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The evolution of persuasive election discourse on television

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1. Introduction

In election periods the political party machines work out a number of communicative strategies with the aim of winning voters' support for their candidatures. Those actions take place on different levels. Various authors (1) draw a detailed panorama of all the resources available to parties at such times. Each of the activities named may be classified from different points of view, which range from the type of message or the medium through which it is transmitted to its degree of explicitness and the senders' intention. In spite of those differences the aim is always the same: to win votes through persuasive discourse.

The variety of discourses we find in this sphere makes it very difficult to deal with them all using the same analytical tools. For that reason, before we begin we need to make a demarcation. This article will be looking at a single object: television election spots. There are many reasons for that choice, but four outstanding ones. The first is that nowadays nobody doubts the major role of television in the election process; indeed, many studies confirm that television is the medium most electors follow to obtain information during the campaign. Such is its pre-eminence that in election campaigns all political parties and their leaders take the medium to project their communicative strategies. Indeed during the campaigns television appearances by politicians proliferate to such an extent that they reach the most inhospitable corners of the programming grid. So we can find politicians not only on the news or interview and debate programmes but even on variety shows performing activities of all kinds. All those appearances may be and generally are considered propaganda, because the aim of all of them is to win votes. But their range of form and subject matter makes it very difficult to study them as a unit. So among all the appearances we have chosen the spots as they are a typically television product.

The second justification for that choice is that such items are explicitly propagandistic. In other words, at no time is there any attempt to hide that the aim is to persuade the electorate. And so when the voters are confronted with the spots they know that they

are trying to persuade them and so they use their own interpretative resources while watching them. A third reason, closely connected to that one, is that the stated purpose of those discourses is persuasion and so they are recognised at all times as elements of propaganda. The explicitness of the propagandistic intention produces a particular reading by the receiver and moreover allows them to be analysed in argumentative terms.

Lastly, the fourth attraction of the analysis is that as items they are not mediated by journalists. That is to say, they are speeches prepared by the parties themselves with the electors in mind and with none of the mediation involved in the presence of a professional who produces an initial interpretation. They are therefore privileged instruments for studying the image each party wishes to project of itself and its opponents, as well as its proposals for the future and they way in which they are put forward (2).

And so, although television election propaganda is banned in Spain (3), over the years the spaces granted by the public broadcasting companies to ask for votes have become election spots in the purest "American style". A simple glance at the election propaganda spots in democratic Spain, from their beginnings to the present day, leads to interesting conclusions which emphasise how those spaces have gradually taken on features that bring them closer and closer to advertising. Among the outstanding elements are the reduction of broadcast time, the multiplication of the number of spaces presented by each party and the growing importance of the image. Initially those features reveal the influence that the medium of television has had on the evolution of this kind of political discourse, characteristic of election periods. They have an essential repercussion on any consideration of communication between political parties and their electors. For example in the general election in 1982 a television election propaganda spot lasted ten minutes on average and throughout that time the image only showed "talking heads" with little or no variation of shots, always based on purely verbal discourse. However in the 2000 elections the average length of a spot was under two minutes and the verbal discourse had practically disappeared, leaving the image to monopolise the limelight. So much so that in many cases the candidates never even address the camera verbally.

So we see that the modifications have not only been in terms of form; they go beyond that and give rise to a characteristic type of political communication highly adapted to the medium of television. In this article we shall be analysing the evolution of television spots in terms of argumentation. The basic methodology is founded on the adaptation of the Theory of Argumentation proposed by Chaïm Perelman (4) for a study of present day propaganda phenomena. The adaptation consists of an analytical grid that has been applied to a study of the persuasive strategies used by political parties in various election campaigns in Spain (5). Specifically the elections held on 28 October 1982, 29 October 1989, 6 June 1993 and 3 March 1996.

The whole analytical section focuses on two fundamental aspects. The first has to do with the "possible worlds" (6) adumbrated by each political party and the way in which

they are inhabited. In other words, each party presents its electors with starting worlds (which sum up the situation they start from) and promised possible worlds (the ones to be attained). Those worlds are inhabited by general agreements which are shared by all electors. Once the possible worlds have been proposed, the speaker's aim is to validate them through argumentation procedures that establish links or breaks with the starting worlds and the destination worlds. From an analysis of those aspects in the election broadcasts mentioned above we can deduce a series of communicative trends which, when reformulated as a hypothesis, enable us to assess that evolution in the last election contest in Catalonia on 17 October 1999 (7).

2. Analysis of election spots 1982-1996

The parties which are the centre of analytical interest are the ones in Catalonia which have won parliamentary representation over those years.

