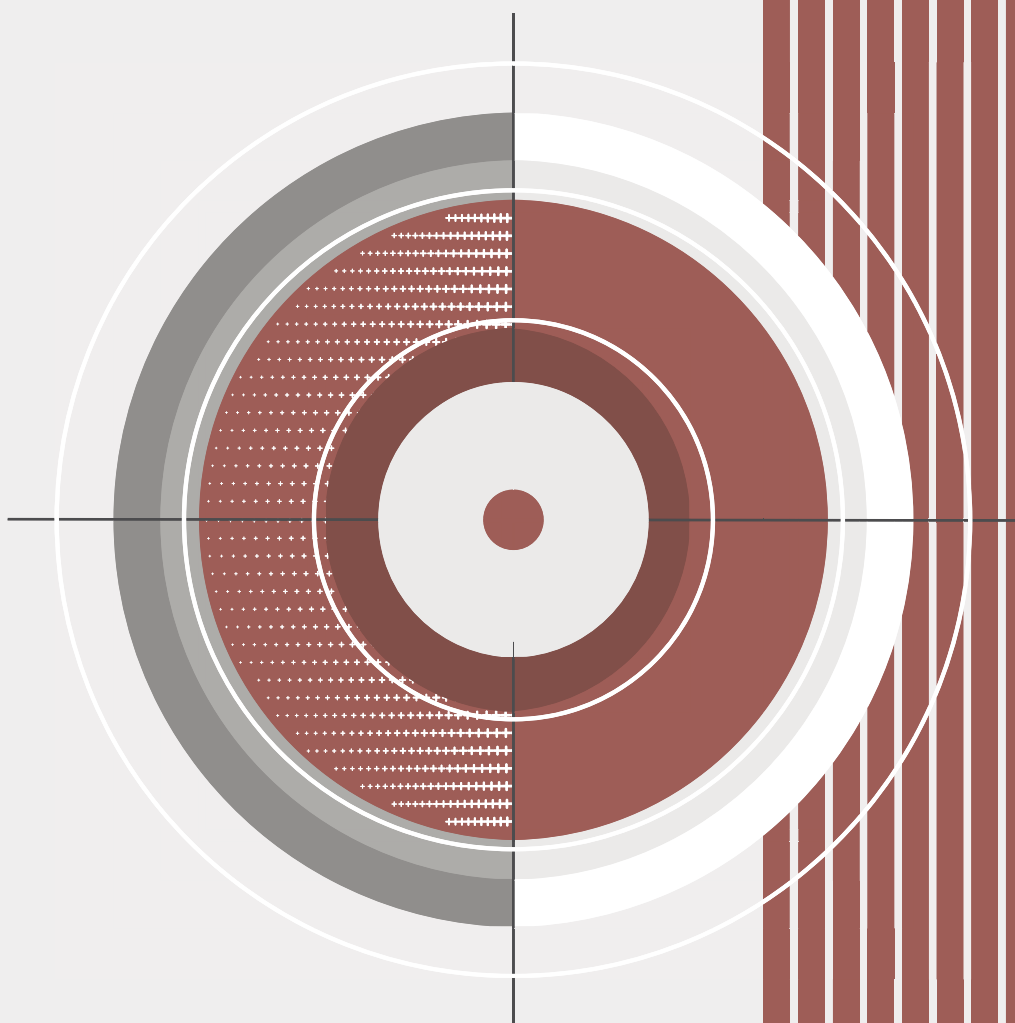

CERLIS

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The CERLIS Journal

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Editorial

STEFANIA M. MACI
Editor in Chief

It is with great enthusiasm that we introduce the inaugural issue of the *CERLIS Journal*, an open-access, peer-reviewed publication dedicated to the study of specialised languages and discourse analysis. As an initiative of the *Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici* (CERLIS) at the University of Bergamo, this journal aims to provide a platform for scholars to explore the multifaceted nature of discourse across various professional and academic domains.

The *CERLIS Journal* welcomes contributions that employ diverse theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches, including corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, genre studies, and translation studies, for the analysis of the wide variety of communicative practices employed by different discourse communities. We are particularly interested in research that examines how technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence and digital communication tools, influence communication practices. Additionally, studies addressing the adaptation of specialised discourse to societal challenges (such as multilingualism, accessibility, and sustainability) or community needs (popularisation) are highly encouraged.

We invite scholars worldwide to submit original research articles, review papers, and case studies that contribute to advancing knowledge on discourse uses. By fostering a dynamic and inclusive academic community, the *CERLIS Journal* aspires to become a leading reference point in the field of discourse studies, especially – but not exclusively – in specialised settings.

We look forward to your contributions and to the engaging discussions that will emerge within these pages.

Éditorial

C'est avec beaucoup de plaisir que nous présentons le numéro inaugural du *CERLIS Journal*, une publication en libre accès, évaluée par les pairs et consacrée à l'étude des langues spécialisées et à l'analyse du discours. Issue de l'initiative du *Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici* (CERLIS) de l'Université de Bergame, cette revue se propose de fournir une plateforme permettant aux chercheurs et chercheuses d'explorer les multiples facettes du discours dans des domaines divers, aussi bien professionnels qu'académiques.

Le *CERLIS Journal* accueille des contributions s'appuyant sur divers cadres théoriques et approches méthodologiques, comme la linguistique de corpus, l'analyse du discours, les études de genre et les études de traduction, pour analyser la grande variété de pratiques communicatives émanant de différentes communautés discursives. Nous nous intéressons particulièrement aux recherches qui examinent l'impact des avancées technologiques, telles que l'intelligence artificielle et les outils de communication numérique, sur les pratiques de communication. En outre, les études portant sur l'adaptation du discours spécialisé aux défis sociétaux (tels que le multilinguisme, l'accessibilité et la durabilité) ou aux besoins de la communauté (vulgarisation) sont vivement encouragées.

Nous invitons les chercheurs et chercheuses du monde entier à soumettre des articles de recherche originaux, des documents de synthèse et des études de cas qui contribuent à faire progresser les connaissances sur les utilisations en discours des langues spécialisées. En encourageant une communauté universitaire dynamique et inclusive, le *CERLIS Journal* aspire à devenir un point de repère majeur dans le domaine des études du discours, en particulier – mais pas exclusivement – dans des contextes spécialisés. Nous attendons avec impatience vos contributions qui ne manqueront pas de susciter des discussions passionnantes.

Presentación

Es un placer para nosotros presentar el número inaugural de la revista *CERLIS Journal*, una publicación de acceso abierto y revisada por pares dedicada al estudio de las lenguas de especialidad y al análisis del discurso. Como iniciativa del *Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici* (CERLIS) de la Universidad de Bérgamo, esta revista tiene como objetivo proporcionar una plataforma dirigida a especialistas desde la cual explorar la naturaleza multifacética del discurso en diversos ámbitos, tanto profesionales como académicos.

CERLIS Journal acepta contribuciones que empleen diferentes marcos teóricos y enfoques metodológicos, incluida la lingüística de corpus, el análisis del discurso, los estudios de género y los estudios de traducción, promoviendo el análisis de la amplia variedad de prácticas comunicativas empleadas por diferentes comunidades discursivas. Estamos particularmente interesados en investigaciones que examinen el modo en que los avances tecnológicos, como la inteligencia artificial y las herramientas de comunicación digital, influyen en las prácticas de comunicación. Además, se valorarán especialmente los estudios que aborden la adaptación del discurso especializado a los diferentes desafíos sociales (como el multilingüismo, la accesibilidad y la sostenibilidad) o a las necesidades de la comunidad (popularización).

Invitamos a académicos de todo el mundo a enviar artículos de investigación originales, artículos de revisión y estudios de caso que contribuyan a mejorar el conocimiento sobre los usos del discurso. Fomentando una comunidad académica dinámica e inclusiva, *CERLIS Journal* aspira a convertirse en un punto de referencia líder en el campo de los estudios del discurso, especialmente –pero no exclusivamente– en entornos especializados.

Esperamos sus contribuciones y los debates sin duda interesantes que surgirán en estas páginas.

Zu dieser Zeitschrift

Wir freuen uns, Ihnen die erste Ausgabe des *CERLIS Journals* vorzustellen, eine Open-Access Publikation mit Peer-Review-Verfahren, die sich vor allem der Untersuchung von fachlichen Diskursen widmet. Als Initiative des Forschungszentrums CERLIS (*Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici*) der Universität Bergamo bietet diese Zeitschrift ein Forum für Wissenschaftler:innen, die Kommunikation in fachlichen und gesellschaftlichen Domänen erforschen.

Das *CERLIS Journal* begrüßt Beiträge, in denen auf der Grundlage verschiedener theoretischer und methodischer Ansätze (u.a. Korpuslinguistik, Diskursanalyse, Text- und Gesprächslinguistik, Studien zur Übersetzung) kommunikative Praktiken in unterschiedlichen Diskursgemeinschaften analysiert werden. Wir sind besonders an Arbeiten interessiert, die sich mit der Frage auseinandersetzen, wie technologische Fortschritte, künstliche Intelligenz und digitale Kommunikationsmittel diskursive Praktiken beeinflussen. Besonders erwünscht sind Studien über neuere Entwicklungen in der Fachkommunikation mit Blick auf aktuelle gesellschaftliche Bedürfnisse und Herausforderungen (z.B. Mehrsprachigkeit, Zugänglichkeit und Popularisierung sowie Nachhaltigkeit).

Wir laden Wissenschaftler:innen aus der ganzen Welt ein, aktuelle Beiträge, Fallstudien und Forschungsberichte einzureichen, die neue Einsichten in diskursive Praktiken ermöglichen. Als dynamisches und inklusives akademisches Diskussionsforum zielt das *CERLIS Journal* darauf ab, ein wesentlicher Bezugspunkt im Bereich der Diskursforschung zu werden, insbesondere – aber nicht ausschließlich – bezogen auf fachliche Kommunikationszusammenhänge.

Wir freuen uns auf Ihre Beiträge und anregende Diskussionen, die sich auf diesen Seiten entwickeln werden.

VIRGINIA ZORZI

Converging Crises. A Qualitative Analysis of Online Representations and Narratives of Climate Migration

Abstract

The ongoing climate crisis can be one of the various interrelated factors determining migration, and it is believed to increasingly and substantially contribute to and reshape future migration patterns. The acknowledgement that the climate crisis plays an increasingly significant role in human mobility and displacement may at least partly diverge from assumptions, widespread especially in Western/global North host societies, about why people migrate. The main aim of this paper is to situate climate-related migration with respect to assumptions about legitimate migration made in receiving societies, suggesting that normalising the climate crisis as a factor contributing to human migration flows within public debates on migration may challenge these assumptions. Focusing on perspectives from both prospective and actual climate migrants, this paper features a qualitative study, based on framing and Appraisal theory. It focuses on a set of informative and narrative texts drawn from websites whose aim is to raise awareness about migration phenomena related to the climate crisis, by making involved people's voices heard. Overall, results suggest that although the analysed texts largely focus on forced migration and the suffering of migrants – generally contributing to perceived legitimacy in host societies – the representations of climate-related migration that emerge from them largely diverge from the 'good, legitimate migrant' stereotypes identified in previous studies.

1. Introduction

This contribution features a qualitative study of a set of texts drawn from websites whose aim is to raise awareness on migration phenomena related to the climate crisis, through explanatory texts as well as first-person testimonies of people recounting their climate migration experiences.

The ongoing climate crisis can be one of the various interrelated factors determining migration, and its influence on future migration flows and patterns is believed to increase in the future, through both slow and fast-onset phenomena that negatively impact on the habitability of various areas of the world (Marotzke et al. 2020; Cho 2021; Huang 2023).

The increasingly significant role of the climate crisis in human mobility and displacement – itself a crisis – may be represented simplistically in public discourse (Mixed Migration Centre 2022b: 2), and may at least partly diverge from assumptions, including by migrants themselves, about why people migrate (Mixed Migration Centre 2022a: 3). War and persecution, disasters (such as floods and earthquakes) and economic reasons are part of those assumptions. Yet circumstances where climate crisis-related effects unfold in a more indirect way, such as desertification, coastal erosion or recurrent flooding, are generally given less prominence. Therefore, the question that prompted the present research is: where would climate-related migration be situated with respect to legitimacy assumptions made in receiving societies? Could its entry into the public debate affect or challenge these assumptions?

The focus of this paper will be on informative and narrative texts that aim at raising awareness on the rights of climate migrants and making their voices heard. Public discourses, like the news or political discourse, tend to reflect and reproduce stereotypical assumptions, drawing on essentialised and generalised representations used to regulate migrants' perceived legitimacy or 'deservingness'. For example, greater legitimacy is associated with those who are perceived to migrate against their will to escape from conflicts or sudden disasters,

while the idea of moving to pursue better economic conditions is considered less deserving of support (see Section 2 below). In this context, informative and narrative texts on climate migration could draw on legitimising stereotypes to make this migration more acceptable in host societies, but could also challenge and negotiate them in an attempt to change dominant perceptions.

