metaphors, specifically the ones aiming to dehumanize the opponent, and the interplay between discursive tools and images based on the same conceptualizations.

Derogatory metaphors linked with the animalistic representation of politicians is a usual shortcut, arguably more efficacious, insofar as it generates the stereotypical frame of connected properties. So, in (23), Luigi Di Maio ascribes to then-premier Matteo Renzi the attitude of *barking*.

(23) Mentre dall'Italia **#Renzi abbaia verso l'Europa**, negli stessi giorni vota un trattato sull'olio tunisino che massacra i nostri agricoltori" (Tweet, 22 February 2016)
'While from Italy #Renzi barks towards Europe, on the same day he votes for a treaty on Tunisian olive oil that massacres our farmers'.

This simple word is sufficient to open an articulated frame in which Renzi is a barking dog, implicitly annoying and innocuous, ready to be on the run in the face of difficulties, in this case to betray the citizens. What is more, the traditional wisdom expressed by the proverb "Barking dogs seldom bite" is implicated. If the strength of metaphors is to open frames, to activate a connected semantic framework of events and participants, animalistic figures in political polemic introduce a severe dehumanizing effect condensing the depreciative properties that traditional imaginary and narrative associate with particular animals.

At this point, the preceding discussion has made it clear that all the different types of political communication have a narrative import, introducing schemes of actions where the politicians are protagonists, the explicit or implicit deus ex machina. In posters as well as in the short tweets, events are narrated and the politician is the agent able to solve the problem, to overcome the obstacle. Narrative is essential to political discourse insofar as it is structured on the basis of some type of metaphorical frame (Skrynnikova *et al*. 2017) that drives reading of the text. What is more, we can think that a set of interpretive primitives are involved, in the manner of the Proppean treatment of the narrative functions in traditional fairy tales, as suggested by Lakoff (1972: 147), whereby:

[…], we can say with some certainty that people do construct some discourses in much the same way that they construct sentences. If people have in their minds a "discourse grammar," it is certain that large segments of that grammar will be shared by people speaking many different languages in many scattered lands.

Lakoff surmises that differences in discourse grammar could depend on different world views and cultural values, thus explaining the mutual comprehensibility of the popular tales semantic organization in the European tradition. Interestingly, Skrynnikova *et al.* (2017: 288) propose the application of the idea of Lakoff (1972) to current political speeches in order to

uncover the plot hidden in the narrative. In other words, it is possible to depict the narrated event and its participants in terms of an elementary roles, "A set of elementary narratives frequently makes up complex narratives", such as the protagonist, the antagonist, the helpers, etc., and the overcoming of obstacles, with the advantage of evoking traditional values and meanings. As an example:

> […] clusters of metaphors employed by the politicians form a specific type of a cultural narrative referred to as an extended metaphorical frame. […] a hero walks a long way with many obstacles to his destination, losing a minor race, learning his lesson, and going on until he wins. An alternative plot is with someone on a quest to overcome a succession of obstacles before getting a chance […]. (Skrynnikova *et al.* 2017: 285, 288)

Indeed, a direct reference to popular fables and their protagonists is not unknown in the political debate, insofar as traditional stories are able to typify the personality traits of a person in terms of moral and behavioral stereotypes. So, the ancient fable of the Scorpion and the Frog[4] is used by the Culture Minister Dario Franceschini, in a tweet of 19.2.2020, in (24), as a comment on doubts about the endurance of the government expressed by Matteo Renzi – the leader of Italia Viva, a small splinter party supporting the government majority – during a debate on the TV talk-show "Porta a Porta".

(24) Mentre stavano per morire, la rana chiese all'insano ospite il perché del suo folle gesto. Perché sono uno scorpione, rispose, è nella mia natura.
'While they were dying, the frog asked the insane guest the reason for his foolish act. Because I am a scorpion, he answered, it is my nature'.

By means of this fable Franceschini points out that the fall would damage Renzi and his party as well. An implicit characterization of the politician is suggested, the stereotype of the man who is willing to hurt himself to satisfy his own ambitions, like the scorpion that does not resist its nature and stings the frog causing death to both. So, cultural tradition provides us with a predetermined representational scheme of the moral behaviors of the persons, a collection of public and private masks structuring the conceptualization of society and the world. Political discourse exploits it as an efficacious tool with the merit of fitting in with the cognitive framework and the conceptualization of the world on the part of the audience.

The link with the moral values of the cultural tradition explains the crucial role played by the shared and traditional ways of representing the event and human actions. In what follows we examine longer texts in which the narrative structure and metaphorical frames are based on a fundamental scheme in which the protagonist (the politicians) solves problems represented by obstacles and unveils deceptions in order to achieve victory. Images and metaphors create a particularly deep plot of meanings that people are induced to interpret on the basis of traditional and cultural world views and beliefs.

[4] A scorpion, which cannot swim, asks a frog to carry it across a river on the frog's back. The frog hesitates, afraid of being stung by the scorpion, but the scorpion argues that if it did that, they would both drown. The frog considers this argument sensible and agrees to carry the scorpion. Midway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog anyway, dooming them both. The dying frog asks the scorpion why it stung the frog despite knowing the consequence, to which the scorpion replies: "I couldn't help it. It's in my nature.

### *5.1 De Gasperi vs communists in the 1948 electoral campaign*

In the crucial moments of Italian history immediately after the end of the Second World War two ideological visions of democracy and civil rules were in contrast giving rise to an intense and violent political confrontation. The campaign for the Italian general election in 1948 was no holds barred: the Democrazia Cristiana Party, inspired by the ideal of a true western-type democracy, focused on the accusation of a plot and duplicity on the part of communists, linked with socialists in the Fronte Democratico Popolare (FDP) with Garibaldi as its symbol. The Communist Party was a political and socio-economic reality rooted in Italian society; it presented itself as the heir of the ideals of the Resistance and of anti-fascism. The election was lost by communists and won by the parties embodying democratic or conservative ideals, determined to establish a democratic and free regime, and averse to Bolshevism and Soviet influence. A sour confrontation also continued in the following years, thus characterizing important aspects of Italian politics.