2.1. Possible Worlds and the individuals that live in them

Throughout the elections analysed, the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) has presented three general possible worlds. The first (PW1) is constructed from elements which are regarded positively such as the majority (1982), progress (1993) and the positive (1996). The party always includes itself in that world and its construction varies according to whether the preceding government was or was not the PSOE. If so (elections in 89, 93 and 96) the world is built on positive lived events such as overcoming the economic crisis (1989), the Olympiad and the Seville Expo (1993) or the integration of women into the labour market (1996). When the PSOE has not been in government, the world is constructed from possible events and values such as change and inclusion in a common project.

The second possible world (PW2) is the opposite of the first. It is the world of the right which is characterised by being a minority of privileged people (1982), regression (1993) or the negative (1996). This world is basically populated by agreed events such as the need for Felipe González to be president as the only way of stopping the right and thus guaranteeing progress in Spain (1993). This world is also full of presumptions of the negative nature of the right. In spite of that, we also find a lived event (1982) which claims that due to the bad management of the right heavy goods vehicles enter certain towns over the Roman bridge because of the fragility of the bridges built by previous governments.

The third possible world presented by the PSOE is the world of the future. This one is presented as a bipolar world depending on whether the future is conceived with a PSOE government or a right-wing one (or not the PSOE). If the future is governed by the PSOE the world is populated, as in PW1, by lived events and positive values. If in the future the PSOE is in opposition the future world appears negative and teeming with agreed possible events and negative values such as instability and failure (1989), repression and desperation (1996).

Some general agreements are transversal to those three possible general worlds, as is the case with the possible events and the commonplaces, such as the existing (1989, 1993, 1996) which claims that what exists is better than what is to come (provided that what is to come is not a socialist government). The same thing happens with the hierarchy of quantity that serves as a basis for the argumentation, since progress is presented as better than regression, which means that the values of all the worlds are organised according to that agreement, i.e., all the values related to progress will be placed before those related to regression.

This party also presents some minor worlds which correspond to the sectors of society at whom certain specific proposals are aimed (jobless, young people, pensioners). Those subworlds are more important in the 82 campaign where the dichotomy between PW1 and PW2 is reduced to the maximum to bring the electorate together, since the serious political crisis of the country seems to require more specific solutions.

For its part the PP (People's Party) presents a dichotomy between the possible world of the present which, not having the PP in power is negative, and the possible world of the future which will be positive if the PP is the government. However, although it is maintained in all the elections it fades from 1993 to make way for a more mixed world which we might define as the present continuous. In no case is the future defined without a PP government, and so we suppose it will be like PW1.

In the elections in 1982 and 1989 PW1 is explicitly defined in great detail: it is populated by lived events which are invariably negative, such as the existence of two million jobless (1982), the loss of purchasing power (1982), public debt (1982), beds in the corridors in public hospitals (1989), lack of public safety (1982, 1989), the poor functioning of public services (1989). That world is also populated with truths such as the negative action of the trade unions (1982), or that things could improve but do not (1989). In the elections in 1993 and 1996 this present world also appears, but it is not so well defined and the focus is more on PW2, PW1 being defined by opposition.

The world of the future PP government (PW2) goes from being loaded with possible events (1982 and 1989) to being loaded with positive values, though increasingly general ones (1993, 1996). Therefore, as occurs with PW1 this world also fades with time, though still maintaining some common constants. Whereas in 1982 Fraga defined the future world with possible events such as a reduction of company social security contributions (1982), preached freedom of education (1982), with assumptions of quality such as a sense of work well done, a job well done or a trade well done, with truths such as the future belongs to young people (1989). That future world, which is defined in the first two elections with specific proposals that make it a very specific world, loses that specificity and becomes increasingly loaded with general values such as trust, truth, dialogue, peace, regeneration, honour, efficiency (1993, 1996), which make the proposal seem more like those of the other parties.

The gradual lack of specificity over time does not exclude the use of general values in

the campaigns in 82 and 89; indeed, values such as life, freedom, unity, honesty, efficiency or trust appear in all the campaigns. The same thing happens with PW1 in the 93 and 96 elections in which negative lived events also appear, such as the existence of a public debt of 700,000 pesetas per person (1993) or supposed events such as the scant creation of jobs for young people (1996).

The 1982 and 1989 campaigns have another peculiarity in the construction of possible worlds by the PP. In both elections a possible world is constructed for the prime ministerial candidate. In spite of the similarities between those two possible worlds (in both cases they are endowed with positive values such as efficiency and honesty), the goal is different, since in the case of Fraga (1982) it is a reconstruction of his past with Franco, which means that lived events are obviated, whilst in the case of Aznar (1989) the aim is introduce him to the electors (and therefore there are references to his political past as president of the autonomous community of Castilla-León). In the other two elections that very personal possible world is replaced by the possible world of the party as a team loaded with values of efficiency and capacity to govern.