This is a qualitative study, based on a small set of textual data. Therefore, it cannot provide a comprehensive, generalised nor statistically significant illustration of climate migration discourse. Rather, it aims at the in-depth exploration of a limited number of specific instances, in order to draw examples of how this phenomenon is addressed in the communicative context of pro-migration organisation/project websites. This study may be considered as a preliminary step towards the identification of potentially recurring linguistic elements framing climate migration in this context. These elements could therefore be instrumental in future research on more comprehensive and representative datasets.

2. Background

As shown by a large body of research mainly focusing on Western countries, the representation of migrants and migration in public discourse within those societies tends to be negative and polarising. The increase in refugee arrivals to Europe from the Syrian region around 2015-2016, known as the migration crisis (Pace and Severance 2016), came about in a context already characterised by negative perceptions of migration (e.g. see Gabrielatos and Baker 2008 on the UK, or Triandafyllidou 1999 on Italy), contributing to those perceptions and, accordingly, to the surrounding discourse. In particular, media representations emphasise a growing sense of crisis, where immigration is mainly framed as a problem, if not a threat, to host societies. Migrants, especially from lower-income, culturally and ethnically distant areas, have been found to be portrayed as a threatening, even

aggressive Other, and often in a generalised, de-individualized manner, with instances of dehumanisation, e.g. by means of objectifying metaphors (Taylor 2021). Scholars argue that this type of discourse is instrumental in reasserting host societies' identities when they are perceived to be in crisis (Musolff and Viola 2019).

These representations reflect and reinforce negative stereotypes of migrants. However, most of the time, stereotypes are ambivalent (Reyna et al. 2013), comprising both positive and negative attributes. In fact, migrants' inclusion in host societies is subject to certain conditions that need to be met in order for one to be considered 'good' or 'deserving' (Hackl 2022). Thus, there are positive stereotypical features that can be associated with migrants in certain circumstances, and prompt positive attitudes towards them in host societies. They may concern their behaviour, their values or their motivation to migrate, and will be compared with climate migration discourse in this study.

The existing literature has highlighted several elements that seem to induce more favourable attitudes or help intentions towards migrants, or more simply to portray them in a more positive light.

One of them is status, whereby refugees may be viewed more favourably than other groups of migrants (Esses 2021). This comes with paternalistic attitudes, because this particular group is associated with a need for help motivated, among other factors, by perceived low ability to solve their problems (Wyszynski et al. 2021). According to some studies, positive attitudes towards refugees may be declining as a result of increased refugee arrivals in recent years. In fact, general migrants might today receive more positive attitudes as an effect of terminological confusion in the public space, and of public discourses depicting refugees in a negative way (e.g. as bogus, Graf et al. 2023).

Beyond status, however, these positive attitudes are linked to involuntary movement and deservingness, which are generally compared with and preferred to voluntary movement, stereotypically attributed to undeserving migrants (Božič et al. 2023). In keeping with the idea that forced migration deserves more support and protection than other types of migration, suffering, victimhood and exploitation – as part of certain migration experiences – have been found to trigger sympathy (Reyna et al. 2013, Sánchez-Junquera et al. 2021).

More in general, a legalised migrant status (i.e. being a documented migrant) tends to determine more positive attitudes (Esses 2021, Grigorieff et al. 2020, Sánchez-Junquera et al. 2021) or, at least, not to elicit concerns (Blinder and Allen 2016). The same quite obviously applies to law-abiding behaviours (Hackl 2022).

Cultural and religious similarity with respect to host societies tends to be viewed more favourably (Esses 2021; Božič et al 2023). Moreover, migrants are expected to adopt politically and religiously moderate attitudes, while at the same time being loyal to the host country; public engagement and practices like volunteering are also part of a ‘good immigrant’ stereotype (Hackl 2022).

From an economic perspective, positive images of migrants tend to see them as resources benefiting host economies (Graf et al. 2023, Sánchez-Junquera et al 2021). This encompasses being hard working and not becoming a public burden or demanding welfare (Hackl 2022). The discourse-analytical accounts of migration that describe positive representations of migrants are consistent with this notion. Incorporating historical analyses in her study, Taylor (2021) showed that this construction of migrants was prevalent in 19th century UK press, and suggested that its positive evaluation is possible when the phenomenon of migration is perceived as controllable/manageable. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that immigrants are overall positively evaluated in New Zealand, a country with a small population and a remote, difficult-to-reach geographical location, where incoming migrants may be perceived as contributing to filling skill shortages, bringing wealth and aiding the economy (Salahshour 2016). Attitudes towards highly skilled potential migrants and asylum seekers tend to be more favourable (Esses 2021); in the British national press, highly skilled labour migrants are positively represented in terms of resources available to the host society (Blinder and Allen 2016, Islentjeva 2020). Climate-related migration is relatively new to public fora, which elicited the question of where it can be situated in the debate, and in relation to the above-discussed stereotypes.

Concern over the threatening effects of climate on migration flows is likely to become more and more common as the consequences of the environmental and climate crises unfold. The major natural hazards that impact on migration drivers, that is tropical cyclones,

heavy rains and floods, drought and desertification and sea level rise, have recently intensified and become more frequent. This has been more or less directly attributed to the changing climate, although knowledge about the specific ways in which this influence takes place is still partial and debated (Piguet et al. 2011). If humanity fails in reducing emissions, it is feared that several hundreds of millions of people could be forced out of their home regions (Cho 2021). However, such estimates are highly debated, and more in general the implications of these converging crises are extremely difficult to establish. The impact of environmental change on migration is complex and not always direct – especially in the case of slow-onset events. Moreover, it always interacts with and is mediated by other factors (e.g. socio-political), which results in vulnerable populations being disproportionately affected (Kraler et al. 2020). Climate-related migration mainly takes place within national boundaries and can in some cases be temporary (Cho 2021). As a matter of fact, whether internal or international, this type of migration should be considered as an adaptation strategy to the climate crisis for large numbers of people (Kraler et al. 2020).

As climate-related migration partly diverges from traditional migration patterns, legislation granting protection and support to people involved in this phenomenon is lacking, further complicating their situation (Cho 2021). So is, I would argue, public attention towards climate-related mobility and displacement. This is the reason why this study focuses on online material specifically dedicated to this topic and intended to raise awareness about it.

One way to pursue this goal is to rely on affected people's stories from different areas of the world.

In the context of migration discourses, personal testimonies play a special role, since they enable a negotiation of widespread stereotypical constructions of migrants in public discourses (see Spinzi and Zummo 2022). However, affected people, or those who adapt their narratives for publication, may in some way also reinforce positive stereotypes, in order to achieve inclusion (Cederberg 2014) and/or favour positive and supportive attitudes in the audience. This paper therefore draws on instances of climate migration communication accompanied by personal testimonies, and represents a preliminary

attempt at establishing whether stereotype reinforcement or challenge is taking place.

3. Method

The present research is based on a small, manually analysable dataset. To retrieve it, a search was made on two different internet browsers (Google and Qwant) for websites dedicated to climate migration that also featured personal narratives. It proved relatively difficult, despite the many news pieces and web pages available on the topic, to find sources including first-person testimonies; none of them featured full-length interviews or monologic narratives. Moreover, many online resources on climate migration – including part of the texts here analysed – focus on people who have not moved yet, but rather are at risk of being displaced. Three websites were identified:

1. “Climate and Migration Coalition”, led by the charitable company Climate Outreach, whose aim is to support policies that assure assistance to displaced people by, among other things, spreading knowledge, and making affected people’s voices heard. The website hosts a report called *Moving Stories. The voices of people who move in the context of environmental change*, where parts of testimonies on different geographical areas are gathered from news and research, and alternated with explanatory paragraphs.
2. “Climate Migrants”, a project (authors’ names/affiliations are not retrievable) whose mission is to spread awareness and direct testimonies of climate migration through an interactive map, where regions affected by potential or actual climate-related displacement are shown. Each location has a short explanation and a link to an external video attached. Videos contain testimonies in various forms (e.g. news piece, documentary). The website also addresses earthquakes, which were however

excluded from the present analysis as they are not generally associated with climate change.

3. “Climate Refugees Stories”, a narrative archiving project centred around the stories of people displaced for reasons related to climate change. It features a small archive of articles combining explanatory paragraphs with extracts of interviews with affected people.

The texts appearing in the home pages of these websites, together with the introductory texts found in their “About”, “Mission” or similar sections were collected for each website. Subsequently, the documents or pages containing testimonies available from the websites were collected and saved individually. In the case of video content (only considered when a transcript was available), the transcript was collected and checked for accuracy. An overview of the dataset is provided in Table 1.

With respect to the authenticity of personal narratives and testimonies in this dataset, it should be noted that they: (a) have been interspersed with informative sections; (b) feature selected extracts of speech that may have been translated and/or paraphrased; (c) contain accounts that have been elicited in different ways, in different contexts. In general, it is not always possible to ascertain the amount and type of mediation between migrants’ words and the published text. Consequently, it is important not to treat testimonies as thoroughly and unquestionably authentic, and to acknowledge their heterogeneity.

Name (short name)	Type	Source/ author	Year of publica- tion	Link	No. of words
“Climate and Migration Coalition”	website texts - informative	Climate Outreach	Not provided	https://climatemigration.org.uk/	1,017

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Available on “Climate and Migration Coalition”: <i>Moving Stories. The voices of people who move in the context of environmental change</i> (Moving Stories)	report featuring testimonies	Climate Outreach	Not provided (probably 2015)	https://climatemigration.org.uk/moving-stories-report-the-voices-of-people-who-move-in-the-context-of-environmental/	14,318
“Climate Migrants”	website texts - informative	Not provided	Not provided	https://climatemigrants.org/	670
Linked from “Climate Migrants”: “Newtok Sights & Sounds: Moving to Higher Ground” (Newtok)	video featuring testimonies	“Phil Daquila” YouTube channel	2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8F_r2Oyl8I	628
Linked from “Climate Migrants”: “Kiribati: The Sinking Islands Being Destroyed by Climate Change” (Kiribati)	video featuring testimonies	Al Jazeera	2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9P7jXveokDY	3398

Linked from “Climate Migrants”: “5 Years Later: Hurricane Katrina Evacuees Happy to Call Tulsa Home” (Katrina)	video featuring testimonies	News on 6 (local news channel, Tulsa, Oklahoma)	2010	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__1yuWaGdIQ	674
Linked from “Climate Migrants”: “The vanishing island” (Isle de Jean Charles)	video featuring testimonies	The New York Times (Op-Docs)	2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBW6KB13Z2g	1,068
“Climate Refugee Stories”	website texts - informative	Climate Refugees Stories project	Maintained until 2023	https://www.climate-refugeestories.com/	327
Available on “Climate Refugee Stories”: “Marshall Islands: ‘Art Stops the Damage’” (Marshall)	webpage featuring testimonies	Climate Refugees Stories project	Not provided (post-2017)	https://www.climate-refugeestories.com/stories/marshall-islands-art-post/	923
Available on “Climate Refugee Stories”: “The Bengal Delta: ‘We are floating in the Middle’” (Bengal Delta)	webpage featuring testimonies	Climate Refugees Stories project	Not provided (post-2021)	https://www.climate-refugeestories.com/stories/bengal-delta-post/	860

Available on “Climate Refugee Stories”: “Ghana: “I have been a Stowaway”” (Ghana)	webpage featuring testimonies	Climate Refugees Stories project	Not provided (post- 2021)	https://www.climate-refugeestories.com/stories/ghana-stowaway-post/	2,689
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Table 1. Overview of the dataset.

For the sake of clarity, from now on the term ‘author’ is used to refer to those who wrote the informative texts, while ‘(actual) migrant(s)’ refers to people who moved from their own country or region. ‘Prospective migrant(s)’ or ‘resident(s)’ indicates people who risk being displaced, while ‘affected person/people’ and ‘interviewee(s)’ are used as more general terms, regardless of whether the person/people has/have moved from home. Finally, I will refer to all the items belonging to the above-described datasets as ‘texts’, whether they are originally written or transcribed from video products.

Two main theoretical approaches are applied to analyse the dataset. The first one is the Appraisal system (Martin and White 2005) and in particular its Attitude component, which was deemed particularly relevant to texts partly comprising accounts of personal experiences, as well as to assess the evaluative aspects of highly debated issues, as are the climate crisis and migration. Specifically, each instance of Attitude identified in the texts was attached a label stating:

- the type of Attitude – i.e., whether it expressed an emotional response on the part of a human actor (Affect), the evaluation of an actor’s behaviour (Judgement) or the assessment of the qualities of an object or person (Appreciation);
- Whether it was attributed to the writer(s) or speaker(s);
- Who the conscious actor(s) experiencing an emotion was/were (e.g. a journalist, a prospective migrant, an actual migrant);
- What it was triggered by or referred to;
- Whether it was inscribed by specific elements in the sentence or invoked through indirect references;

- Whether it was positive, neutral or negative.

The second approach adopted was that of frames, based on the way elements of reality are selected and given salience when we communicate, so that a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or solution tend to be promoted (Entman 1993). Frames express the way a problem is identified and described, and were therefore deemed suitable to the analysis of communication around situations of crisis. In order to identify how climate migration was framed in the texts, elements selected for inclusion and given salience were identified sentence by sentence, and grouped into broader categories in order to let elements of consistency across texts emerge. Some examples of the categories employed are “forced migration”, “environmental phenomena threaten population”, “conflicts affect an area”, “need for international cooperation”, and “population relies/depends on local resources”.