A cipher of the speeches made by Alcide De Gasperi, the secretary of the Democarazia Cristiana Party and by Palmiro Togliatti, the secretary of the Italian Communist Party (cf. Baldi and Franco 2015) is the use of metaphors essentially aiming to disparage the adversary, occurring inside a prose clear and, at the same time, as Desideri (2011) notes, prescriptive, almost didactic. As we saw, metaphor and generally figurative language have important effects of sense as far as they are able to provide new meanings, different from both source and target, to the people's conceptual system. Specifically, a typical rhetorical instrument is the use of dehumanizing metaphors applying terms designing animals to humans, a procedure related to strong ideological motivations and contrasts. A well-known case are the metaphors of "parasites" and "noxious bacillus" chosen, in Mein Kampf, by Hitler for naming the Jews (Chilton 2005). The bestial metaphors used as referential expressions induce the person(s)-target of metaphor to be moved to a sort of no man's land, devoid of cultural values. This semantic tool in the political struggle has a long history in the European political arena, at least from the eighteenth century, as shown by Ventrone (2005). The recourse to non-human and beastly linguistic or visual representations experienced a resurgence during the terrible, conflictual decades of the first half of the twentieth century, albeit maintaining its effectiveness until today.

The use of (dead) metaphors is a classical method aimed at generating systems of meanings and evoking positive or negative emotions, as in the language of De Gasperi in the first electoral campaign of republican Italy (Cavazza 2002). He presents the political opponent (the Communist Party and FDP) as an "internal enemy" plotting against the national interest because of its being subject to the foreign power of the Soviet Union and Cominform. The internal enemy is an alternative to shared values in which the nation is grounded and, therefore, it is devoid of legitimacy. So, the delegitimizing strategies serve to frame disturbing and obscure semantics alternative to the basic values of the community, as illustrated in the following excerpts in (25a, b). This effect is also achieved by means of religious or ethical formulations (indicated in bold type), in turn able to bring deep basic feelings to the surface (Desideri 2011). This is the case of the metaphor of the "wolf dressed up as a lamb" which was widely used in the election campaign. This well-known image from the Gospels served to persuade the electorate of the opponent's treachery (Vinciguerra 2016), implementing a clear didactic function.

(25) a. **i lupi di ieri si presentano oggi in veste di agnello** e accusano noi di portare discordie [...]. E agli elettori diciamo: occhio alla cortina dei gas fumogeni: il Partito comunista per ora si appiatta dietro una certa cortina fumogena che si chiama Fronte popolare, [...] La vera forza che sta dietro e manovra è **il Partito comunista, il quale ha fatto il lupo fino a ieri e oggi bela di concordia e di pace; ma ormai abbiamo già visto le zanne. Certi discorsi da Mefisto sono inutili: sotto la toga vediamo spuntare lo zoccolo del caprone**. (Roma, 15 febbraio 1948; De Gasperi 2008, pp. 1150-1155)'
'Yesterday's wolves come dressed today as lambs and accuse us of breeding discord [...]. We tell the voters this: beware of smokescreens: the Communist Party is lying low for now behind a smokescreen called the Popular Front. [...] The real force lurking and manoeuvring from behind is the Communist Party which has played the wolf until yesterday and today bleats of harmony and peace; but by now we've seen its fangs. Mephisto can say what he pleases: under the toga we can see the goat's hoof peeping out.'

b. mi viene rivolta l'accusa di usare un linguaggio troppo rude: questa accusa, indovinate un po', mi viene proprio dai comunisti i quali sono soliti misurare le parole e che se nelle aule parlamentari **parlano come agnelli**, davanti alle folle e quando pubblicano manifesti, **parlano come lupi rabbiosi**. (Torino, 7 marzo 1948; De Gasperi 2008, pp. 1180-1181) 'I am being accused of using excessively rough language: this accusation, [...], comes straight from communists who usually measure their words and if in the parliamentary chambers they speak like lambs, before the crowd and when designing posters, they speak like rabid wolves'.

References to the devil at the end of the first excerpt enhance the religious substratum, drawing upon people's deepest feelings and imaginary. Delegitimizing discourse is characterized by metaphors denoting sub-human characters, as in the preceding passages, where the term rabid wolf/wolves directly introduces the reference to political opponents. Dehumanizing and alienating metaphors is a procedure aiming to reshape the symbolic universe of persons and bring to light a concealed perception of things. In depicting the ambiguous nature of communists De Gasperi resorts to metaphors highlighting their elusive and threatening behaviour. He uses the language of military espionage: fifth column (a metaphor adopted since the Spanish Civil War in the sense of "traitor"), as in (26a, b, c). The communists are presented as an organization inside Italy covertly working and plotting in favour of a foreign invader:

(26) a. non possiamo accettare il principio che da parte del bolscevismo venga organizzata e alimentata una quinta colonna entro la nostra nazione e che faccia una politica diversa da quella che è la politica nazionale (Roma, 15 febbraio; cit. da De Gasperi 2008: 1154).
'We cannot accept the principle that Bolshevism should organize and fuel a fifth column inside our nation or engage in politics different from what is national politics.'

b. Ed è contro questa congiura che noi ci siamo levati e abbiamo detto in nome della indipendenza della nostra patria che non possiamo ammettere che si guidino delle quinte colonne da di fuori (Frosinone, 29 marzo; cit. da De Gasperi 2008: 1238).
'We have risen up against this plot, and proclaimed in the name of our homeland's independence that we cannot allow fifth columns being led from outside'.

c. Questo pericolo è particolarmente grave perché tale tentativo non si compirebbe per la forza interna di un movimento nazionale italiano, ma sarebbe la quinta colonna di un movimento più grande (Genova, 11 aprile; cit. da De Gasperi 2008: 1292).
'This peril is serious indeed since such an attempt would not be the inside work of a national Italian movement, but the fifth column of a larger movement.'