The PP also presents various subworlds which in most cases overlap with those of the PSOE, adding some different groups such as the small and medium-sized businesses (never mentioned by socialist propaganda). Unlike the other party, the PP's subworlds carry weight in all the elections, although they are defined differently: whilst in 1982 and 1989 they are defined verbally, in 1993 and 1996 it is the images that show us those groups.

The PCE (Spanish Communist Party) does not present the same possible worlds over time, although the dichotomy between ours (positive) and theirs (negative) is maintained. The positive possible world varies with time and goes from being the world of movement and work (1982) to being the world of the true left (1989) to become the positive world of the alternative (1993, 1996). The same thing happens with the possible world defined as negative which in some cases is the world of unemployment (1982) and in others the false left (1989) or the simply negative world (1993, 1996).

In 1982 the PCE presented two possible worlds populated by agreements based on reality, which makes them well defined worlds differentiated from other political ideas. First the present world is laid out before us, the possible world of unemployment (PW1) which is the world governed by the few and populated by lived events (freezing pensions, unemployment, inflation and excess red tape), supposed events (figures from high society who guzzle whisky), truths such as women regarded as slaves, people who consider Spain to be a barracks or a strict mother. That world is illustrated by an initial fiction in which two young people are looking unsuccessfully for a job, the inevitable result of the situation described above.

Opposed to that is the world of movement, that possible future world governed by the PCE (PW2), which is presented as a conciliatory world which tries to include the rest

of the country. That PW2 is not only described in words (speech by Carrillo on camera) but through a song and images of people working. This world is populated by general agreements of all kinds from the creation of a million jobs, 'no' to NATO, a health plan or free education with plentiful resources to values such as peace, freedom, happiness, culture or progress. Truths such as dignifying women or the structure of the autonomous communities also appear alongside commonplaces such as the inclusion of everyone in the group.

Facing that proposal in 1989 the dichotomy of the PCE, now IU (United Left), moves to two different possible worlds: the possible world of the false left (PW1) and the possible world of the real left (PW2). In this case, PW2 is constructed basically through values, PW1 is based on lived events and suppositions. Some of the values of PW2 are austerity, solidarity, work, change, freedom, democracy, equality, progress, honesty, justice and welfare. The events that populate PW1 are the problems of the environment, increasing inequality, poor functioning of health services and education, appalling roads and a lack of decentralisation. In this case both worlds are defined fundamentally through the word, since the image plays a very limited role in this presentation of possible worlds.

The possible worlds of the last two elections (1993, 1996) coincide. They are very general worlds, the present negative possible world (PW1) and the future positive possible world (PW2). PW1 is defined through real images (1993) or small fictions (1996), but in both cases this world is presented in black and white. It is populated fundamentally by lived events: the Corcuera Law giving more power to the police (1993), speculation (1993), three million unemployed (1993), businesses closing down (1993), temporary contracts in large numbers (1996), pensions not being equal to the minimum wage (1996). There are also values such as marginalisation (1996). Faced with this PW2 is populated in both cases with values such as freedom, participation, honesty, transparency, efficiency, equality, future. In this case too we can find possible events such as setting up a new energy plan to respect the environment, the application of a youth employment plan and truths such as the creation of a Europe different from the monetary one or of a safe, modern society.

There are basically two subworlds aimed at by PCE/IU: young people and workers. This is a constant over the whole period.

We can differentiate two ways of proposing possible worlds in the case of CDS (Democratic and Social Centre) because the leader Adolfo Suárez had been prime minister for some years. We can see that particularly in the 1982 elections when the possible world of the present is not all negative: we can find as many negative events as positive ones. The distinctive characteristic of CDS is that is sets its strategy in the proposal for a future possible world which practically obviates the present (except in 1993). We can therefore say that CDS only proposes one world (the opposing world is not represented but could be deduced from comparison), PW populated by general agreements of all kinds. Possible events: free textbooks (1989), reduction of military service (1989), reforestation (1989). Values: freedom (1982), equality (1982) and

quality of life (1989).

CDS breaks with that trend in the 1993 campaign, when small fictions appear presenting a very negative present possible world loaded with lived events such as jobless young people, increased taxation, the difficulty of acquiring a new dwelling, etc. At the same time a future possible world is presented also populated by possible events: tax measures, drug addict's card, allocation of 30% of public housing to young people. Perhaps the outstanding characteristic of the possible worlds in this campaign is the almost total absence of values, with the sole exception of solidarity.