The texts, manually annotated for Affect and salient elements, were reviewed in light of the stereotypical features discussed above. It should be emphasised that these texts are here considered individually and not as a corpus, as no claim of representativity can be made. Accordingly, Section 4 reports on findings and related extracts without generalising. Findings might nevertheless be a starting point for future research based on more representative data. In the next section, an inventory of the ways in which the analysed texts connect and interact with each of the above-described stereotypical features through Affect and frames is also provided.

4. Results

Involuntary movement

Emphasis is placed on the involuntary nature of climate migration in most analysed texts. This is done by framing climate migration as

originating from a threat, whose source – environmental hazards, and occasionally some environmentally damaging human activities – is given salience (Example 1¹). The threat is mainly directed at human communities (ecosystems or other, non-human species are not made salient). Appreciation by the authors describing these phenomena (e.g. as *severe*) strengthens the sense of threat.

- (1) Over recent years, the Philippines population have experienced **severe** floods, landslides, drought and forest fires. This is having a **devastating** effect on agriculture, freshwater, coastal and marine resources, health and livelihoods for the poorest communities. (Moving Stories)

Another salient element that in various texts implies a need to migrate against one's own will are the worsening life conditions in the regions affected by climate change-related hazards (e.g., the faltering availability of local resources, which the local communities rely on to survive). The Appreciation attributed to these conditions (e.g. *crowded*, *impossible* in Example 2) convey danger, lack of safety and overall unsustainability. Associated with these instances of Appreciation are those of Affect signalling involved people's suffering (covered in the next paragraph).

- (2) "We stayed there for a week but it was so **crowded** that we decided to leave and go back to the ruins of our house. It proved **impossible** to live there as well, so we left [...]" (Moving Stories)²

Thus, most descriptions highlight the forced nature of people's movements. It can be conveyed by referring to the effects of the phenomenon leaving migrants with no alternatives but to move (Example 3 directly mentions land disappearance), or through Affect, often accompanied by strong feelings of attachment to one's land and willingness to remain there (see the verb *want* in Example 4).

¹ Instances of Attitude contributing to the salience of the elements mentioned are marked in bold in the running examples.

² Quotation marks indicate that the example is taken from a testimony; their absence indicates that the example comes from informational texts or sections of texts.

- (3) “The people in the side of Tebunginako lagoon, they’ve already gone to the mainland because 200 meters of their land disappeared. And the people that lived there, removed. And removed and separated”. (Kiribati)
- (4) “I **don’t want** to separate our family. You know the culture and tradition is so strong here that we were born here, we **want** to stick with our subsistent lifestyle. We know the country and this is our land”. (Newtok)

This type of framing seems overall in line with stereotypes favouring positive attitudes towards forced migrants. At the same time, some elements of complexity are introduced. Firstly, reference to people’s attachment to their homeland and community prevails over their desire to form a new life elsewhere in these texts. This emphasis on the area (as well as the culture) of origin somewhat diverges from loyalty-based stereotypes (see Section 2 above), where immigrants showing attachment and loyalty towards host societies tend to be viewed more favourably. Secondly, some interviewees express awareness of the socio-economic risks entailed in migration (5), as well as in applying for refugee status, which adds to people’s reluctance to move. Thirdly, migration can be temporary, with people maintaining ties with their communities of origin after migrating (6). Fourthly, some authors and migrants address enforced immobility, when people cannot leave vulnerable areas for economic, political or conflict-related reasons (7, for example, deals with the concurrence of COVID lockdowns and floods). Lastly, some instances of migration explicitly characterised as voluntary do appear and are mainly associated with labour migration (8).

- (5) “We don’t want to move to other parts, we don’t know what to do there. We would turn into delinquents. We’d enter into a cycle of poverty which happens in the cities”. (Moving Stories)
- (6) Many then are left with no option but to migrate to cities like Dhaka, while at the same time “keeping one foot in the village” through social ties and remittances, for safety nets and a pathway to return, especially during a crisis. (Bengal Delta)

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- (7) Intersecting impacts of COVID-19 and cyclone Amphan created a peculiar juxtaposition of mobility and immobility for these return migrants, [...]. “There is water in every direction, and we are floating in the middle”. (Bengal Delta)
- (8) Pakistan also has a long history of voluntary migration, which is largely split between unskilled labourers travelling to the Emirates and Dubai and more skilled workers heading for Europe and the US. (Moving Stories)

In sum, authors used Appreciation to describe climate-related events affecting human communities as threatening, while involved people used both Appreciation and Affect in reference to their own situations, affected by climate events. Specifically, they used Appreciation to describe their life conditions as worsening, while Affect had the function of giving salience to their pain and to their attachment to the land, which they did not want to leave. The overall framing may identify climate-related phenomena as the main problem, which threatens human communities and/or worsens their life conditions, forcing people to migrate against their will.

This is in line with the legitimising stereotype that favours migration that is perceived as forced. However, salience is also given to involved people’s attachment to their contexts of origin rather than to their willingness to move and integrate into a different societal context; additionally, migration-related risks, the possibility of migrating only temporarily and the utter impossibility to move (enforced immobility) are acknowledged. These elements contribute to a more complex and nuanced representation of climate migration.

Suffering, violence, victimhood and related need for help

Suffering, trauma, loss and crisis are made extremely salient in affected people's stories, and Affect is mostly used to this end (9). In some cases, oppression and violence are made part of the frames, thus contributing to the representation of involved people as victims, in line with more favourable stereotypes.

- (9) “I just heard that one of my relatives has been swept away by the sea. That’s why **I’m crying**...I would like to relocate but I do not have the resources”. (Ghana)

Affected people’s need for help and support is mentioned in some of the texts, but not without also pointing out the concurrent lack of help and support especially on the part of governments and the international community, sometimes invoking negative Judgement towards decision makers (10). In a few instances, host societies are attributed responsibility in contributing to the crises forcing people to move, through climate-altering emissions and other environmentally damaging operations (11).

- (10) “Only the Fiji government and the people have definitely come forward to say yes we will assist Kiribati [...] **No other nation, no other country has ever come forward** with that”. (Kiribati)
- (11) “And **their factories are actually also contributing to the climate change**, so we would like to ask for a helping hand to the bigger countries”. (Kiribati)

What diverges from stereotypical portrayals of migrants’ suffering are the presence of Affect denoting nostalgia or strong willingness not to leave one’s home, family, community, culture or land, together with positive Appreciation towards them (e.g., “*I don’t want to separate our family. You know the culture and tradition is **so strong** here*”, from Example 4 above). Some texts mention people’s willingness to determine their own future, despite the environmental hazards affecting it. In one instance, help offered to Pacific islanders is framed as participation in a fight that they are already determined to fight by themselves (12). In the short documentary on Kiribati, it is said that residents are aware that any help would be too late and too little for that specific area, but they continue to actively advocate for a proper response to the climate crisis, framing it as a global issue (13).

- (12) “Neither do we want our lands eroded, or our economies destroyed. Nor do we want to become environmental refugees either. We want to stand up and fight. All we ask is that the more affluent nations and the international community in general, help us in this fight”. (Marshall)

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- (13) “[...] we need to talk about carbon emission levels, we need to talk about temperature rises, but in fact what will be achieved once those agreements are reached is of no consequence to our situation”. (Kiribati)

In sum, the texts are in some respects in line with stereotypical representations of migrants as suffering, victimised and in need of help, since they do at times give salience to involved people’s tragic experiences, and specifically to their strong emotional responses, through negative Affect. However, the acknowledgement of involved people’s need for help can be accompanied by implicit negative Judgement about foreign and supra-national political actors who have not so far provided support, but have rather substantially contributed to the climate crisis.

Further complexity arises from the use of Affect and Appreciation to express positive feelings of attachment to one’s own place and culture of origin beyond the suffering that may be experienced in that context, rather than to express a wish for migration and integration into a different context (see also above). Moreover, involved people’s disposition towards self-determination is given salience in some of these texts, beyond the role of foreign help.

Legal (refugee) status

Neither authors nor interviewees in the analysed texts make efforts to frame climate migrants as refugees. Some interviewees even state that they would not want to become refugees (12), which is consistent with people’s reluctance to migrate.

The label “climate refugees”, legally inaccurate although evocative of the forced, traumatic elements of climate migration, is used in three texts (“Climate Refugees Stories”, “Climate Migrants”, “Ghana”); the scope and current potential vs the limits of this label are not however discussed in those texts. All the remaining mentions of migrant status deviate from the stereotype, emphasising the inadequacy of the current legal system in safeguarding climate-related migrants (14).

- (14) “Where will they go? How will they settle down? will they be treated as refugees, can they be treated as refugees?” (Kiribati)

Law-abiding (vs criminal) behaviours

This aspect of integration in host societies is discussed relatively rarely in the analysed texts, also because several among them are about prospective migrants, who still live in their home regions. When reference to law-abiding vs criminal behaviours does appear, it goes against the stereotype. In the *Moving Stories* report, crime is described as almost inherent in the dire socio-economic situation of people moving to large, overpopulated cities in Colombia (5). Within the same document, authors denounce the Chinese government’s criminalisation of internal migrants who become beggars in the urban areas where they re-settle. In a different text, an illegal action, namely becoming a stowaway on ships leaving Ghana is framed as the only way out for people trapped in their villages, rather than as a morally deplorable conduct.

Moderate cultural, religious and political stances

Political stance never appears in the analysed texts. Religion is only mentioned once, in the context of hurricane Katrina – an unproblematic mention from a Western perspective, given that in this case migrants and their host community share a Christian background. Culture, on the other hand, is more relevant to the frames used in several texts, as it is the object of strong attachment on the part of prospective or actual migrants. The key role played by culture in defining the identity of threatened and displaced people, and their determination to maintain cultural identity through their migration experience (15) may seem to partly diverge from the stereotypical features here considered.

- (15) “[...] our plan is one in which we remain as independent and self-sufficient as possible. We wish to maintain our cultural identity and live sustainably wherever we are”. (Kiribati)

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At the same time, culture is represented relatively vaguely, when salient. No reference to values, intercultural differences or similar issues is made, so that the central point sustaining the stereotype – cultural conflict – is not touched upon.

Public engagement in host societies

Contributing to society as a sign of or way towards integration is generally absent from the analysed texts, except for one case. In the news piece on people displaced by hurricane Katrina, one interviewee expresses positive Affect about his job, and frames it as a positive contribution to the community of arrival (16), aligning himself with the stereotype. However, he is a US citizen migrating within his country, which (at least in principle) mitigates otherwise stricter conditions for inclusion.

In a different example, Affect marks the interviewee's wish to achieve integration in his potential host society (17). This desired outcome is framed as full equality with members of the host society, described in terms of doing similar things, therefore potentially adopting similar lifestyles. This challenges the implicit notion that migrants should integrate in host societies proving their loyalty through a greater effort than the one requested of native citizens (Hackl 2022).

(16) “When I was in New Orleans a lot of the jobs I was just basically making a check, but I just **feel** like now I'm making a difference”. (Katrina)

(17) “I really **prefer** to move to an area where I can settle down and act like anybody else in that society”. (Kiribati)

Hard work and contribution to the host economy

There is no explicit reference to hard work as a value or an economic resource in the analysed texts, but some references to work and labour are found. In various texts labour migration is associated with voluntary migration and represented as a way out of poverty, or at least a strategy

to sustain one's economic situation (8). This would be framed negatively – as economic migration – in stereotypical views.

In other few cases, like the one described in Example 16, jobs are framed as a way towards inclusion. Another example is found in the Kiribati documentary, where the local government is said to have devised citizen relocation schemes that include job training to acquire skills and improve their employability abroad. These elements might be considered to be partly in line with positive stereotypes seeing migrants as resources for host societies.

Overall, several stereotypical features generally favouring positive attitudes towards migrants are not made salient in these texts: the refugee status is questioned rather than seen as a goal to be achieved; religion and politics are rarely explicitly mentioned, and culture – while extremely important in defining involved people's identity – is not, in principle, represented as a divisive aspect; in general, migrants' social and economic contribution to host societies is rarely discussed.

On the other hand, the stereotypical belief that simplistically sees law-abiding migrants as more legitimate is indirectly confuted by alternative perspectives on the criminalisation of migration, as well as on socio-economic factors favouring criminal conduct by migrants in some contexts.

A focus on stereotype-challenging elements and beyond

As shown in the paragraphs above, several elements found in the texts analysed challenge the positive stereotypes of migration described in Section 2 above. Because they add complexity to oversimplified representations of migration, these elements may point to perspectives — more or less specific of climate-related migration – which might contribute to a richer and more informed discussion on this issue, as well as on migration in general. This section focuses specifically on positive-stereotype-divergent aspects found in the data analysed; the ones highlighted among the findings described above are here summarised, together with other elements that do not seem to fit in the system of dominant representations and framings considered at the beginning of Section 2.