Figurative language provides particular strength to fear and securitarian sentiments just by enlarging the semantic space driven by the original metaphor, here fifth column, the multiplicative effect noted by Chilton (2005).

An interesting point is that the semantic power of metaphors also comes from a certain degree of vagueness and indefiniteness. In other words, metaphors trigger alternative worlds stemming from the semantic domain of the source, but simultaneously introduce a particular kind of vagueness, left in the hands of the recipients and their cognitive and linguistic abilities. Indefiniteness is, we recall, an intrinsic property of communication, with and without language. In section 1 we have seen that the notion of "the same language" is in need of explanation. Sperber and Wilson (1996: 45, 57) observe:

> […] failures in communication are to be expected: what is mysterious and requires explanation is not failure but success. […] We see it as a major challenge for any account of human communication to give a precise description and explanation of its vaguer effects. Distinguishing meaning from communication, accepting that something can be communicated without being strictly speaking meant by the communicator or the communicator's behavior, is a first essential step.

The naive idea whereby the meaning of words is rigorously and univocally defined clashes with the fact that words and sentences of languages have by their very nature a meaning at least partially undetermined, with grey zones requiring the interpretation of the extra-linguistic context (Jackendoff 1993). So that language does not ensure conceptual tuning between interlocutors:

> Not only is our conceptualized world our own reality, we constantly check whether it converges with everyone else's. To the degree that we sense that it converges, we take the common view as flowing from the "objective character of the world." On the other hand, to the degree that we sense conflict, we are forced to acknowledge subjectivity, and the sense of what is "objective" becomes less stable. (Jackendoff 2002: 330)

Persuasive discourse, obviously, not only does not escape this property but exploits it, inasmuch as, according to Danler (2005), it includes forms of avoidance of confrontation and omission, making the real intention of the speaker obscure. Metaphoric expressions seem to be able to enhance this type of communication. This also holds for the military jargon used by De Gasperi against the communists: employing gas, a smokescreen, shock troops, camouflage, outflanking tactics, presenting the opponent as nursing obscure intentions threatening law and order, and Italian democracy.

Posters illustrate this threat in a suggestive metaphoric representation, where the true face of communism appears as a skull and unveils a disturbing and threatening semantic frame including oppression, army, war, death. The claim "Vote (DC) or (Bolshevism – bringer of death) will be your master" in (27) (from Ventrone 2005: 173) dissimulates a destiny of death and oppression: the deceit is uncovered:

(27)

From Ventrone 2005: 173

The reduced argumentation of posters is however telling (cf. Ventrone 2005), as in (26'):

(27') Premise/implicature: there is the risk that the people will not go to vote
Supporting Arguments: Bolshevik power is a blood-thirsty master, imperilling the liberty and life of the persons; if you don't vote Bolshevism can win
Conclusion: vote against this risk (vote DC)

The vagueness of metaphoric and figurative expressions gives rise to a sort of disquiet, linked to the possible emergence of obscure meanings. As seen, in the campaign of the DC the rhetoric of the (Bolshevik) plot inspired and supported the delegitimizing discourse, partially by means of metaphors like "fifth column" and the storytelling focused on the wolf and the lamb. Like the skull in (27) (from Ventrone 2005: 171), the wolf under the skin of a lamb reveals the true nature of the Communist Party, as in the poster in (28a), where the ironic claim "The Democratic Front celebrates peace" shows the true value of the word 'peace' for communists, in so far as a fierce wolf is hidden under the skin of the lamb, and, again the deceit is uncovered.

(28) a. b.

From Ventrone 2005: 171

The famous poster in (28b) shows the Communist Party as a wolf that is about to snap a ewe, representing a person that does not vote "I do not vote". The caption is a proverb formulated in a dialect of the extreme South of Italy: "Who behaves like a ewe, the wolf eats him/her". The use of dialect reflects the sociolinguistic conditions of the countryside areas, especially in the Southern regions, where illiteracy was still very common, with the consequence that many persons could not interpret the different messages and be subject to deceptive propaganda, or, be induced not to vote. Addressing them in their common language intended to increase acknowledgement of the common identity and expectations with the DC, thus increasing the self-consciousness of the people.

The image of the wolf unveils the true nature of the communists: they are predators exploiting the lack of preparation of people in facing the crucial questions involved in the first free elections after the war. The messages conveyed by the posters translate into images and assertions the articulated discourses of the leader. The same imaginary is created based on the coincidence between metaphors and pictures. Again, dehumanizing images are prevailing in the symbolisms adopted by the DC, strongly inspired by two principal ends: to decode the messages of communists, by showing the real, true, denotation introduced by the words and symbols that they used, and to bring to light their ambiguous nature depriving them of their human essence, and their being acceptable adversaries.

The point is that Communists, in turn, aimed at evoking the interests of workers, although the relation with the Soviet Union, its regime and its imperialist politics were difficult to downplay. The posters of FDP put the spotlight on social values such as liberty, peace, work and family, on the basis of the common interests between workers and communists. The imaginary depicted is apparently inspired by traditional values, in some sense, similar to the ones of Catholic sensibility, as in the poster in (29a), "For peace, liberty and work. Vote Garibaldi", and (29b), "For the defence of the family. Vote for the Italian Communist Party". where the image of a family nucleus, father, mother and child is the physical and ideal core of the poster.

(29) a.

b.