In the case of the two Catalan parties CiU (Convergence and Union) and ERC (Catalan Republican Left), since these are Spanish elections the presentation of possible worlds is far more confused than in the previous cases, since they come up against the dilemma, often difficult to overcome, between the aspiration to an independent Catalonia and the role to be played in the Spanish parliament. That is reflected most of all when it comes to presenting the future possible world, i.e., when proposing an alternative possible world defined as up to date. In both cases what they end up proposing is the possible world of a stronger Catalonia. In that respect, therefore, there is a certain coincidence between the two parties which is not reflected, for example, in the local elections in which they present two completely different possible worlds (8).

The common feature of the presentation of possible worlds by CiU is that at all elections they construct a possible world of the present (1982), up to date (1989, 1993, 1996) populated with negative general agreements: lived events such as unemployment (1982), the loss of purchasing power by pensioners (1989); supposed events such as the running down of the socialist project (1989, 1993); truths such as the inequalities between Catalonia and the other autonomous communities in Spain (1996); particular values such as tension (1993, 1996), conformity (1989) and indifference (1989); general values such as discouragement (1993) and inequality (1996).

What varies over time in CiU propaganda is the possible world they propose as an alternative. In 1982 they restricted themselves to proposing a possible world of solutions to the economic crisis which we might call the possible world of Catalan lifestyle (but only in the economic, not the political, sphere). It is the world of truths such as acceptance of the improvements provided by technology, possible events such as increased exports or lower prices; general values such as flexibility and efficiency and particular values such as savings or Catalan "common sense". This PW2 varies substantially in the 1989 elections, when a possible world of autonomy is opposed to PW1 (but also as a solution to the economic problems of Spain as a whole), populated basically by values of all kinds such as expectation, hope, trust, tenacity, enthusiasm, welfare, modernity, progress, conviviality or freedom. Some possible events also appear, such as a review of the economic financing system, defence of Catalan citizens and a reform of the Senate.

In the last two elections the alternative possible world to the negative PW1 is self-

government (Catalonia), defined in detail (less important in PW1), but populated by similar elements to PW2 in earlier elections. Therefore, in spite of the change of name the individuals populating the worlds are quite similar: possible events related to the state of the economy with an increase in jobs (1993), promotion of investment (1993), pension guarantees (1996) and values such as enthusiasm (1993) and modernity (1993).

In the case of ERC the opposition is between the negative possible world of Catalonia integrated into Spain (PW1) and the positive possible world of Catalonia outside Spain (PW2). The elections in which the differences between those two possible worlds are best defined are those of 82 and 93. In the 1982 elections PW1 was populated by values such as centralism and Spanish nationalism and lived events such as unemployment. But the richer world is that of PW2, which contains three subworlds: autonomy (self-government); the left (with values such as rigour and realism and events such as higher pensions and unemployment benefit); and lastly the republic (where respect for human rights predominates). Needless to say, this PW2 has an exact but negative replica in PW1 which thus demarcates it.

Likewise, in the 1993 elections the Catalan party once again focused its campaign strategy on bringing out that dichotomy between two possible worlds. Through a recourse to black and white (one which we see frequently used to differentiate positive and negative) they present what is for them the possible world of Catalonia integrated into Spain: with images of deserted factories in the Vallés area near Barcelona, the deserted railway station in Torelló, the toll booths on the motorways which, by being shown, acquire the status of lived events. In this world there are also truths such as the staleness of the discourse of Aznar, González and the Catalan politician Roca. The world is completed with colour images of the rest of Spain and lived events such as the high speed railway station, free access by motorway to Madrid or the KIO towers. Faced with that is the PW2 of an independent Catalonia where values such as dignity as a nation, independence and education appear.

In the two other elections, although the two worlds continued to be the same, the general agreements that populate them are far vaguer and there is a mixture of proposals to solve the problems of Spain, such as the struggle against corruption and for social rights, and a presentation of a totally verbal PW1 populated by lived events such as precarious jobs, rural discrimination and attacks on the Catalan language (1996).

2.2 Procedures that bring about adherence to the possible worlds proposed

In their television propaganda speeches the parties use different argumentative procedures as both link and dissociation (9). In general we can say that the procedure we find at the base of all television propaganda speeches is the philosophical binomial. As we pointed out in the previous section most parties present a dichotomy of possible worlds, granting one of them a positive value and the other a negative one. That counterpointing, as Perelman points out, is basic to Western culture and makes the

public adhere to the one presented as positive. The positive world is loaded with all the agreements that people recognise as good, and it is difficult for anyone to adhere to the one presented as negative. Obviously the political party and the vote it is asking for are always on the positive side, thus creating a predisposition to the proposal.