- There needs to be a global view on the climate crisis: climate-related migration should not only be considered as triggered by specific, circumscribed phenomena. Rather, it is one of many outcomes that will become more and more widespread and involve more and more people in the future. Likewise, climate-altering gas emissions should be considered part of the frame when discussing climate migration.
- (18) “Climate change, even if it impacts Kiribati right now and is undermining our development and all that, it's not about Kiribati alone, it's about our whole world”. (Kiribati)
- Complexity and uncertainty characterise our knowledge about climate change and its relation to migration, and this should be given salience when discussing these issues (19). Elsewhere, climate change is described as a cause for drastic changes in migration phenomena (20). Although this may seem to contradict the acknowledgement of uncertainty, it certainly reflects widespread concerns, and might also have been used as a persuasive device to convince people to give importance and attention to the issue itself.
- (19) Determining the extent to which climate change has played a role in recent displacements in the Philippines is therefore difficult. (Moving Stories)
- (20) Climate change will re-shape patterns of migration and displacement. (Climate migration)
- Part of the problem in the debate about climate-related migration is the lack of knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon among the public and decision makers. The websites “Climate and Migration Coalition” and “Climate Refugee Stories” explicitly frame their work as tackling this problem.
- (21) The relationship between climate change and migration is not well understood by governments and civil society. By bringing our expertise on the issue to people who needed it, we encourage informed debate. (Climate Migration)

- The lack of space devoted to migrants' voices in the public discussion on climate migration (see Section 2) is also problematic.
- (22) [...] Much of our work focuses on the testimonies and stories of people who are already moving due to climate change impacts. We believe that these voices should be central to the debate about how this issue is addressed. (Climate Migration)
- People and communities dealing with the prospect or the experience of migration actively respond to the crises they face. Throughout the analysed dataset, affected people give prominence to their intentions, decisions and responses. For example:
 - they adopt several adaptation strategies before considering moving (23);
 - as emigrants, they send remittances, which contribute to the resilience of those who remain in their communities of origin (24). Remittances might be framed as damaging to host economies in an anti-immigrant perspective;
 - they establish that they intend to migrate with dignity, without giving up on their culture, without being victimised, without becoming refugees, or avoiding what they know from the beginning would be a life of little social inclusion (especially in the cases of migration towards large, overpopulated cities, as explained above). This type of framing is particularly clear in the accounts about and by Pacific islanders (15);
 - they do not intend to move at all (25).
- (23) Smallholders often try a range of adaptation strategies in response to worsening environmental conditions. (Moving Stories)
- (24) With increasing exposure to disasters at home, this flow of remittances from abroad has provided some financial stability for families affected by disasters. (Moving Stories)

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- (25) “If the hurricane finished today I’m ready to come tomorrow. I’m stay right here. Born and raised here and I’m stay here. That’s my town”. (Isle de Jean Charles)

Some of the more explanatory parts in the dataset reframe migration as an active response to the many climate-related difficulties people encounter (26), even when they would greatly prefer not to move.

- (26) How can moving become an empowering way for some people to adapt to climate change? (Moving Stories)
- Everybody who is affected by the negative consequences of the climate crisis should have the same rights no matter the motivation they may have to migrate. This attempt at normalising what is perceived as voluntary migration represents a powerful rejection of the stereotypes that frame forced migrants as more deserving of support.
- (27) Many will be forced from their homes by disasters. Others may want to move as a way of adapting to unprecedented change. We exist to protect the rights of anyone facing these circumstances. (Climate Migration)
- Art can be a way for people to cope with their experiences as well as to bring back and maintain the bond they have with their culture and land.
- (28) “When I create music, I tap into my ancestors and things I learned from the Island. When you’re there, every day you hear the wash of the ocean. Every day, you are in tune with the rhythm of the earth. That rhythm is gone in the U.S. When I do art, I tap into that rhythm. I want to get the rhythm back and save it. Even though we can’t go back, art stops the damage. It changes the world”. (Marshall)
- Forced immobility is as problematic – and as dreadful, for those experiencing it – as forced migration, and is an equally relevant part of the climate migration phenomenon (7).

- Migrants can maintain strong ties with their communities of origin, even by regularly returning. This is framed as a form of self-protection (6).
 - Some of the environmentally human activities exacerbating the effects of climate change in certain areas may be carried out by the same residents who suffer from those effects, because they lack alternative income sources.
- (29) [...] the devastation has increased dramatically in recent years due to rising sea levels and illegal sand mining – often committed by the same people who have lost their fishing livelihoods, desperate for an alternative source of income – that has eroded the coastline, rendering their homes more vulnerable to the encroaching sea. (Ghana)
- Finally, in two cases, more explicit attempts at reframing migration are made. The author of the Bengal Delta text from the “Climate Refugees Stories” website proposes a frame switch concerning the relationship between people and borders, in order to underline the arbitrariness and inequality that characterise current migration policies (30).

In “Climate Migrants”, climate migration is reframed as an opportunity rather than simply a form of emergency relief (31). This would require shifting from an emergency frame for climate migration to a ‘new normal’ frame, which in turn calls for systemic and more carefully planned responses.
- (30) I propose moving beyond what I call the “people crossing borders” framework that has dominated migration theories, and call for developing a deeper critical understanding of how borders cross people, which then place certain groups on the “wrong” side of history, territory, and policy. (Bengal Delta)
- (31) We believe that with preparation and organization, Climate Migration can become an opportunity for cross cultural exploration and problem solving, instead of disaster relief. (Climate Migrants)

5. Discussion

The use of Attitude and the framing of climate migration encountered in the analysed dataset tend to represent migration as a problem, but one that affects people who move, or have to consider moving, contrary to the dominant perceptions of migration as negatively affecting host societies. The problem obviously originates from climate crisis-related environmental phenomena (the consideration is sometimes extended to consider the role of human activities), which affect certain areas and people in a disruptive way. Some among the analysed texts insist on pre-migratory contexts, while others address people's movement away from their homes. The shift of focus from host societies to communities of origin partly prevents a discussion of climate migrants' perception in host societies. However, it emphasises that, although host societies might not always be aware of this, movement is much more often than not experienced as forced, or at least deeply undesirable, in the context of climate-related migration, be it determined by sudden disasters or slow-onset, persisting and worsening phenomena.

Within this frame, people do not want to leave; they suffer greatly both from leaving and from what they experience while moving. The salience given to forced migration and suffering seems to align with positive stereotypical features of migration in host societies, as people who are perceived to experience migration in this way tend to also be seen more favourably, and in need of help. In a way, many of the analysed texts may draw on this type of representation to obtain greater support for people moving for climate-related reasons.

However, representing migrants – instead of host society members – as those who express evaluation allows authors and interviewees to add non-stereotypical elements to the way they frame their experiences and situations. The main one is the coexistence of involuntary movement and affected people's will and active participation in managing their potential or actual movement. Linked to this aspect is their attachment to their home, communities and cultures, which is salient in some of the analysed texts. Single texts

highlight several other elements that add complexity to the representation of climate migration (see Section 4).

Within these frames, negative moral evaluations are implicitly directed at those (governments, wealthier countries, the international community) who are not providing support and protection to displaced or potentially displaced people. Therefore, in all the three websites considered for this analysis, the proposed solutions include spreading knowledge about the issue, supported by affected people's voices, and protecting migrants' rights. This needs to be done, according to the authors, in light of the drastic consequence brought about globally by the climate crisis – which is also why some texts include human emissions as part of the problem, touching on the issue of climate mitigation.

6. Conclusions

In this study, framing and evaluation – in the form of Attitude within the Appraisal system – have been used to analyse a small dataset of informative and narrative texts on climate migration, in order to find out whether and how their discursive construction of migrants relates to the stereotypical assumptions on 'good', legitimate migrants in host societies. Research (see Section 2) has shown that host societies mostly frame migration as a socio-economic and cultural problem. The presence of migrants – particularly the aspects that differentiate them from members of the receiving community – are seen as threatening towards host societies' cultural identity and safety. Migrants themselves are represented as invaders and/or as an economic burden. Consequently, their motives, intentions and actions are overall evaluated as morally wrong. The solution proposed, at the discursive and political level, is to enforce strict control on people's movements, containing and limiting them as much as possible. Within this frame, migration may become less of a problem when justified by force majeure and possibly characterised by traumatic, tragic, violent and/or

discriminatory experiences. These are directly associated with people's need for help and support, often to be issued in a condescending way, which emphasises a certain power asymmetry. Finally, migration only tends to be seen positively when it serves as a resource for the host economy, in the form of (preferably skilled) workers.

The present study highlighted that while the informative and narrative texts here analysed also frame migration as a problem, they focus on how the phenomenon of climate migration negatively affects people on the move or prospective migrants, in a context of forced movement. The main source of evaluation in discourse (be it a subject-centred emotional response, the assessment of the qualities of an object or person or the judgement of someone's behaviour) is thus shifted from members of receiving societies to people directly involved in the movement.

The findings emerging from this analysis are limited by the size of the dataset, which affects result generalisability, and by the fact that annotation was carried out by one person only, which affects the impartiality of the analysis. However, a similar method of annotation might be applied to larger datasets and by different annotators. Moreover, the findings themselves suggest salient elements in the discussion of climate migration whose use could be examined in larger corpora. These may include, for example, some particularly salient indicators of Affect (e.g. words belonging to the semantic fields of fear and threat, sadness, nostalgia and love) or expressions conveying agency (such as verbs *want* and *prefer* or the metaphorical use of the verb *fight* in this context). An exploration of their textual surroundings might furthermore provide more comprehensive insights into the frames used.

Overall, results suggest that, although the analysed texts tend to focus on forced migration and most of them give importance to the suffering of migrants or prospective migrants, the representations of climate-related migration that emerge from them largely diverge from the 'good migrant' stereotypes identified in previous studies. These representations offer alternative frames, and it would be interesting to test whether giving them more space in public debates may favour positive attitudes towards the protection of involved people's rights. Such a change is made even more desirable considering the global and

systemic ramifications of anthropogenic climate change, whereby addressing displaced people's situation from a different perspective might be an incentive to reflect on the necessity and urgency of climate-crisis response in general. In the words of Kiribati Community Organiser Penelise Alofa, "we may be on the front line going down first, it will reach everyone right in the end".

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DARIO DEL FANTE

The Self-representation of Refugees through Pronominal Choice. A Case-study on Migration Counter-discourse in a Collection of Narratives on Refugees by Refugees.

Abstract

This paper explores self-representation of refugees by analysing pronoun usage in a collection of refugee narratives. By adopting a corpus-assisted discourse studies methodology, this work aims at providing insights into how refugees perceive themselves individually and collectively. The analysis reveals a predominant use of the pronoun "I," reflecting an individual identity. However, several narratives also exhibit the consistent use of "we," which is employed in both referential and impersonal contexts, though never in a vague sense. Three primary referents are identified: for the referential use, the family and the community; and for the impersonal use, an undefined generic group, which may refer to any refugee or all of humanity.

1. Introduction

When studying migration¹ discourse across various sources, defined as “a large class of all discourse genres of or about migrants or migration” (Van Dijk 2017: 4), as well as the representation of migration, two key aspects are essential for understanding the relevant literature:

- Country of arrival: this corresponds to the perspective of generally wealthier countries that host migrant populations – the national community of this country is represented as the in-group
- Countries of origin: this refers to the perspective of the countries from which migrants depart, often for diverse reasons - the national community of this country is the out-group

Depending on the perspective from which migration is experienced, the resulting discursive representation differs.

Research has predominantly focused on dominant discourses of migration², emphasizing the production of discourses by in-group communities who perceive migrants from an insider perspective, thereby identifying them as outsiders. Over the past three decades, studies (e.g., Chilton, 1994; El Refaie, 2001; Hart, 2010; Taylor, 2014) have provided valuable insights into the role of mainstream media and host societies in perpetuating dehumanizing representations of migration. The literature highlights a prevailing negative image of migrants as invasive entities threatening the cultural identity of host countries and imposing unsustainable burdens on social services. Specifically, research on news media, social media, community blogs, and political discourse consistently demonstrates how migration is framed as a threat or an invasion.

There are also instances where migration is portrayed positively (e.g., Blinder & Allen, 2016; Salahshour, 2016; Taylor, 2020;

¹ In this paper, I will consider refugees as a subset of migrants. In this context, migrants are defined as individuals leaving their homeland for various reasons, whereas refugees are specifically migrants fleeing war or persecution across international borders. I will use both terms consistently, as this distinction aligns with the conventions in the relevant literature.

² It is clear that discourses about migration from the host community perspective are more likely to focus on immigration rather than emigration.

Isentyeva, 2021). However, such positive representations are often interpreted as serving instrumental purposes for the news media producing them. In these cases, the newspaper itself is ultimately positioned as the beneficiary of the positive framing, being portrayed in a favourable light and receiving positive feedback from the general audience.

This predominant focus on the host-country perspective has diverted research attention away from a neglected "dusty corner" of migration studies (Marchi & Taylor, 2018: 9). Specifically, "counter-discourses and self-representations constructed by asylum seekers and refugees, both in digital and non-digital contexts, have been scarcely explored" (Grasso, 2024: 43). To reinforce this aspect, it is noteworthy what both Georgiou (2018: 47) and Horsti (2016: 15) observed regarding the relationship between the hyper-visibility of migrants in the media—as in the case of the 2015 migration crisis—and the limited space allocated to migrants' personal views and opinions in mainstream news media. Aside from a few important exceptions (De Fina, 2003, 2020; Baynham & De Fina, 2006; Cederberg 2014; Catalano, 2016; Batzke, 2018; Leurs et al. 2020; Spinzi & Zummo 2022; Grasso, 2024), how the experience of migration is understood from the in-group perspective in diverse social, historical, and linguistic contexts represents an area of study which needs more attention. This work is intended to focus on this specific "dusty corner" with the hope of contributing with new knowledge on the studies on self-representation of migration.