In other words, they point to the same values the DC appealed to. The interpretive level is strongly involved, in the sense that the same words and symbols are associated with very different semantic universes and ideologies. In fact, we know that lexical elements can be used

in connection with different new semantics, implying new interpretations of the world and society (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004: 57) semantic re-interpretation corresponds to a different way of categorizing society in the terms of opposite worldviews. The result is that the simple choice of lexical items gives rise to a sort of symbolic violence and of a coercive type of communication, from which persons could free themselves, only by exercising a conscious critical approach. Also apparently clear terms such as *liberty*, *peace* and *family* in the claim of the posters in (29a, b), introduce alternative and ambiguous meanings. Liberty and peace in the sense of the communist and socialist regimes in the Soviet sphere did not correspond to the semantics of liberty and peace in the states of the Western world. Naturally we know that playing on the indeterminacy and ambiguity of the same terms is a lexical strategy generally used in political discourse: the interpretation rests on the symbolic universe and the referential frames of the audience. The same for family, given that the secular conception of family is very different from the one of traditional Catholicism supported by the DC and conservative parties.

The FDP reminds people that the interests it supports are those of the workers, so that it suggests that whoever votes Garibaldi votes in his/her own interest (in these elections women were voting for the first time), as in (30): "Vote. If you vote for me you vote for you", Garibaldi says.

(30)

Indefiniteness is the cipher of this type of assertions, tentatively something like the structure in (29'):

(30') Premise: vote
supporting argument: vote for you
implicatures: your interests are liberty and work, which the Communist Party supports
conclusion: Vote for me (the Communist Party/FDP)

Interestingly, the identification between party and elector is a figure frequently used. For example, the Movimento 5S has recourse to this claim, "Vote (you) for you", in the Regional Election of 2013, as in (31).

(31)

The strong conceptual simplification catches the eye, any justification and argumentation is zeroed, only the assertion or the imperative is preserved.

*5.2 Togliatti's rhetoric*

Let us turn now to the rhetoric of Togliatti in the years after the 1948 election (Baldi and Franco 2015); Desideri (2011) underlines the polemical and scathing nature of the speeches of Togliatti. Indeed, in spite of the defeat, Togliatti is conscious of the fact that he is supporting a side and a well-rooted thought in society and he wants to challenge his political opponents in order to confirm the strength of the party in society. In his speech in Modena in 1950 (from which the excerpt in (32) comes), he aims to activate expectations and a semantic system that responds to a widespread identity representation. Thus, Togliatti may foreshadow a future goal, in terms generally valid in the presence of a strong and wide sharing of identity, whereby the promise of commitment establishes the borders of self-legitimation. The speaker knows that large parts of the working class and of intellectuals can be referred to as "the healthy forces of the Italian people", in opposition to the interests, often obscure, of liberal forces and of economic powers:

(32) Come partito dì avanguardia della classe operaia e del popolo italiano, coscienti della nostra forza che ci ha consentito di conchiudere vittoriosamente cento battaglie, **ci impegneremo ad una nuova, più vasta lotta**, in difesa della esistenza, della sicurezza, degli elementari diritti civili dei lavoratori. **Ci impegniamo a svolgere un'azione tale**, di propaganda, di agitazione, di organizzazione, che raccolga ed unisca in questa lotta **nuovi** milioni e milioni di lavoratori, tutte le forze sane del popolo italiano. Ci impegniamo a preparare e suscitare un movimento tale, un sussulto proveniente dal più profondo stato di cose che grida vendetta al cospetto di Dio. (9/1/1950; from Baldi and Franco 2015: 149)

'As a vanguard party of the working class and of the Italian people, aware of our strength that allowed us to successfully conclude a hundred battles, we are committed to a new, broader struggle in defence of life, safety, and basic civil rights of the workers. We will engage in such an action, propaganda, agitation, organization, gathering new millions and millions of workers in this fight, all the healthy forces of the Italian people. We are committed to preparing and launching a movement which rises from the deepest state of affairs, that cries out to heaven for vengeance.'

The linguistic process of delegitimization of the opponent is the other side of the legitimizing narrative presenting oneself as the guarantor and defender of the values threatened by the adversary. The pragmatic and morphosyntactic organization reflects the polarization (Danler 2005), for example by using we, contrasting with the other forces. The topicalization and focusing processes distribute sentential /eventive content in order to associate them with the desired information flow, where "As a vanguard party of the working class and of the Italian people…" is the topic and the complement of the verb "we are committed to" is the focus. What is more, indefiniteness is strong, which who is the speaker that makes the promises, who is 'we'? And what are the 'action, propaganda, agitation, organization' promised?

Togliatti's speeches aim to "regain legitimacy after a political failure", i.e. the elections of 1948, although, actually, as noted by Smith (2000 [1997]), the Communists and Socialists did not convince the population about their having really accepted the democratic rules. Baldi and Franco (2015) point out the systematic use of linguistic procedures that conceal practices of delegitimization of opponents by recourse to metaphors denoting them as sub-human entities, In (33a, b) the participants designed by 'spectrum' and 'chameleon', depicting the two referents in terms of non-human qualities, are initially treated as the subject /agent; then, the semantic structure is reversed, and the two metaphors are introduced as a predicate, in (33a), or a complement in (33b), restoring the true deep logical order (Baldi and Franco 2015: 147, 148).

(33) a. quando tra i presenti a un'assemblea si muove uno **spettro**, è inevitabile che quello **spettro** attiri l'attenzione e ad esso ci si rivolga. **Onorevole Tesauro**, lei qui è lo **spettro del regime fascista** […]. (8.12.1952)
'when among those who are present in the Assembly, there is a ghost it is inevitable that that ghost draws attention, so that we talk directly to it. Deputy Tesauro (Italian MPs are addressed as 'Onorevole'), here you are the ghost of the fascist regime'.

b. Lascerò da parte le volgarità, gli articoli come quelli che scriveva l'altro giorno un **illustre camaleonte**, il signor Mario Missiroli, domandandosi che cosa c'è sotto all'at teggiamento dei comunisti […] proprio lui che, per esaltare i Patti del Laterano, scrisse un intiero volume che, si dice, ebbe il personale plauso di Mussolini! **È evidente che lezioni di etica da un camaleonte non le prendiamo**. (27.3.1947)
'I will leave aside vulgarity, such as the articles that were written the other day by an illustrious chameleon, Mr. Mario Missiroli, wondering what's underneath the attitude of the Communists [...] the same man who wrote a full volume to exalt the Lateran Pacts, a volume that, it is said, had the personal approval of Mussolini! It is clear that we do not take ethical lessons from a chameleon.