That use of the philosophical binomial is heightened with time due to the gradual simplification of television political discourse. Thus we see that at the first elections the parties presented more than two possible worlds, thus bringing about multiple oppositions. In the later ones, on the other hand, bipolaristion is increasingly the rule. A good example is the case of the PSOE which, in the 1996 campaign, only presented the clash between two worlds opposed in all senses, with nothing in common, i.e. one of them had everything positive and the other everything negative, whilst in the 1982 elections the worlds contained a number of nuances, with positive and negative values, forcing a more shaded opposition.

Also over time we see that there is an increase in the use of definitions that is related most of all to the growing recourse to general values. The main feature of general values is ambiguity; their very generality means that they can be interpreted in different ways. That breadth of interpretation makes it necessary for the parties to anchor their meaning in definitions that are more and more visual and less and less verbal (thus maintaining a certain degree of ambiguity). So we have seen that most parties used values such as freedom, efficiency, honesty and solidarity but it is also true that those values do not have the same meaning for a PP voter and a PSOE or IU voter. That is why images describe exactly what is meant by those values and whilst a PP spot defines solidarity through images of people helping one another in a friendly manner, in one by IU (1996) the images are of young people carrying a placard demanding the 0.7%.

Just as time has favoured the use of those two types of dissociative procedure, we cannot say the same of the link procedures which, perhaps because of the difficulty of expressing them in images, are less and less used. The ones that have lost most ground at the different elections are the ones based on a quasi-logical structure. In spite of that we find some examples of their use by the PSOE, which turns to a frequency procedure to show that what is happening is good and must be maintained (the good that has to be maintained is their government). At all events, the most widely used quasi-logical structure is the one that is the foundation of the request for the vote. The vote transfers all the positive of the possible world to the future reality through the transitivity procedure. That resource is common to all parties and all elections.

More usual are the procedures with a structure based on reality, especially the causal procedure which consists of determining causes and setting out possible effects. Examples of the procedure are to be found in the PSOE when the party presents itself as the cause of an appealing future and places the right as the cause of the failure to overcome the crisis and the loss of what has been achieved (1996). In this respect we should also mention IU (1989), which identifies the cause of all evils as the “non authentic” left, or ERC (1993), which picks Spanish centralism as the root cause of the

bad economic situation which Catalonia is going through compared to the rest of Spain.

A recourse to the person-act coexistence procedure is also usual and is growing with the degree of personalisation in politics. It consists of loading a person with positive events and values so that his or her acts are also impregnated with that positive quality (if a person is good, efficient, honest, etc., his or her acts will be too). We see the use of the person-act procedure in the PP spots (1982, 1989), where a good length of time is spent presenting the qualities of Manuel Fraga and José María Aznar to show that "they can do it". CiU also used the resource in the 1993 campaign when showing the capacities of Roca and his excellent political curriculum. A deeper analysis of television speeches may lead us to the conclusion that the resource can also occur with a slight variation when instead of a person, the guarantor of the acts is the party (IU, 1989: if IU is the true left, its acts will also be truly of the left).

We can also speak of a continuous recourse to synecdoche, especially in the structuring of the possible worlds (indeed, synecdoche is one of the basic characteristics of any possible world), which means that in the presentation of the worlds only the features the party considers most important are included. Thus for example the PCE in 1982 constructs the possible world of work (PW2) with workers mostly doing heavy and/or waged jobs: people loading sacks of fruit, building workers, people driving cranes, whereas the PP (1996) shows another type of worker, for example, the owner of a fruit shop or people sitting at a computer, the small and medium-sized businesses being the star of all the spots (in that respect they coincide with CiU). Those types of opposition in the structures of the different parties are usual. There is also synecdoche in the fact that the worlds proposed are populated by all the good things or all the bad things, leaving out anything which is not of interest at any given moment.

Synecdoche also brings about another interesting effect: seeing what kind of people appear in the spots. We see that in the case of the PP the young people who appear usually have short hair and wear striped shirts or knee-length skirts, whilst in the case of the PSOE the hair is longer and the skirts shorter. IU also gives a different image of young people (10). Those synecdoches normally help to reinforce existing dichotomies between the possible worlds proposed by the different parties and coalitions.

In this section we also find a host of symbols used more and more frequently as time goes by: images of flags, lively music, victory signs and others are common to all political parties.