On this basis, this work focuses on the self-representation of migration according to two general objectives. First, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the underexplored area of discourse produced by migrants. Second, by examining counter-discourses by migrants, it seeks to shed light on the mechanisms behind the formation of hegemonic discourses (Fairclough 2015) and to reveal how counter-discursive practices are enacted and function. The notion of counter-discourse is drawn from Grasso, who defines it as follows: "Counter-discourses account for discourses that aim at destabilizing the social order by challenging dynamics of power and favouring social change, thus standing in opposition to dominant discursive practices" (Grasso 2024: 43).

To achieve these aims, I have conducted a case study using a distinctive source of data, the *1000 Dreams project*: a collection of interviews where refugees interviewed other refugees. The objective of this research is to examine the relationship between individual and group identity, with particular emphasis on how refugees define themselves in relation to others. Understanding how individuals relate to others provides a foundation for analysing identity, including the ways in which individuals categorize and interpret the world. Specifically, this research focuses on the first-person plural pronoun "we," which serves as an expression of the self within a larger collective identity. For example, the pronoun "we" can take various forms and may refer to different groups, such as a restricted group like a family, or a broader collective like the global LGBTQ+ community.

Three research questions have been posed:

- Do refugees prefer to refer to themselves individually (using I) or as part of a bigger group/community (using "we")?
- What referents can be identified for "we," and what kinds of groups or identities does it signify?
- To what extent is the personal pronoun "we" used in a referential, impersonal, or vague sense?

The distinction between referential, impersonal and vague is taken from Kitagawa & Lehrer (1990:742): referential uses indicate specific individual; the 'impersonal' use applies to anyone and/or everyone; the 'vague' use applies to specific individuals which are not identified or identifiable by the speaker and the hearer. In general, this study focused on subject pronouns, as these are directly tied to the speaker's perspective, enabling researchers to examine subjective versions of reality and the construction of identity. Subject pronouns are also more likely to appear in active voice constructions, wherein the speaker exerts control over the narrative. While the analysis was not confined solely to the pronoun "we," it began by examining its occurrences and usage to understand how different speakers referred to this pronoun in various contexts. The investigation then compared the first-person plural subject pronoun "we" with other subject pronouns, such as "they" and "I," to assess whether shifts between pronouns reveal significant identity-related motivations. For instance, shifts from "I" to "we," or

contrasts between “we” and “they,” can signal alignment with or distancing from specific groups or perspectives.

2. Background - Migration discourse, orientation and perspectives

De Fina and Tseng (2017:382) classify the broader framework of studies examining the connections between language, discourse, and social life, focusing on the role of refugees and migrants in two main strands of investigation. On the one hand, there are studies that approach refugees and migrants as citizens and members of a community, viewing them as real social actors. These works focus on the interactions of migrants and refugees with society or communities, with particular interest in their processes of integration. For example, some studies emphasize the role of migrants and refugees as foreign language learners, focusing on their language proficiency to assess social integration (e.g., Miller 2014; Sorgen 2015; Kosyakova et al. 2022; Bellinzona 2024). Other studies explore refugee identity construction and identity negotiation within new contexts, often using non-linguistic approaches, such as psychotherapeutic tools (e.g., Clayton 2019; Hughes 2019) or analysing the digital environment (e.g., Udwan et al. 2020; Spinzi & Zummo 2022; Aziz 2022).

On the other hand, there are studies in which the identities of migrants and refugees are either the object of representation mainly from the host-country perspective (mainstream discourses of/on migration) or the subject of representation (counter-discourses by migrants/refugee). As previously discussed, the dichotomy between studies on *mainstream* discourses and those on *counter-discourses* of migration offers a useful framework for approaching the most relevant literature on the representation of migration. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of how migratory phenomena are discursively depicted, it is essential to consider the contrast and tension between these two discursive orientations. This body of work explores

the use of language (texts, narratives, and discourses) by and about migrants and refugees across various levels, including oral narratives, newspapers, political speeches, and interviews.

As for the studies addressing mainstream discourses, there is a vast array of work interested in different aspects of language and from different perspectives: metaphors in discourse (El Refaie 2002; Charteris-Black, 2006; Arcimaviciene 2019; Taylor 2020; Del Fante 2024); Critical Discourse Studies (henceforth CDS) and Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (henceforth CADS) on the most recurrent topoi through which migration is represented in the press (Van Dijk 1991; 2017; Triandafyllidou 1999; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Baker et al., 2008; KhosraviNik, 2009; Taylor, 2014; Schröter et al. 2019; Viola and Verheul 2020; Islentyeva 2022), in parliamentary discourse (Ter Wal 2000; Van del Valk 2003; Demata 2017; Boonen et al. 2018), in online forums (Bloch 2016). The general findings from these studies highlight the stereotypical and fixed portrayal of migrants as dehumanized and as threats to the stability of host societies and their discursive image is stereotypically negative (e.g. Baker et al., 2008; Rheindorf & Wodak 2020; Del Fante 2024). What is particularly noteworthy are the recurring discursive patterns observed across different linguistic and geographical contexts. According to De Fina, mainstream representations on migration massively circulate through media due to their mediatic dominance which is a result of the fact that modern nations consider the control of migration flows as a priority also because the appeal to national unity against foreigners is “an easy way for politicians to evade responsibility for economic and social inequalities and to rally popular consensus” (2020: 65).

In recent years, a different discursive image of migration has been emerging from many institutional and grass roots initiatives. As regards institutional initiatives, to name a few, “I Am a Migrant,” the International Organization for Migration’s platform, aims to promote diversity and the inclusion of migrants in society. Other institutional examples include Aware Migrants³ ([awaremigrants.org](https://www.awaremigrants.org/)). In Italy, the association “Carta di Roma”⁴ fosters collaboration among media

³ <https://www.awaremigrants.org/> (Last accessed on 10th January 2025)

⁴ <https://www.cartadiroma.org/> (Last accessed on 10th January 2025)

operators, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and editors to promote respect for and guarantee the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and minorities in general. Recently, the ISMU Foundation (Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity) launched the AWAKE project⁵, which seeks to prevent and combat disinformation about migration. In terms of grass roots initiatives, there is Migrant Voice⁶ (migrantvoice.org), a migrant-led organisation established to develop the skills, capacity and confidence of members of migrant communities. Similarly, The Transcultural Devon⁷, a video-interview project hosted by the University of Essex, documents the polylingual and transcultural nature of Devon while challenging stereotypical perceptions of the area. Among these initiatives lies the *1000 Dreams project*⁸ (see section 4.2), whose materials will serve as the object of study for this work.

All these initiatives represent a fundamental alternative source of information that can complement or oppose mainstream narratives and that contribute to the emergence and formation of the *counter-discourse* on migration.

However, it is necessary to distinguish between works that focus on institutional initiatives and those addressing grassroots initiatives. As highlighted by Chouliaraki (2017), Chouliaraki et al. (2018), and Georgiou (2018), even though certain initiatives or research aim to amplify the alternative and specific voices of refugees, the dominant political powers in host countries continue to enact symbolic bordering practices, namely a mechanism of global journalism through Western news platforms by which migrants are excluded by their space of visibility. For example, Chouliaraki (2017:91) emphasizes the absence of real refugees' faces in news media, which instead prioritize a selfie taken by an actor portraying a refugee. These practices, alongside the geopolitical and biopolitical functions of European borders (Vaughan-

⁵ <https://www.ismu.org/en/project-awake-awareness-raising-campaign-providing-key-elements-to-tackle-disinformation/> (Last accessed on 10th January 2025)

⁶ <https://www.migrantvoice.org/> (Last accessed on 10th January 2025)

⁷ <https://transculturaldevon.exeter.ac.uk> (Last accessed on 10th January 2025)

⁸ <https://1000dreamsproject.com/> (Last accessed on 10th January 2025)

Williams 2015), operate as representational mechanisms of exclusion. Georgiou, analysing both institutional and grassroots initiatives designed to provide space and voice to refugees and migrants, underscores the significance of such efforts. While impactful, these initiatives—particularly institutional ones—risk exacerbating the social and cultural marginalization of migrants and refugees. Georgiou (2018: 55) argues that "the refugee and migrant voices appear as conditional, exceptional, and inferior to European humanity and rationality." By representing migrants in specific ways, such initiatives establish "aesthetic and discursive requirements defining who these people are and who they should be in order to be accepted" (Georgiou 2018: 55). Within these narratives, refugees and migrants are portrayed as respectable, but they are not fully recognized because they remain "vulnerable, irrational, and dependent on European values" (Georgiou 2018: 55).

For this reason, works addressing grassroots initiatives often focus on narratives and interviews that are likely to mitigate the risk of symbolic bordering. In fact, narratives or stories - gathered through various methods and on diverse platforms - are intended to elaborate an experience in presence of an interlocutor and storytelling. Narratives and stories are understood as discursive practices and as a form of social activity that reflects societal beliefs and relationships while contributing to their negotiation and transformation. Through narratives, individuals construct and renegotiate understandings of social realities and reshape the relationships among themselves and, potentially, with others outside the immediate interaction (De Fina 2003:19).

De Fina (2003) employs a discursive analytical approach to the narratives and chronicles of Mexican immigrants in the U.S.A., this approach is situated within the long-standing traditions of narratology (Bakhtin 1981), narrative analysis (Labov 1981), and discourse analysis (Fairclough 2015). The author studies two aspects of identity in language and discourse: the portrayal of the self in specific social roles and the articulation of belonging to groups and communities. To achieve her research aims, De Fina focuses on pronominal choices in responses to questions, agency (namely, the linguistic strategies used to describe actions), and identification categories employed to express identity. In particular, De Fina emphasizes the importance of

approaching the linguistic representation of immigration from a discursive perspective, as discourse is “a practice constitutive of reality and therefore central to our understanding of how meanings are generated” (De Fina 2003: 217). Among her specific findings, De Fina underscores the complexity of self-representations: understanding the self-representation of Mexican migrant workers requires reference to “wider social processes and cultural expectations that frame and surround” their migration (De Fina 2003: 221).

Catalano (2016: 187–193) provides another example of a study on non-institutional discourses. The author compares the language used to discuss immigration and migrants with the language migrants themselves use to describe their own experiences, based on interviews with 77 individuals who have experienced migration in various ways. Catalano focuses on the metaphors migrants use to present themselves and identifies striking differences. While dominant discourses often employ generally negative and conventional metaphors, such as WATER, WAR, AND CRIMINALS, migrants reframe these metaphors to weaken their negative impact and transform them into new ones that produce a humanized image. For instance, DANGEROUS WATER is reimagined as the new host country, and THE ABILITY TO SWIM corresponds to a successful INTEGRATION. While these findings might seem expected, the clear distinction between dominant discourses and counter-discourses is noteworthy.

Batzke (2018) conducts a qualitative study on the individual experiences of undocumented migrants as conveyed through autobiographical narratives within the context of the DREAM Act discussion in the USA. The DREAM Act, drafted in early 2001, constitutes the first and only proposed pathway to legal status and, ultimately, citizenship for undocumented migrants. Through a diachronic analysis spanning from 2001 to the pre-Trump era, Batzke provides a comprehensive examination of the dynamics underpinning self-representation.

The study reveals that, in the struggle for rights by marginalized groups such as undocumented migrants, it is common for these groups to develop narrative strategies that establish both inclusions and exclusions. In this context, personal narratives often prioritize necessity over truth. Examining the revendications of migrants, it becomes

evident that individuals who are not perceived as normative or "suitable" for U.S. citizenship—according to the criteria of the same undocumented migrants reclaiming rights—are systematically excluded. Thus, strategies employed in the pursuit of rights create new exclusions.

Grasso (2024) examines the visual and non-visual discourses articulated by a group of refugees, both on the digital platform Twitter and within the broader context of Australian detention policy. This research seeks to understand how refugees construct their individual and collective identities. Grasso describes these identities as expressed through interpersonal relationships and are characterized by constant transitions—fluid and context-dependent. This dynamic portrayal contrasts sharply with the stereotypical and discursively stable image of refugees commonly presented in dominant media over the past thirty years, which tends to be homogenized and reductive. The author emphasizes the importance of studying counter-discourses, as they provide alternative perspectives that challenge the conventional logic of mainstream information and invite a focus on alternative discursive images.

In general, I believe it is essential to conduct research on both aspects. On the one hand, focusing on mainstream discourses and their representation of migration is valuable, particularly when the linguistic structures and the motivations behind such structures are analysed. This approach sheds light on the intricate relationship between power and language. On the other hand, analysing alternative discourses and the self-representation of migrants and refugees is equally important. Such research highlights underexplored areas and enables more comparative work on the dynamics between mainstream and alternative discourses on migration.