As we saw, metaphors change the cognitive space including the referent by increasing the symbolic universe of the individuals with new interpretive nuances that make deep sentiments and perceptions surface. So, the figurative term 'chameleon' referring to a human being is interpretively different both from the use referring to the animal and the generic terms such as 'opportunist', etc. Analogously, the term 'spectrum' implies a being devoid of the human essence. In both cases, the first occurrence introduces an effect of vagueness that the speaker eliminates by adding the proper name in the following sentence. The strong referential indefiniteness generally introduced by figurative expressions allow the speaker to omit the precise information, as typically in political discourse (Danler 2005). So, Bettino Craxi (Desideri 1987), in a speech given as Prime Minister, in (34), recalled the ambiguous politics of certain left-wing forces in the years of challenges to

authority (1968), using the image of "ride the tiger", a dead metaphor that captures the representation of obscure and hidden forces that drove and oriented the protests:

(34) […] Riandando con la memoria a quegli anni [i.e. 1968], ricordo che mentre io mi trovavo un po' spaesato da povero ma incallito riformista quale sono, parti importanti della sinistra non esitarono a **cavalcare la tigre**, a **lisciarle il pelo** e in qualche caso ad eccitarla. (Concluding talk at 43rd Congress of the PSI, Verona, 14.5.1984; from Desideri 1987: 7 e sgg.)
'Recallig those years, I remember that while I was a little disoriented being a modest but inveterate reformist, important parts of the left, did not hesitate to ride the tiger, to caress its hair and in some cases to excite it'.

Ventrone (2005) foregrounds the fact that a permanent feature of Italian electoral campaigns and generally in the political struggle is the resort to conspiracy theories, as noticed in section 3.1. Here Craxi hypothesizes and refers to obscure and covert forces underlying the student protests and the other protest rallies. The use of the metaphor renders the reference even vaguer and, at once, widens the denotational extension of the discourse.

*5.3 A mythical reality*

The narration of facts and experiences as a sort of mythical origin of a community is a tool frequently used in defining the content of a strong ideological shaping of society:

> A very common way of communicating ideology is through myth. […] Myth engages the hearer by providing a narrative that embodies a set of *Persuasion, Legitimacy and Leadership* beliefs expressing aspects of the unconscious. It provides a narrative-based representation of intangible experiences that are evocative because they are unconsciously linked to emotions such as sadness, happiness and fear. Its function in discourse is to explain with a view either to entertainment or gaining power. (Charteris-Black 2005: 22)

The rhetoric of Mussolini allows us to investigate how political speech can foreshadow or, however, depict the birth of new values as a sort of a new sense of life and its basic sentiments and beliefs, by means of the narration of shared experiences and emotions. This particular storytelling is able to create and confirm belonging to a civil religion of the homeland and its history (Desideri 1984, 2011). Gentile (1990: 234, 236) characterizes this attitude of fascism as a heritage of the ideals of the Italian Risorgimento (the 19th century struggle for National unity), whereby:

> What united fascists was not a doctrine but an attitude, an experience of faith, which was concretized with the myth of a new 'religion of the nation […] The initial elements necessary for the formation of a 'fascist religion' were already present in the first phase of the movement, which identified with the myths of war and participation it. [...] Mussolini's charismatic power was notably increased by the institutionalization of fascism as a religion.[…] His meetings with the masses were the highest points of fascist worship in which, with appropriate orchestration, one witnessed the emotional fusion of the leader with the crowds as a symbolic mystical dramatization of the nation's unity, achieved through its supreme act.

The speeches in (35a,b) (Desideri 1984: 54, 55; 91) belong to the beginning of Fascism (Gentile 2002). They are very interesting in showing the crucial role of the common cognitive and emotive background on which Mussolini builds the new national culture (cf. Desideri 1984, 2011). The politician represents himself with essential interpretative roles, as an agent

of events, an object of evaluation and a guarantee of common identity. The common ground is provided by participation in the war and ideals confirmed by this experience aiming at a new Italian society:

(35) a. È forse la prima volta nella storia italiana che il Capo del Governo può andare tra la folla tranquillamente senza le preoccupazioni che potevano affliggere certi individui in altri tempi. Sono della vostra razza, ho lo stesso vostro sangue, le stesse vostre virtù e naturalmente gli stessi vostri difetti. Appunto per questo si stabilisce tra noi la perfetta comunione degli spiriti: basta che io vi chiami, perché dalle città e dai casolari un coro unanime e formidabile risponda: "Presente!". (*Al popolo di Cremona*, 19 giugno 1923; vol. III: 171)
'Maybe, it is the first time in Italian history that the head of government can mix with the crowd peacefully without the preoccupation that could afflict certain individuals in other times. I am of your race, I have the same blood as you, the same virtues as you and naturally the same faults as you. Just owing to this, a perfect communion of souls is established between us: as long as I call you, a unanimous and formidable choir answers from the towns and farmhouses "Present!"