Lastly it is worth taking a leisurely look at the most widely used link procedures, which are also gaining ground with time. These are the ones that start from agreements to structure reality, specifying examples, illustrations and models (or anti-models). This type of procedure is almost always used through images (although there are cases of verbal use, particularly in the lived events presented by the parties which can serve as an example of the good or bad situation of the possible world described) and bring about almost immediate adherence by the public because they are easy to interpret. One

visual example is to be found in the PSOE (1989) in a spot in which different famous people with successful careers appear: Arancha Sánchez Vicario, Montserrat Caballé, Salvador Dalí, the actor Juan Echanove and the band Mecano who, along with the images of the Olympiad and the Expo, exemplify the triumphs of the socialist government (11).

Illustrations are also increasingly frequent in all parties which illustrate the incompetence of the government in that way (PP, 1989), showing on screen beds in the corridors of a hospital, the jet fighter in which the deputy prime minister Alfonso Guerra flew to avoid a traffic jam, or the poor functioning of the public services; what a PP government would mean (PP, 1996) with the sun shining, planes taking off…; regression would mean a government of the right (PSOE, 1993) with an image of a clock with the hands moving backwards and people and cars moving in the same direction; the progress that a socialist government would mean (PSOE, 1989) with windows opening onto different landscapes; the consequences of a Catalonia dependent on Spain (ERC, 1993) with images of deserted factories and railway stations and a cow with the Catalan flag painted on its side which is being continually milked; the poor situation of young people with problems such as unemployment, lack of housing or drugs (CDS, 1993), with small fictions in which young people are standing in the dole queue, a family is desperate because the son has stolen money from them to buy drugs, or a couple seeing a flat and saying that because of the price they have to postpone their wedding; the shortage of work and social benefits (IU, 1996), with a fiction in which two people meet and remark that they have not found jobs; the impossibility for young people to find work (PCE, 1982), with young people going into different buildings with the newspaper in their hands; the grievance of investment by the state in Catalonia (CiU, 1996) with photos of schoolchildren playing in a playground. Most of these illustrations, as we have seen, are done through small fictions or still photographs (on fewer occasions).

Models are also used, though less frequently than the two other procedures. Indeed, although it is usual for all political parties to turn to famous people from show business and sport to provide their support in the campaigns and thus serve as a model for action, the PSOE is the only party to bring them into its television propaganda. We can see that clearly in the PSOE spots (1993, 1996) in which famous show business figures (Loquillo, Adolfo Marsillach, Antonio Banderas, Gila) ask for the vote for the party and even sing a song in a group (1993).

3. Stating the hypothesis

From this study we have drawn a series of communicative trends that we express in the form of a hypothesis to see whether or not in the last election campaign in Catalonia (17 October 1999) those general lines are followed.

Concerning the possible worlds and general agreements we find two fundamental hypotheses:

a) Depopulation of the possible worlds

Depopulation is to be seen in two key aspects which, though they may be presented in isolation, cannot be disconnected since they are completely interrelated.

a1) The kinds of general agreement that are used to populate the world. The individuals inhabiting the worlds presented by the different political parties are based less and less on reality and more and more on the preferences of the electors. In other words, individuals lose variety. Just as in the first elections the possible worlds contain a wide variety of individuals: events, values, truths, presumptions, hierarchies and places of argumentation, in the most recent ones there is an indisputable predominance of values (which are, moreover, increasingly general). The values share a high degree of indefiniteness (which enables them to reach a far wider public, or not to lose the public in the centre) since the interpretations are more open (everyone can adapt the values to his or her own system of ideas).

a2) The role played by the image in structuring possible worlds. First of all, this reinforces ambiguity, since the image involves different interpretations due to its high degree of polysemy (which as we have already mentioned is well adapted to the wish to reach the public in the centre). Another key function of the image is its facility for creating presence. That function is used by the parties when it comes to showing the past and presenting a particular future.

b) Reduction in the number of possible worlds presented by each party

b1) In the previous investigation we have established that the political parties have gradually reduced the number of possible worlds presented in their spots. In recent election campaigns it seems that there is a tendency to present only two possible worlds, which brings about a clear duality between two worlds to which dichotomous and positive-negative opposed values are allocated. One of the most widespread dualities is the one between the government parties and the opposition parties, especially as far as the allocation of positive and negative values is concerned. That duality rests on the philosophical binomial.

Concerning the argumentation procedures, we can see a simplification in the use of argumentative resources. Recourse to certain types of argumentation to the detriment of others is closely related to what we said in the previous point (especially everything concerned with the image as the cause of better knowledge of the techniques of the medium).

b2) And so we have to point out a reduction in the **more rational procedures** based on quasi-logical mechanisms. Procedures of that type are only maintained when asking for the vote, which is considered the key cause for achieving the promised possible world. The reason for the elimination of apparently more logical arguments is that the image greatly restricts the use of certain types of argument which are difficult to translate into

images. Moreover, reception of the messages on television makes it more difficult to include complex arguments which need more time for expression and reflection.