3. Theoretical framework

Within the broader research on the self-representation of migrants and refugees, this work serves as a case study examining how refugees present their identities through language.

Here, I intend migration primarily as a process in which a person undergoes a moment of crisis, marked by separation from their homeland and a transition from one familiar socio-cultural and linguistic context to another. During this passage from the home community to a new one, the relationship between individual identity and group identity comes under strain, as the person must adapt their identity to fit the new context.

The success of this process of integration depends largely on the individual's ability to construct a new identity. This ability, in turn, determines the extent to which the integration process is successful or not.

Discourse regarding migrants and discourse by migrants should be understood in a complementary, almost mirrored way. If we consider discourses on migration as "attempts at reconstructing the threatened 'home identity' of the respective host society" (Musolff & Viola 2019: 4), then, conversely, discourses by refugees can be seen as similar attempts to re-establish their lost "home identity" within a new context. From a related perspective, Sayad (2002) describes this dynamic as a "double absence," while Triandafyllidou (1999:66) argues that the concept of national identity inherently entails the notion of difference. She explains that "its existence presupposes the existence of Others, other nations or individuals, who do not belong to the ingroup and from which the ingroup seeks to differentiate itself in order to emphasise its distinctiveness and uniqueness" (1999: 66). Within this line, this paper sets out to explore how refugees linguistically construct their identities by means of group relations.

Following De Fina (2003), this analysis seeks to replicate an exploration of social orientation in relation to positioning, namely the position of the speaker with respect to others. Positioning indicates how

identities are deployed and negotiated in narratives (Deppermann 2015).

In other words, this concept refers to how speakers position themselves along “the dimensions of interdependence versus autonomy from others and of personalization versus depersonalization of experience” (De Fina 2002: 51). A personalized and independent narrative, in this context, reflects the presentation of a unique perspective on life. Conversely, a depersonalized narrative conveys a general experience that can be adapted to the group or community to which the speaker belongs, or even to a universal audience.

These dimensions are understood as fundamental aspects of identity and can be investigated through language by examining specific linguistic features. Among the elements that express identity, this study focuses on the use of personal pronouns, which play a central role in identity construction, in a collection of narratives. Narratives are particularly significant because they enable individuals to both “create and negotiate understandings of social realities” and “continuously modify the social relationships that exist among them and, potentially, with others who are not present in the interaction” (De Fina 2003: 19). In language, pronouns are a flexible set of items, “dependent upon context for their meaning” (O’Connor 1994: 51). According to Bull and Fetzer, “through the selective use of pronouns, speakers can adopt a footing that displays either greater or lesser involvement, depending on what it is they seek to achieve” (Bull & Fetzer 2006: 9).

Specifically, “the use of personal pronouns can directly indicate forms of positioning via different forms of including, excluding, and generalizing” (Dannerer 2022). This paper focuses on the use of the subject pronoun “we,” examining its referential, impersonal, or vague applications (Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990), as explained in section 1. In narratives, this pronoun typically refers to a group that includes the speaker and an indefinite number of others. Furthermore, “we” carries a significant persuasive function, as its use signifies group membership and identification. In the context of refugee and migrant integration into a new social and cultural environment, relationships and group belonging are crucial aspects that shape and influence personal identity. By analysing how each speaker employs the pronoun “we,” it is possible to gain insights into their identities, their relationships with

others, and their connections to both the nations they have left and the ones in which they now reside, and, ultimately, their relation with the self. As Fairclough (2000: 152–153) points out, the concept of “we” can be somewhat ambiguous but rhetorically effective. By analysing a speech by Tony Blair, he demonstrated how “we” could be used to vaguely reference different identities within the same textual area. For example, “we” may refer to the political party, Great Britain, or an undefined group. This oscillation in personal narratives demonstrates how individuals variably position themselves in relation to their social orientation. The study of personal pronouns in migration discourse is particularly valuable, as it can reveal whether individuals use “we” to present themselves as part of an isolated community within their country of arrival, as part of their family of origin, or as part of the country of arrival. In other words, the first-person pronoun “we” can illuminate the speaker’s position regarding the process of integration, as well as how they perceive both their country of origin and their country of arrival in terms of dependency and independence.

4. Data and Methodology

4.1. The dataset – The 1000 Dreams Project- About Refugees, By Refugees

The data for this research was collected from the website of the *1000 Dreams Project*, produced and supported by Witness Change, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the living conditions of marginalized groups and amplifying their stories. The project spanned several countries across Europe (e.g., Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Spain) and engaged individual storytellers with refugee backgrounds who conducted interviews with refugees throughout the continent. At the time of writing, a total of forty storytellers have completed an intensive training program and received mentorship from the Witness Change team. These storytellers conducted interviews and

created portraits of other refugees. Each storyteller was provided with photography equipment and benefited from sales to publications, print sales, and exhibition fees.

The storytellers typically conducted interviews within their communities or with refugees who shared a linguistic or cultural background. The interviews followed a flexible structure but generally focused on the refugee's journey, starting from when they left their home country to their arrival in the host country. The interviewer typically began by asking where the refugee currently lives, allowing the conversation to flow naturally. The interviews often concluded with a question about the refugee's dreams and any particular message they wished to convey. Lastly, there are particular demographic features which have been considered.

The project represents a storytelling initiative that challenges mainstream narratives about refugees through a collection of 1,000 refugee stories from across Europe. The project aims to counter the most prevalent discursive images of migration, which often depict migrants either as dehumanized masses—hordes, floods, or invading armies—or, in more sympathetic portrayals, as helpless, defenceless victims. Even when media coverage presents a more sensitive description of migration, the constraints of space and time often limit the number of stories shared, risking the reinforcement of stereotypes. The *1000 Dreams Project* seeks to raise awareness of the vast diversity and complexity of refugee experiences.

Martin Rojo (2013), De Fina (2020), and Grasso (2024) have emphasized the importance of alternative discourses or counter-discourses. As Grasso (2024: 42) notes, “the counter-discursive productions of marginalized groups are pivotal to raising awareness about the social inequalities to which they are subjected and to producing discursive perspectives that represent their interests. Therefore, *the 1000 Dreams project* has been selected as an example of a collection of counter-discourses in the form of personal narratives for two main reasons. First, all the interviewers have refugee backgrounds, as the project's motto clearly states: “About Refugees, By Refugees.” This aspect is fundamental in reducing potential biases and social imbalances that could arise if the interviewer came from the host country. Secondly, these stories represent a unique example of migrant

self-representation, not linked with mainstream media constraints. The interviews and interviewers are not subject to any specific informational agenda other than the desire to tell a story. This is an important factor since the two perspectives involved in the interviews are closer in this context, with respect to situations where the interviewer looks at migration from a different perspective than the interviewed.

While all the stories are collected and published in English, not all the interviews were originally conducted in this language; many have undergone translations. Unfortunately, information about the translators and the translation process has not been provided. Therefore, I have chosen to include only those stories collected in English-speaking countries, specifically from refugees living in Ireland and the United Kingdom. This selection comprises a total of 55 stories, where it is likely that the interviews were conducted in English.

4.2. Methodological Considerations and Outline of Methodology

Although this study aligns with the tradition of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (henceforth CADS) (Partington et al., 2013; Baker, 2023) through its adoption of a combined qualitative-quantitative methodology applied in two distinct steps, the initial plan was to use only qualitative techniques by employing a discourse analytical approach (Fairclough, 1992; 2015). However, after collecting a total of 55 stories (cf. section 4.2) and given the total size of the dataset of 217.000 words, I was inclined to treat these texts as a corpus, examining them from a broader perspective to gain an initial general overview of pronoun usage across the 55 interviews.

Consequently, I decided to incorporate a preliminary corpus-based quantitative stage⁹ (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Brezina 2018; Baker 2023) into my research to refine the results, by using Lancsbox X (Brezina & Platt 2023) and then to adopt instead a CADS approach, as

⁹ It is important to emphasize that, given the nature of the dataset and the fact that it does not constitute a representative sample according to Brezina's (2018) concept of representativeness, the quantitative analysis does not aim to produce generalizable results.

already mentioned. As discussed in the relevant literature (Baker, 2023; Partington et al., 2013; Taylor & Marchi, 2018; Gillins et al., 2023), combining the “quantitative rigour of corpus linguistics with the social perspective of qualitative approaches to discourse analysis” (Marchi & Taylor, 2018: 4) offers a methodological solution ‘because of the ways it addresses some of the weaknesses and exploits the strength of its constituent parts’ (Vessey 2013: 3). The quantitative techniques of Corpus Linguistics provide neutral starting points, while the inherently qualitative nature of Discourse Analysis helps address a common criticism of quantitative studies: their tendency to overlook context(s).

5. Analysis

5.1. Preliminary Quantitative Analysis

As briefly mentioned in Section 4.1, the first step of the analysis involved a distant reading of the narratives, focusing on pronoun usage. Specifically, I calculated the frequency distribution difference between the personal pronouns “we” and “I” across the texts. Although the dataset is not representative and thus the quantitative analysis cannot be deemed fully reliable, this procedure was conducted to provide a general overview of the distribution of first-person pronouns (singular and plural) across the stories. The aim was to identify narratives with a significant occurrence of the pronoun “we.”

At first, I calculated the frequency of occurrence of the personal pronouns “we” and “I” using the *Text Tool* function in Lancsbox X. This tool provides an overview of all files (texts) in the corpus, including their size, wordlist, and lexical diversity. It also facilitates an in-depth analysis by presenting a table with a breakdown of frequencies and relative frequencies for each file. Figure 1 presents the raw

frequency¹⁰ of “I” and “we” for each interview in the corpus. Each interview is labelled with two letters, representing the initials of the interviewee. The initial impression was that every interview contained more first-person singular pronouns (“I”) than any other pronoun, and there were no interviews showing a higher frequency of “we”. This outcome is somewhat expected, given the nature of personal narratives, where the use of “I” is naturally more frequent. However, this result partially addresses the first research question concerning whether refugees prefer to refer to themselves individually or as part of a community. In this dataset, refugees seem to favour their individual identity over the collective. However, the graph offers an intriguing perspective. As often discussed in the literature on migration discourse, the portrayal of migration in mainstream media and social media—especially when produced by non-refugees or non-migrants—tends to adopt a dehumanizing perspective, emphasizing generalizations over individual identities. Linguistically speaking, and often using metaphors (e.g. Taylor 2021), migrants and refugees are presented as large groups, with particular emphasis on their numbers. The picture that emerges from these data is significant, indicating that shifting the perspective from which the migratory phenomenon is approached leads to changes in its linguistic representation. In fact, I believe it provides a valuable insight for critically analysing migrants' self-representations. Rather than focusing on newspaper articles about migrants crossing borders or social media posts and comments that critique migrants' stories from an external perspective, this graph demonstrates how the texts examined here offer an internal viewpoint. This internal perspective emphasizes the specificity of biographical details over the generalized characteristics typically associated with the stories of large groups.

¹⁰ I used raw frequency since the purpose was not to compare texts with one another, as their differing lengths would affect the final result. Instead, my aim was solely to compare the occurrences of “I” and “we” within the same text.

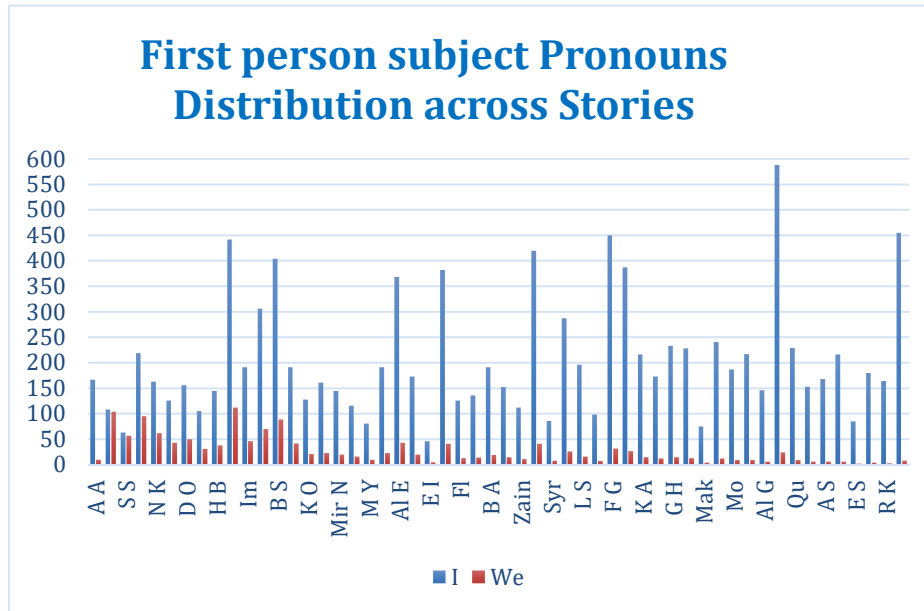


Figure 1. Pronoun distribution in the 1000Dreams Corpus

Given my interest in the pronominal use of the first-person plural subject pronoun “we,” I analysed the interviews and selected a subset of 13 interviews where the pronoun “we” was relevantly frequent. Since there was any baseline to follow, I just based my decision looking at the data and I found that looking at the stories ordered in terms of ratio between “I” and “we”, I found that there was a sweet escalation until the ratio passed from 22% to 16% (See Table 1). At that point, I decided to define a threshold, including only those interviews where the pronoun “we” constituted at least 20% of the occurrences of “I.” This allowed me to focus my analysis on stories where the interviewees were likely to have used the pronoun “we” significantly. Moreover, considering that the corpus contained both questions and answers, the possibility that “we” also occurred in the interviewer’s questions could have introduced some noise. This issue was mitigated by focusing on interviews with a considerable frequency of “we.” In fact, the smaller the occurrence of “we,” the higher the probability that the interviewer’s

contributions had a greater impact on the overall frequency of “we” in the interview.