b. Sono venuto qui non soltanto come Capo del Governo, come Presidente del Consiglio: sono venuto qui soprattutto come vostro compagno di trincea e di sacrificio. Quando io sono dinanzi a voi mi riconosco in voi e rivivo quelle che sono certamente le pagine della mia vita alle quali tengo di più: le pagine della trincea, quando ho potuto vedere col mio occhio il travaglio sanguinoso della stirpe italiana, constatare lo spirito di devozione, vedere come sbocciava dai suoi sedimenti che parevano millenari e perduti, il fiore stupendo della nostra magnifica storia. Ci riconosciamo tutti. Ognuno di noi è certamente stato infangato da quella terribile terra rossa del Carso, ognuno di noi ha sofferto i geli ed i venti delle altitudini alpine, ognuno di noi ha vissuto in dime stichezza quotidiana colla vita e la morte. […] In quest'opera mi è sommo conforto il pensare che non mi manca la solidarietà dei miei compagni di pensiero.
(*Alla nuova sede dei mutilati*, 11 marzo 1923; vol. III: 83, 84)
'I came here not only as the head of government, as the President of the Council: I came here principally as your companion in the trenches and sacrifice. When I am before you I see myself in you and I relive those that are the pages of my life I really care about: the pages of the trench, when I had the opportunity to see with my own eyes the blood-soaked labor of the Italian lineage, the spirit of devotion, to see how the stupendous flower of our wonderful history sprang forth from its sediments which seemed millenary and lost. We all recognize ourselves. Each of us had surely been smeared by the terrible red earth of the Carso, each of us has suffered frosts and winds of the Alpine altitudes, each of us lived being daily familiar with life and death […] In this work I am comforted by thinking that I enjoy the solidarity of my companions with the same thoughts.

In (35) the memories and feelings of the war feed a new faith, to which the crowd is called to respond "Present!", in (35a). A new dial sprang from the millenary sediments of Italian

history. Sacrifice and the reference to the trenches and the blood-soaked labor are metaphors that intensify the referential capacity of these speeches. The common race, blood and virtue, sealed by sacrifice, are the signs that establish the civil religion of history and war. Again, what strikes one in these speeches is the absence of any realistic and concrete topic and the strong self-centeredness on the role and the body of the leader. Following Danler (2005) we note that the entire text is based on polarization, in the sense that it is obvious that the representation of the sacrifices of the war fought for the homeland, 'our wonderful history', is the good, and the other unmentioned positions are evil. Naturally no confrontation or reflection is developed and the rhetorical machinery for emotions is put into practice:

(35') genericity and omission: *certain individuals in other times; as long as I call you, a unanimous and formidable choir answers from the towns and farmhouses "Present!"* (what is the aim? who are the persons that say Present?) (35a)
repetitions, *When I am before you I see myself in you…, Each of us had surely been smeared by the terrible red earth of the Carso, each of us …, each of us…,* (cf. (35b))
the identification I/*you* = *we*

War is represented as something necessary and essential for the self-consciousness of the people, and it is part of the religious-like tone of Mussolini's speech. Saussure (2005: 128, in analyzing the talks of the French right-wing leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, observes that "religious-like discourse plays a very important part in ideological totalitarian manipulation". The millennialist attitude characterizes the foreshadowing of a promised future, that we saw in speeches of Togliatti in (32), as well as in celebrating 'the Italian lineage' forged by sacrifice by Mussolini in (35a). Moreover, in Mussolini's speeches the audience is depicted as a devoted people, the people made of humble soldiers, similar to the humble miners, the excluded to which Le Pen spoke (Saussure 2005).

Let us turn, finally, to the strategies of delegitimizing communication in speeches by political leaders (cf. Baldi and Franco 2014). The following speeches of Mussolini aim to delegitimize two actors: the League of Nations (a superordinate actor) and the Ethiopian leaders and population (broadly speaking, actors designated as subordinate). A noteworthy property of Mussolini's speeches is his use of polarization as a tool for (de)legitimization, whereby "the political speech must make it easy for the listener to identify with one group and to ostracize the other" (Danler 2005: 52). By way of polarization Mussolini uses modal verbs and epistemic adverbs. To this end, the Italians are associated with events or states of affairs that are taken as certain. One discursive strategy is to take an epistemic or deontic expression representing Italians and their history in an assertive formula, as in (36a), and (36b), automatically shared by the audience, that introduces the judgement on the present time

(36) a. Durante i trenta secoli della sua storia l'Italia ha vissuto molte ore memorabili, ma questa di oggi è **certamente** una delle più solenni
'During the thirty centuries of its history Italy has had many memorable hours, but this is **certainly** one of the most solemn'

b. La loro manifestazione **deve dimostrare** e **dimostra** al mondo che Italia e Fascismo costituiscono una identità perfetta, assoluta, inalterabile.
'Their demonstration **must and does show** the world that Italy and Fascism constitute a perfect, absolute, and unalterable identity'

On the contrary the enemy's actions are presented as facts, already occurred, supporting an evaluative and modal conclusion, as in (37).

(37) Il capo e i ras battuti e fuggiaschi **non contano più** e nessuna forza al mondo **potrà mai farli contare**.
'The leader and tribal chiefs beaten and fugitives **no longer count** and no power on earth **can ever make them count**.'

This use of language displays one of Mussolini's political speaking strategies: he gratifies the audience by proceeding from uncertainty to certainty, and discredits the enemy by minimizing the real effect of enemy action. Another interesting feature of Mussolini's speeches is their tendency to move a constituent leftwards (left dislocation), presenting it as topic, something known and a part of a shared value system. As noticed, this makes a person or an event obvious for the target audience, triggering implicatures of truth and reality, as illustrated in (38a,b,c). Left dislocation and the use of aboutness topics contribute to depicting the shared framework, the cognitive ground legitimizing the self-consciousness, and delegitimizes whom opposes.