The indefiniteness brought about by the population of the possible worlds with general values means that great use is made of the **dissociative definitions** which help to tighten the meaning a little and mark small differences between the parties.

b3) Lastly the capacity to "make presence" from the image means that there is also an increase in the use of arguments which, starting from values, structure reality in a particular way. Such is the case of the **illustrations, models and examples**.

4. Establishment of an evolution: the case of the Catalan elections of 17.10.1999

The first striking conclusion is the coherence between the hypotheses we have mentioned and the analysis of the election propaganda spots in the Catalan elections. Indeed, an analysis of the propaganda carried out on that occasion meets all the hypotheses, with one exception: the non use of quasi-logical procedures, which are used, as we shall see, by both CiU and PSC-CpC (Catalan Socialist Party-Citizens for Change). However, the hypothesis that seems to be most strongly confirmed is the possible worlds one. All parties and coalitions at the elections present a small number of possible worlds, which are also quite depopulated.

If we look first at the structuring of possible worlds (a2) we can state that all the parties present a very small number. A quick review of the propaganda ads shows that in general the parties only present two possible worlds. That is the case with CiU, which focuses its strategy on two worlds: the present one which is depicted as positive but unfinished, and the future one, which is outlined as a complement to the present one (we have to say that this is a typical strategy of parties in power at elections). Also ERC, IC-V (Initiative for Catalonia-Green Party), EUiA (United Alternative Left) and the PP base their proposal on that dichotomy of worlds with one substantial difference: the present world is negative whilst the future one is positive. In terms of the construction of possible worlds, the PSC-CpC coalition is a curious case. In all their spots except one the socialists present a structure based on four possible worlds: a negative present; a positive future if Maragall wins; a negative future if he does not; and lastly a world of the remote past when Maragall was mayor of Barcelona. As we can see, structures of that type which propose both past and present in positive or negative form according to whether or not the victory goes to the socialists is copied from strategies already used by the PSOE in the general elections. There is, as we have said, one exception. The Maragall coalition presents an ad that breaks with the tendency to put forward one single positive possible world, the world of a Maragall government (the spot was directed by Javier Mariscal). In this case simplification in the proposal of possible worlds is taken to extremes since it eliminates the negative world always presented by the other parties.

Concerning the way in which the different political forces populate those worlds (a1),

there are no exceptions and the tendency is fully confirmed. All the parties base their proposals on increasingly ambiguous values which try to reach the maximum possible number of people. That trend is reinforced by the use of images. By using values as a foundation, political propaganda increasingly loses its connection with reality, which is no longer the main source of the elements under discussion. Although this conclusion is clear we can find a few nuances worth mentioning. The first one arises with the parties that come to the elections while in power. In this case the actions carried out during their mandate are events on which to base their propaganda, as indeed they do. So in CiU propaganda there are achievements such as free motorways, the abolition of military service, etc. The second notable nuance is that of parties such as IC-V which try to specify some of the their proposals in future government actions. The causes of this gradual depopulation may be diverse, but the influence of the television medium seems clear. Television is a channel that requires short discourses based on the image. Those characteristics make it difficult to admit discourses trying out proposals that do not exist and of which there are therefore no images.

A third question related to the possible worlds is the gradual importance acquired by images in their structuring (a2). Without going to the extremes of the Maragall spot done by Mariscal in which there are only images, the other parties put forward their proposals through images, relegating the presence of the candidates to the fringes in comparison with the spots at the beginning, when they were clearly the leading actors.

If we focus on the second aspect of our analysis, the argumentation procedures, we see that the last Catalan elections follow the line set out in the hypothesis except for the quasi-logical arguments (b2). In this respect whilst ERC, PP, IC-V and EUiA base their persuasive strategies on philosophical binomials which oppose dualities between which the elector has to choose, CiU and PSC-CpC use a slightly different strategy. Let us take it step by step.

ERC, PP, IC-V and EUiA pose the election in terms of the elector’s choice between two possibilities, one presented as positive and the other as negative (b1). The terms of the duality are provided with their foundation through the construction of the possible worlds and nothing more. So two worlds are presented and the elector chooses the one he or she prefers - it is assumed that he or she will always choose the one presented as positive. So ERC portrays the election as a choice between a politically boring and a politically amusing world. The PP portrays it as a choice between a world in which Catalonia is disconnected from Spain and a world in which that does not happen. In the case of IC-V the duality is presented between a present negative world and a future positive one in which close attention is paid to issues such as the environment, a decent job and young people. Lastly EUiA presents the dichotomy between a positive world of the left and a negative world not of the left.