Interview	Raw freq. of “I”	Raw freq. ff “We”	Ratio of “we” to “I”
O A A	108	104	96,3
S S	63	57	90,5
A Al	219	95	43,4
N K	163	62	38,0
S A	126	43	34,1
D O	156	50	32,1
Wul	105	31	29,5
H B	145	38	26,2
Sh	442	112	25,3
Im	191	46	24,1
L P P	306	70	22,9
B S	404	89	22,0
J S	191	42	22,0
K O	128	21	16,4
AMA	161	23	14,3
Mir N	145	20	13,8
Zol	116	16	13,8
M Y	81	10	12,3
R Y	191	23	12,0
Al E	368	43	11,7
E I	46	5	10,9

Table 1. Overview of the Distribution of personal pronouns in the *1000Dreams Corpus*.

This sub-corpus which served as the basis for a qualitative analysis aimed at interpreting this pronoun switching. Specifically, I close-read each story to understand the identity underlying the pronominal use and categorized each pronoun according to its referent.

Based on this interpretative qualitative reading, conclusive remarks and interpretations were drawn. Lastly, a brief methodological reflection. The use of quantitative techniques is not intended to respond to “the demands of positivism within the social sciences”, in line with Brown (2024: 485). Instead, quantitative analysis serves as a trigger or, better, as an interlocutor for the subsequent qualitative in-depth analysis.

Subsequently, as already discussed, I narrowed my analysis to the smaller subset of 13 stories. Figure 2 below illustrates the distribution of "I" and "we" in each interview of the sub-corpus. Table 2 summarizes the information regarding their provenance and, as you can see, involved people predominantly coming from the Middle East area.

Interviewee	Provenance
OAA	Afghanistan
SnSl	Iraq
AbA	Syria
NK	Egypt
SA	Iran
DO	Kurdistan/Syria
W	Eritrea
HB	Iran
Sh	Kurdistan/Iraq
Im	Uganda
LPP	Turkey
BS	Kurdistan/Turkey
JS	Syria

Table 2. Interviewees' provenance

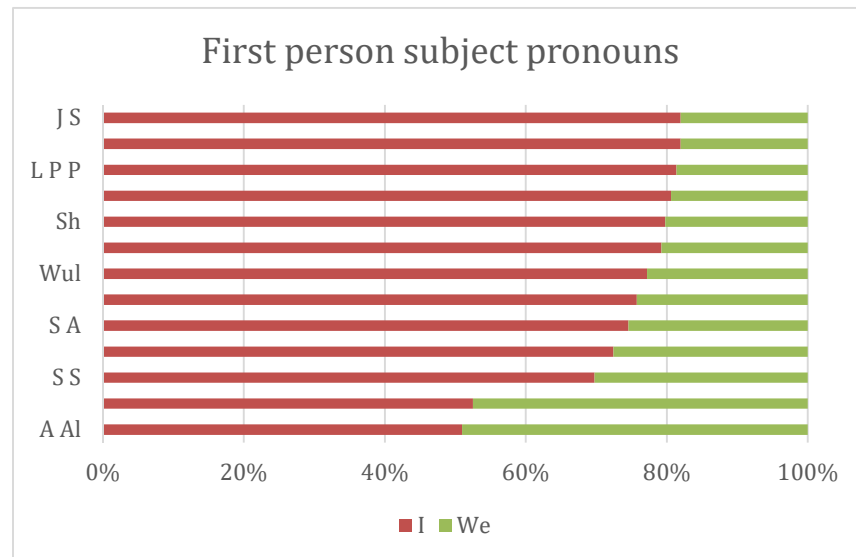


Figure 2. Ratio between “I” and “We” in the selected 13 stories.

This small collection of narratives was then qualitatively analysed, with a specific focus on the subject pronoun “we.” I examined the referential meaning of the pronoun to identify and define the plural identities conveyed by its use.

5.2. *Qualitative analysis of the pronoun “we”*

The qualitative analysis revealed the presence of both referential and impersonal uses of the pronoun “we,” as discussed in Kitagawa and Lehrer (1990), while no vague uses were identified. With regard to the referents of the pronoun “we,” we identified the following:

- 1) Generic “we” – in this case the referent can be inferred from the context and the pronoun applies to the humanity in general or to the refugee in general – (Impersonal)

- 2) The Community (Referential) – in this case the referent is a broad notion of community, which varies depending on the speaker
- 3) The Family (Referential) – in this case the referent is the family, in all its variety of forms

As expected, the pronoun “we” does not refer to a single, consistent type of identity throughout all the narratives. Table 3 below shows all the identities for each narrative (each narrative is listed according to the initials of the interviewee), with the number of occurrences of “we” found for each category. Table 4 summarizes the distribution of each category. As you can see, the two referents which correspond to the referential use, namely Family and Community occur more frequently (31 occurrences) than the impersonal one (21 occurrences).

Story	Identity referred to by the pronoun “we”	Occurrences
OAA	Family	1
	Community (Local)	1
SnSI	Generic we (Refugees)	1
	Family	2
AbA	Generic We (Humanity)	1
	Generic we (Refugees)	1
	Community (Local)	1
	Family	3
NK	Generic We (Impersonal)	1
	Family	4
SA	Generic We (Impersonal)	5
	Family	2
DO	Family	2
W	Generic We (Impersonal)	3
HB	Generic We (Impersonal)	3
	Family	3
Sh	Generic We (Impersonal)	1

	Generic We (Refugees)	1
	Family	1
Im	Community (Local)	3
	Family	5
LPP	Generic We (Impersonal)	3
	Community (Homeland)	1
	Family	1
BS	Community (Local)	1
JS	Generic We (Impersonal)	2

Table 3. Overview on the pronouns referents for each narrative

Reference	Occurrences	Use
Family	24	Referential
General We	21	Impersonal
Community	7	Referential

Table 4. Occurrences of the references in the stories analysed

5.2.1. *Community*

In this case, the interviewees used “we” to refer to a broad notion of community¹¹, which varies depending on the speaker. The analysis shows that there is no clear distinction between communities; rather, there is a degree of generalization ranging from the local community—such as the neighbourhood or the people they commonly interact with—to a wider community, such as the LGBTQ community or their motherland community in a foreign country.

In this regard, I identified that the distinction introduced by Tönnies (2001 [1887]) between *Gemeinschaft* (communal society) and *Gesellschaft* (associational society) were particularly useful for my analysis and proved valuable in explaining the different types of

¹¹ Although this type of reference was the least frequent in the dataset, it is given greater attention in the discussion because its interpretation addressed different aspects of refugee identity and their positioning.

communities identified in the study. In his seminal work on sociological theory, Tönnies defines *Gemeinschaft* as a communal society connected by natural will (*Wesenwille*)¹² and *Gesellschaft* as an associational society, comprising groups of communities linked by rational will (*Kürwille*). The former refers to rural societies, characterized by natural rules of solidarity and cultural similarity, where people maintained direct, face-to-face relationships with one another and were primarily bonded by emotions. The latter refers to modern cosmopolitan societies, shaped by rational self-interest aimed at achieving specific objectives, with clear and formalized rules created to support this purpose.

In (1)¹³, the interviewee, narrating about her new life in England, commented on her relationship with the LGBTQ group she became part of. The interviewee does not introduce the argument on herself, but the interviewer does.

- (1) Q: And you also told me that you are a part of African LGBT group.
A: Yeah.
Q: How like how often do you meet them before COVID?
A: **We** used to meet every Saturday. That's the date, but COVID has stopped everything.
Q: Yeah, and how do you feel being a part of African LGBTQ group?
A: That group has, it boosted me because **I** was almost down. Yeah, one a friend who told me. No, the friend who...**I even I didn't have** a GP, then a friend directed me to the GP. **When I went to the GP, I** told them my story. And **they** took me, **they** told me to go to LGBT.
Q: Wow. And how do you feel like when you go and see these people in the group?
A: **We** are always happy chatting, laughing, a lot of stories, even if you go to a club.
Q: Nightclub?
A: Yeah, **we** go there and dance, **we** drink, **we** dance, **we** chat. That is so cool.

(IM – 1000Dreams Project)

An interesting pronoun shift is observed, moving from the contraposition between the first-person singular “I” and the third-

¹² Natural and spontaneously arising emotions and expressions of sentiment.

¹³ From this point forward, questions will be marked as 'Q' and answers as 'A.' Additionally, I have emphasized in bold all the pronouns under analysis and the passages deemed relevant to the discussion.

person plural “they,” which may have been used to refer to an undefined group of people or as a gender-neutral singular form corresponding to the General Practitioner, to the collective “we,” which refers to the LGBTQ group. This pronoun shifts seems to reflect the integration process that the person experienced. LGBTQ groups can be inserted into the category of communal society.

The interviewees also used “we” to refer to a specific ethnic group or national community in a foreign country.

- (2) But sometimes when I really started I read the news about Kurdistan and again continue the war, yes I felt bad but I know the like me too many Kurdish people, the fight in their life with art with a journalist like you and with the literature, with signs, with too many things Kurdish wanted to say. **We** are here. **We** are live. **We are. We are. Yes, that we are different. We don't have any state.** But **we** live and we we we we can't not officially what we have like the you have an official name but this name not yours. But you are different like, like, as my official name release from the Turkey because for within you know the forbidden Kurdish language and surname. But **we know we are Kurds.**

(BS – 1000Dreams Project)

In (2), the interviewee's story focused on the Kurdish diaspora, with the interviewer asking whether her ability to deal with challenges was connected to her Kurdish cultural background or if it was something she developed independently. In the discussion, the interviewee attributed her resilience to her Kurdish cultural background and practices. The pronoun “we” is repeated through the use of anaphora as a rhetorical device, to reinforce her sense of belonging to her in-group—a stateless population—emphasizing their collective resilience in the face of challenges in a foreign country. In this case, the Kurdish population can be seen as a middle ground between a communal society and an associational society. While the Kurdish nation appears to align with the definition of an associational community—given that Kurdish people have the shared objectives of recognition and structured methods

to achieve them¹⁴—Kurdistan is a stateless nation. It lacks official recognition, and therefore, a natural will is necessary to maintain cohesion among the different Kurdish communities living around the world.

- (3) Q: How's your life been since you came to Europe and here? In terms of the difference between being here and being in Turkey? What do you think is good and what's bad?

A: That is, there are pros, and there are cons. Of course, that's **my** country, where I was born. Where my past is, my family, my friends. But here, too, I express myself more **clearly**, I express myself more **freely**. **I** feel like **I** have more self-esteem here. That's the difference. There, in Turkey, you cannot say your opinion, you cannot act as you feel, you cannot dress as you like, you cannot walk the way you want. (...) ¹⁵ But I didn't see anything like that here. No matter what clothes you wear, you get the same dignity when you go somewhere. They make you valuable, they consider you as valuable. They do not assess your appearance in your clothes. You are accepted as you are. They welcome you for who you are. (...) But this is not the case in Turkey, unfortunately. You know, here even if you don't have money in your pocket, you can dress up and go somewhere and you will be accepted there. **Nobody knows you don't have any money in your pocket**. Hahahah. Turkey is very much a materialist country. People first look at what you wear. That's how **we** were raised. When **we look at something**, this is for sure. **We** have a lot of biases. I saw there's no prejudice here, and it made me very happy.
(LPP – 1000Dreams Project)

In (3), the interviewee also used the pronoun “we” to refer to his home country when the interviewer asked about the differences between the host country and the home country. As you can see, the interviewee celebrated the host country as a place where one could possibly express freely himself/herself, and denigrated the home country, in this case Turkey, as a place full of biases, where people would pay more attention

¹⁴ An example is the Kurdish Human Rights Project (<https://www.khrp.org/>), a registered charity established in 1992 in response to the genocide, war crimes, and human rights violations occurring across the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, the Caucasus, and beyond. By leveraging their extensive expertise in international human rights law, the organization aims to uphold the human rights of all people in the Kurdish regions and beyond.

¹⁵ For a matter of space, along the article I will remove some portions of text which are not particularly relevant for the analysis. However, you can find the full transcript at <https://1000dreamsproject.com/>.

to appearances than the substances. Interestingly, when he spoke about his homeland, he used the inclusive first plural pronoun, considering himself still part of the culture and of a community he left. In this case, Turkey is an associational society, since it is a proper Nation.

Two cases were also identified where much larger communities were implied, despite the presence of fuzzy boundaries (4-5). In (4), the interviewee was describing the reasons why he left his homeland. Here, the possessive pronoun “our” was used to identify the quite vague and wide group of revolutionaries behind the (initially non-violent) rebellion in Syria.