(38) a. Con l'Etiopia$_{\text{Topic}}$ abbiamo pazientato 40 anni
'With Ethiopia$_{\text{Topic}}$ we had been patient for 40 years
b. Durante i trenta secoli della sua storia$_{\text{Topic}}$ l'Italia ha vissuto molte ore memorabili…
'During the thirty centuries of its history$_{\text{Topic}}$ Italy lived many memorable hours…'
c. Con le popolazioni dell'Etiopia$_{\text{Topic}}$ la pace è già un fatto compiuto
'With the Ethiopian populations$_{\text{Topic}}$ peace is already an accomplished fact'

Left dislocation, therefore, enhances the interpretation of a constituent as a part of the shared system of beliefs and values, of what is a sort of silent pact between the speaker and the audience. If these speeches, aiming at justifying a particular political and military action, are compared with the ones in (34), we realize that the true, deep semantic movement is reproducing and bringing to the consciousness level a general system of values and attitudes. This is the Italy of Fascism and its myths, its convictions and its racial biases, grounded in the imagined experience of the Roman inheritance (Gentile 2002).

### *6. Rhetoric and sentence type: illocutionary externalization*

The correspondence between words and world, the typical statements (declaratives and assertions), are not the concern of the political way of representing events and the world. On the other hand, the rhetorical means give shape to a language evoking imageries and beliefs. Metaphors play a crucial role in creating new meanings, thus widening the possible interpretations associated with a term or a sentence. Actually, rhetoric has also to do with the way in which the sentence externalizes the event and its participants, the arguments of the verb. The syntactic organization of the meanings in the terms of the argumental structure of the verb gives rise to this interpretive level. The distribution of the grammatical functions and the thematic roles they correspond to provide a particular picture of the events and the world. Some special attention concerns the identification of the speaker with the agentive subject through the deictic of the first person. Analogously, the use of the pronoun of 1$^{st}$ plural 'we' contributes to establishing or to arousing the common background of beliefs and feelings between speaker and recipients. Devices such as topicalization, in turn, fall within the pragma-linguistic mechanisms addressing the audience towards what is assumed by the speaker to be this common semantic space.

All of these properties combine in shaping the illocutionary organization of a sentence. Some illocutionary properties of political discourse repeatedly occur, specifically hortative formulas and, especially, orders and emotional expressions. It may be banal to wonder why

this type of sentences are systematically used in political speeches, to the effect that they are pragmatic-oriented sentences linked with the intention of the speaker. Expressive and exclamative sentences externalize "the speaker's propositional attitude to the state of affairs represented by the propositional content" (Beijer 2003: 6). We will concentrate on the relation between interpretive properties and expressive devices in speech, i.e. as the outcome of illocutionary arrangement and morpho-syntactic organization interplay.

A clear similarity can be detected between exclamative sentences, independently of the syntactic form they have, and the other sentence types that exclude veridicality, characterizing instead assertions on states of affairs or individuals and events. So interrogatives and imperatives seem to provide some suggestions on the interpretive nature of exclamations insofar as an irrealistic temporal and eventive positioning is involved. More precisely, exclamatives are generally introduced by interrogative elements such as how and which (a), suggesting that the two types of sentence share the same WH- operator-variable structure (Zanuttini and Portner 2003: 40). That explains one of features of exclamatives, i.e. the fact of denoting a set of alternative propositions, as suggested by the definitions 'surprise', 'unexpectedness', 'extreme degree'. In other words, it is this effect of interpretive widening that characterizes exclamatives as a rhetorical means in some sense similar to the other expressive devices. Besides, in exclamatives their "propositional content" is presupposed. We can expect to find these properties not only in wh- exclamatives but in all types of exclamation, however introducing a scalar interpretation based on a deviation from the norm (Beijer 2003).

In political speech a recurrent modality of exclamative syntax is the rhetorical question, i.e. a question including its answer. It has the quality of excluding the introduction of a direct evaluation on the part of the speaker, but, at the same time, its content is presupposed and prompts the corresponding evaluation in the audience. So, it has properties similar to exclamatives, presuppositionality and interpretation of scalar alternants. Let us return to the example in (4b), repeated in (39).

(39) a. **Ma dove siamo finiti in Italia?** Libertà per i nostri simboli e la nostra cultura. **No al pensiero unico!** (23.9.2016)
'But where did we end up in Italy? Freedom for our symbols and our culture. No to the single thought'

The text in (39) contains a rhetorical question introducing an exclamative content, as in (39'):

(39') *But where did we end up in Italy?*
i. the wh-operator quantifies on a set of propositions, like a true interrogative
ii. nevertheless, this question does not expect an answer to the extent that the scalar propositional content 'Italy ends up in a bad situation' is presupposed and 'where' suggests an unspecified extreme degree,

A direct exclamation is "No to the single thought!". An extreme degree content is introduced as the rejection of the 'single thought!' (i.e. conventional wisdom). The proposition inferable content concerning 'the single thought' as a value of European policy is assumed as presupposed. Analogously, in the 1948 electoral campaign rhetorical questions are used by Alcide De Gasperi, the head of DC, in depicting the real nature of communist propaganda, as in (40):

(40) **E perché dunque l'atteggiamento comunista è così ostile?** Perché questo è *l'ordine di Mosca*: ne abbiamo le *prove inconfutabili*. (Pescara, 10 aprile; De Gasperi 2008, p. 1284; from Vinciguerra 2016: 282)
'And why then is the communist attitude so hostile? Because this is the order from Moscow: we have the irrefutable proof of this'

Again, in (40) the answer, explicitly given by the orator, is obvious and presupposes the veridicality of hostility by the communist attitude. The combination of the wh- and the quantifier so 'così' introduces the quantification on the degree of hostility: an extreme degree and an irrefutable danger.