The strategy of the two majority parties, CiU and PSC-CpC, is not reduced to that dual presentation of two possibilities to choose between. They try to persuade through procedures that link their proposal for the future with a base that guarantees it. Thus in the case of CiU the guarantee that the promises will be kept is based on the government

action carried out by Jordi Pujol over the legislature, which seemed to have won a broad consensus. The PSC-CpC modes are fairly similar, but the guarantee for the future is to be found in the person of Pasqual Maragall and his government at the head of Barcelona City Council during the 1992 Olympiad. The strength those foundations acquire makes the socialist propaganda much more personal, since Maragall appears as the only artificer of the positive future. On the other hand, as opposed to what happened at earlier elections, Pujol shares his government action with other candidates in the coalition, although he is notably overvalued through the images.

In conclusion, we can state that the aspects we have analysed are consolidated as clear trends in television propaganda communication. In that way they generate a particular type of communication based essentially on the image with a gradual simplification of the messages. It is also important to note the gradual disconnection of the proposals from the political reality of the moment, which is almost totally abandoned as a starting point. The general values gain a good deal of ground, leaving a broad ambiguity which can only be resolved by the interpretation made of them by each voter.

Notes:

(1) CANEL, M.J.: *Comunicación política. Técnicas y estrategias para la sociedad de la información*. Madrid: Tecnos, 1999. Chapter 2. MAAREK, P.J.*: Political Marketing and Communication*. John Libbey, 1995. ARCEO VACAS, J.L.: *Campañas electorales y "publicidad política" en España 1976-1991*. Barcelona, Escuela Superior de Relaciones Públicas, 1993.

(2) Although it is claimed that there is no mediation in this type of communication, there is irrefutable evidence that television languages do have an influence, as we shall see later, on the structuring of those messages.

(3) Law 5/1985, 19 June, General Election Regulations, art. 60: "No election advertising spaces may be contracted in the public communications media. During the election campaign, the parties, federations, coalitions and groupings standing for election have the right to free propaganda spaces on public radio and television." And Law 2/1988, 3 May, Regulating Election Advertising on Private Television Channels, art. 1: "No election advertising spaces may be contracted on the private television channels which are the object of concessions".

(4) PERELMAN, Ch.; OLBRESTCHS-TYTECA, L.: *Traité de l'argumentation. La nouvelle rhétorique.*

(5) A broad commentary on that analysis is to be found in: PERICOT, J.; CAPDEVILA, A.: *Estrategias persuasivas de la propaganda política televisiva*. Paper submitted at the IV Spanish Congress of Political Science and Administration. Granada, 30 September to 2 October 1999. Published on CD-ROM.

(6) The theory of the "possible worlds" was put forward in the early seventies from the discipline of logic. In this work we start from the adaptation made by Umberto Eco in a sphere closer to narrative discourse. Bibliographical references by this author include *Lector in Fabula* and *The Limits of Interpretation*. Further contributions along those lines are to be found in works such as: GOODMAN, N.: *Ways of Worldmaking*. Hackett Publishing Company, 1978, and articles such as "Transitar por los mundos posibles" by Jordi Pericot. In *Temes de Disseny*, 14. Barcelona, Elisava, 1996.

(7) A more detailed analysis of narrative strategies in the 99 election campaign are to be found in: GIFREU, J.; PALLARÉS, F.: *La campanya més disputada. Mitjans, partits i ciutadans a les eleccions catalanes de 1999*. Barcelona, Fundació Bofill. (At press).

(8) For a closer look at this subject, consult chapter 3 of PERICOT, J.; RUIZ COLLANTES, X.; PRAT, Ll.: "La propaganda política en les eleccions autonòmiques de 1995: estructures narratives i estratègies argumentatives", in the book by GIFREU, J.; PALLARÈS F. (eds:): *Comunicació política i comportament electoral*. Barcelona, Mediterrània, 1998, pp. 111-140. It contains a far more exhaustive analysis of the argumentative strategies of the different parties in the autonomous elections in Catalonia in 1995.

(9) Because of the length of this work, instead of analysing the speeches one by one, we shall point out the more general trends deriving from a comparison of the parties and their speeches.

(10) The same thing happens with other groups such as housewives, old people, workers and even the kind of building or setting.

(11) Indeed, this spot stirred up a good deal of controversy, since some of the famous people who appeared on the video had not given their permission (they had even given explicit support to other parties) and the PSOE was accused of wanting to claim every success achieved in Spain for themselves even if they had had nothing to do with it.