The use of imperatives is typical in exhorting or inviting people to vote for a party or a candidate, as the posters discussed in section 5.1 illustrate. However, it shows up in many kinds of political messages. Imperatives are strictly linked to a specific illocutionary force, an act of command (Aikhenvald 2010), addressed to the recipient. The imperative form generally excludes tense distinctions, insofar as it is deictically anchored to the discourse universe. From a typological perspective, imperatives overturn the markedness hierarchy underlying assertion/declarative sentences. Indeed, while in the latter 1st person subjects are the less marked type of referents, in imperatives the most natural type of subject is the 2nd person, the recipient, eventually combined with the 1st person in 1st plural inclusive forms (Alcazar and Saltarelli 2014). According to Portner (2004) imperatives lexicalize a property 'which can only be true of the addressee' rather than an event. In other words, the imperative form externalizes the assignment of a property to a prominent argument, however including the addressee (Platzak and Rosengren 1998), and as such, from a semantic point of view, imperatives are not submitted to veridicality requirements. So, alternative interpretations can be activated by virtue of shared implicatures and presuppositions.

More to the point, a key use of imperatives in political discourse is in the 1st person plural, the inclusive 'we', as illustrated by the examples in the excerpts in (41a), from the Tweet of Salvini already discussed in (4c), and in (41b), from the speech of Togliatti examined in section 5.2.

(41) a. Che Futuro abbiamo in testa? **Partiamo dalla difesa delle nostre RADICI**, dalla nostra tradizione e dalla nostra cultura (24.2.2018)
'What Future do we have in our heads? Let us start from the defence of our Roots, from our tradition and our culture'

b. La nostra lotta è lotta per la **rinascita** del nostro Paese, per il suo **rinnovamento** politico, economico e sociale. In questa lotta noi vogliamo l'unità dei lavoratori, prima di tutto, e, attorno a essa, vogliamo si realizzi l'unità politica e morale di tutta la nazione. **Disperdiamo le ombre le quali impediscono la realizzazione di questa unità!** (27.3.47)
'Our struggle is a struggle for the rebirth of our country, for its political economic and social renewal. With this struggle, we want the unity of the workers, and around it, we will realize the political and moral unity of the whole nation. Let's remove the shadows which prevent the realization of this unity!'

In (41a) "Let us start from the defence of our Roots…" designs an attitude, and its implementation is left open. Differently from exclamations its propositional content is not totally presupposed, but it waits to be saturated. Thus, imperatives are entirely played on the adhesion of the audience, put to the test. This interpretive mechanism underlies the imperative in

Togliatti's speech in (41b). The imperative exhorts the audience to go beyond suspicions and overcome misunderstandings in order to realize the prefigured new unity among the working forces. "the shadows that prevent…" are given as recognized, and the propositional content of 'remove'… is prepared by the preceding sentences. The alternatives concern the 'how' and the 'when', the intensity of the engagement towards the announced alternative semantics of "rebirth" and "renewal". The use of the 1st person plural is not only a tool for highlighting the common interest between the speaker and the audience, but is the rhetorical way for introducing a presuppositional interpretation of the imperative.

## *6. Conclusions*

It is the common conceptual constructs that allow the sender and the recipient to understand one another and to share ideas, symbols and behaviors. These representations are inscribed in interpretative schemes, namely the conceptual and emotional framework that gives them a more general meaning ("frames", Goffman 1974). Manipulation, i.e. to obtain the development of 'mental representations' desired by the issuer on the part of the recipient, takes place in a way only partially unconscious. When we speak of manipulation of consciences by political propaganda, we must take into account that the recipient has no less intellectual ability and the possibility to interpret than the issuer:

> Texts are complex structures that prompt readers to construct conceptualisations. […] readers […] are not absolutely manipulable. The cognitive ingredients that readers assemble are a kind of *bricolage* guided by the linguistic input. The cognitive structures are not *in* the texts, they are in people's heads. They can be transferred by texts, but once in people's heads they can be elaborated in variable ways, depending on social and psychological factors. […] Possibly, the conceptual constructs themselves need to be already dormant in the social and psychological environment. (Chilton 2005: 39)

The preceding analysis has highlighted that politicians exploit a common symbolic universe with their audience, that may be understood as something similar to the "cognitive unconscious" of Lakoff and Johnson (1999). That is based on the world-representation formed during life starting from socialization in early childhood, through the internalization of ideas, metaphoric representations, beliefs, feelings, behaviours. The formation of a particular vision of the world is, as we have seen above, the fundamental mechanism of communication, and can also be pursued through argumentation as justification of beliefs and assumptions in order to motivate a conclusion. Argumentation is inherently oriented to persuade, and implies all discourse and textual devices normally used for this purpose. In this sense Glukhova and Sorokina (2018) conclude that persuasion is a part of argumentation, combining manipulative and argumentative strategies.

Our investigation has been focusing on persuasion, understood as the effect on persons achieved by argumentative and/or manipulative political discourse. We have considered the semantic effects achieved by means of rhetorical and pragmatic choices in political discourse. Metaphors, narrative, argumentative discourse, impolite discourse, claim-type expressions, hortative formulas go hand in hand in defining specific levels of interpretation generally implying new semantic spaces and alternative worldviews. Persuasion is the result as the shared thought between the speaker and the audience. In keeping with Mercier and Sperber (2011), we have taken it that argumentation in political discourse maximally exploits its capability of providing elements, whether they are veridical or not, supporting the discourse and its conclusions.

Indeed, persuasion, i.e. the change in the beliefs and attitudes of the audience caused by political discourse cannot be seen as a simple and direct result of the ability of the orator. Persuasion is the result of the elaboration of meanings and beliefs on the part of an active audience; it is the result of sharing a common worldview and common values. However, politicians are able to exploit and, possibly, to activate for power goals, the covert and deep symbolic universe of the people. This is their fundamental necessity in order to confirm their leadership and reliability. For such a purpose, symbol, metaphors and other rhetorical strategies are put into practice, including rhetorical tools which are especially insidious such as the strategies based on the delegitimization of the opponents and recourse to emotional adhesion. The systems of values that feed the beliefs and attitudes of persons and the cultural and historical framework in which they are immersed are the basis for the exchange of meanings in the political arena: persuasion is the sign used in this exchange.

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