- (4) Q: Okay, let’s go back a little bit and ask you, why did you leave Syria in the first place?

A: (...) When the Arab Spring started in 2011, it came to Syria. Some children wrote on the walls, “It’s your turn, Doctor”; they meant Bashar Al-Assad who is an ophthalmologist, so Naguib Mahfouz who was the governor of Daraa caught those children, cut their fingers and insulted their parents a lot. I mean, he insulted tribal elders and notables in the country. Some people say that he cut the children’s genitals, others say that he cut their fingers. This is where the revolution began. **Our** revolution was against injustice, corruption and nepotism, people wanted freedom and nothing more. **Our** revolution was not a revolution to receive positions or receive the capabilities of a particular entity, no, it was all about removing corruption and removing the ruling group. So, the war or revolution, started to affect the cities one after another, just like fire that’s burning wheat. It keeps burning more and more. In one way or another, I mean, the system took advantage of the revolution. **Our revolution**, for less than six months was not armed, it was a peaceful revolution, with a bottle of water in the right hand and a flower in the left. (...)

(AbA – 1000Dreams Project)

In (5), the “we” used by the interviewee indicated the Muslim community in London in the aftermath of 9/11.

- (5) Q: You came to the UK in 2001. This is a war led conflict. You came a few months before September 2001 and the big conflict against Islam, against Muslims. Here in the UK, after these months, the few years in this country, do you feel this people is afraid from you, they are discriminate you or not?
- A: (...) So personally with me, there was no nothing happened to me or to my family. But after that, **we** will have a big fear of that kind of situation that not only **us**, all Muslim, **they** had, **they** were a very bad situation, but the police was very helpful every time **they** were calling **us**, especially on the mosque when **we** were praying. **They** send **us** police to guard to secure the prayer

people **they** are praying. So, yeah, there was a bit difficulty that time, even though now that there are some things happen and they blame the Muslim and even do some after the 9/11 some any problem happened, **they** blame Muslims. **They** said, oh, this is because of Muslims happen like that but now after 2015, 16, that's now people know that not all Muslims.
(OAA – 1000DreamProject)

In these instances, the referent did not clearly denote a specific community—namely, a group of people living in a particular area and sharing common interests, social characteristics, or nationality. In both cases, the interviewee remains somewhat vague despite providing information about the religion and ethnicity of these groups. This makes these instances of "we" refer to more specific referents than those categorized as Generic We, as discussed in Section 5.2.3.

5.2.2. *Family*

When Family was the referent of the pronouns "we", the interviewee presented themselves shifting from one single person, to be part of a collective entity as the family is.

- (6) Q: OK, how has life been since you arrived in Europe? What's what's been good about being here and what's being difficult?
A: I've been in Europe for 20 years, so that's a difficult question to answer. But **I** can tell you what life was like before coming to Europe, and that was a different country in a different school on a very regular basis. So **I** went to 12 primary schools in a six year period. That's how many times **we** moved, when **we** left Iraq and then coming to England, the most amazing thing that **I** appreciate the most is having a home and a base and a place that **we** can call our own, which even in the first few years of being here, **we** didn't get used to the idea. **We** didn't get accustomed. **We** kept thinking **we** had to leave. (...)
(SaSI – 1000 Dreams Project)
- (7) Q: Well, have you ever imagined that you would have to deal with a situation like that?
A: **We** have never imagined that we would have to be in a situation like that, we never thought that we would have to leave Syria. In our country everything was available. We never thought that we would have to leave and become refugees outside our country. Praise be to Allah, it is what it is. And now you feel you have developed the feeling, that you are now able to deal with the circumstances. It is the human being's nature to adapt to any situation, any conditions, any atmosphere, even in the desert or coping with cold. If you won't adapt to the situation you will go crazy. You have to adapt in one way or

another.

(...)

Q: Well, do you feel like you have lost or gained things going through this experience?

A: **We** have learnt a lot but at the same time we try to forget or ignore because if we had kept thinking about everything **we** would have gone crazy a long time ago. **We** have things that we should forget in order to be able to live.

(...)

Q: Well, and the coronavirus? You arrived before the pandemic started, right

A: I arrived in 2017.

Q: So it was different for you than before, how did Covid-19 affect you?

A: The first month, **I** stayed at home, I mean, quarantine in every sense of the word. I would go out to get some stuff then go back home. **I** would disinfect, clean myself and take a shower, it was something unknown, something new. Then I started to spend time with self-education online but I was unable to learn, if I don't have a face-to-face tutor it's impossible for me to learn. I have a garden outside so **I** planted everything you could ever think of. I ordered the seeds online from Syria and I planted them here but some of them died. Generally, it was a very terrible situation to stay at home all day, there was great deal of pressure on me with my wife and my children, you see them all day and night and that puts pressure on you.

(AbA – 1000Dreams Project)

As demonstrated in examples (6) and (7), the interviewees respond to the questions using both first-person singular and first-person plural pronouns. Specifically, in example (6), the interviewee refers to herself as “I” when discussing education but switches to “we” when describing the travels her family and she experienced. Similarly, in example (7), the speaker uses “we” to refer to himself and his family but shifts to “I” when discussing his experiences with COVID-19. This shift between pronouns also appears in other interviews, where interviewees often use “we” to refer to their families.

Examining this use of the pronoun “we,” we might interpret it as a linguistic manifestation of social positioning, where the individual remains connected to their family. This could refer to their family of origin (with parents) or their new family (partner). From the perspective of those considering the individual in the context of integrating into a new social system, this use of “we” might indicate a form of resistance or a tendency to remain anchored to a safe, small community. It is not my purpose to argue that individuals who use “we” to refer to their family are unwilling to integrate. However, I propose that such

occurrences could signal an orientation where these people perceive and position themselves as in relation to more familiar traditions and cultures. This, in turn, may be interpreted as an indication of the challenges they face in the process of integration.

5.2.3. *Generic We*

The “generic we” represents a problematic use of the pronoun “we” in the context of these narratives. Whilst referring to the Community and the Family, the narrators positioned themselves in a specific situation of the discursive space giving specific references to the hearer and the interviewer, in this case the pronoun “we” were used in a vague sense: the references were not identified or identifiable from the context and were not clearly stated by the speaker and the hearer. In this case, I identified two types of referents.

Firstly, as in (8) and (9), there are cases where “we” is used referring as “impersonal we”, namely without, and does not directly refer to a specific group community, but it is related to some kind of collective entity to which the interviewee belongs.

- (8) Q: You flew directly?

A: Yes, I flew in, I came on a visa, as a tourist. (...)

Of course, each country, each community has a different dynamics in itself. There are bad things here, too. I mean, this place is a flesh. Everyone's so good. No evil, no death, no theft. There's no such thing. But at least I feel like myself. I exist as myself. I dress as I want, I talk as I want. I don't pay attention to my walking anymore. (...) They say your walk looks so sweet, so sympathetic. I liked it. I mean how small and funny these details are actually but how important it is to a person. It's always been like this throughout history. Man has always turned to himself and searched for himself. All the books are written for this. All the songs, all the poems composed for it. It's what it's written for again. I mean, **we've** always been looking for ourselves, looking for ourselves, searching for our essence. What are **we**? Who are **we**? What do **we** want to be? Why do **we** exist? **We've** always been used to their questions.

(LPP – 1000Dreams Project)

- (9) Q: Do you consider yourself a European?

A: **We** live in a world that is in constant transition. **We** are crossing everything and it has nothing to do with geographical boundaries and **we** are always crossing even ourselves. This is a global product that **we** are experiencing in this century. Therefore, in this century **we** don't even have time to think about

our personal experiences. What happens to us controls us in a way that we cannot think about ourselves. (...)
(SA – 1000Dreams Project)

One interviewee overtly referred to humanity in general, as in (10).

- (10) Q: So what are some things that bring you joy, you enjoy most?
A: Um. Making people happy, contributing to **us**, **to the human being**, that makes me happy. Um, comforting, empathy. (...)
(Sh – 1000Dream Project)

The use of the generic reference could be connected to the interviewees' need to speak on behalf of the majority, a large group, or even all of humanity, as seen in example (10).

Lastly, I observed an alternative usage where the generic reference pertains to slightly more specific groups. Although their boundaries remain indistinct and their identity is general, it is not entirely impersonal. In examples (11) and (12), the interviewees refer to a broad, collective category which seems to encompass all refugees.

- (11) Q: OK, so we really appreciate your answering all these questions. Is there anything you would like to add that might help people in Europe better understanding the life of refugees here?
A: You mean Europeans to understand? Refugees are humans. They'd just like you. They could be your sister. They could be your mother. They could be your dad. They could be your brother. **We're not different. We're all the same people.** There's nothing special **about us**. **We** all had a home and we couldn't stay there anymore. And that's all there is to it.
(SnSI – 1000Dream Project)
- (12) Q: Okay. How do you spend your time? Do you work? How do you spend your whole day?
A: I arrived to the UK in 2017. From 2017 until 2019 (for almost two years), I used to spend around five days a week studying English in college because I didn't know the language. I studied it until my English became strong, then I got my driving license, I trained and then got it, and then I went to work partially, for 16 hours per week. Of course, as you know, It is mandatory to learn the language. **Without the language, we can't work here at all.**
(Im – 1000Dream Project)

We can argue that in both examples, there is a subtle assumption that

“we” is used to appeal to cohesion among refugees and to foster the perception that no differences exist among them, regardless of their provenance.

6. Discussion

The narratives analysed in this study contribute, in a sense, to the formation of a counter-discourse on migration. These personal accounts of specific life stories challenge and counterbalance the mainstream discursive image of migration, which is predominantly shaped and disseminated by the media and, more significantly, by those who observe migration phenomena globally but are not necessarily migrants themselves. This existential distance can be identified as the primary factor contributing to the discursive image offered by members of the host country, which is often biased and inclined towards an "othering" effect. Instead, these personal narratives serve as counter-discourses, as they strive to offer an authentic and alternative image of migration. As analysed, this image is vivid and multifaceted, reflected in the different identities conveyed through the same pronoun, “we”.

The refugees' stories presented here show a relatively balanced distribution of pronoun use, with 31 instances of referential usage compared to 24 instances of impersonal usage. This pronoun operates along a spectrum, with one pole representing a broad concept of group (such as all of humanity or any refugee) where the pronoun is used in an impersonal sense, and the other pole representing a narrower, more intimate group where the pronoun is used in a referential sense—such as the local community or the family as the primal unit. The narrower the referent of the pronoun, the more detailed the descriptions provided. Depending on their social positioning—specifically, the dimensions of interdependence versus autonomy from others or personalization versus depersonalization of experience—how these individuals use and perceive themselves within the community varies. The more specific the referents of the first-person plural pronoun, the more precise the

refugees' perception of their social position within the host society. In this context, it can be argued that this linguistic phenomenon reflects the process of integration. Upon arriving in a new country, individuals transition from a depersonalized experience—marked by the novelty of their surroundings—to a more personal and interdependent experience of life.

Moreover, as regards the same impersonal use of the generic "we", it can be further interpreted in two distinct ways. As Fortanet (2004) explains, there are exclusive uses of "we," which exclude the hearer or audience from the reference, and inclusive uses of "we," which encompass the hearer or audience within their scope. When the generic "we" refers to all of humanity, it functions inclusively, is used impersonally, and avoids specifying any particular group membership. In these cases, refugees convey general messages intended for everyone which are aimed at connecting with others. Conversely, when the generic "we" refers specifically to refugees, it assumes an exclusive function, drawing a clear distinction between those who are refugees and those who are not. This demarcation reflects the division between the in-group and the out-group, a distinction often perpetuated by the host-country community.

7. Conclusive remarks and further work

This paper aimed at contributing new insights to the study of self-representation in migration offering a case-study on the use of pronouns in a collection of narratives.

I found that, as expected in the case of personal narratives, the analysis of the collection of stories revealed that refugees interviewed showed the tendency of referring to themselves by using the subject pronoun "I".

In addition, I also found different stories where refugees consistently used the pronoun "we". The analysis of these narratives revealed that the pronoun "we" was used in both impersonal and

referential use, but not in a vague use. Three main referents were identified: for the referential use, the family and the community; and for the impersonal use, an undefined generic group, which could refer to any refugee or to all of humanity.

Two primary social positionings emerge within this plurality. On the one hand, refugees position themselves within a global community—unspecific and autonomous—where they identify simply as refugees or as part of humanity. On the other hand, they situate themselves within a small, intimate community—the first and smallest encountered in life: the family—where they assume the roles of parent, child, or sibling. On this basis, as previously discussed, it is important to reconsider the dehumanized discursive image that emerges in the literature on the representation of migration from the host country's perspective. When examining refugees' self-representation, their identity is, on the one hand, individual, but it is also plural and diverse, reflecting its complexity and fragmentation—or, in Sayad's terms, its crisis. This highlights the importance of counter-discourses in counterbalancing the communicative power exerted by mainstream dominant narratives on migration. Consequently, providing more media space and conducting further research on these counter-discourses should be strongly encouraged.

As evidenced by the excerpts, the data are highly promising and suggest intriguing avenues for future research. Notably, these include exploring the binary opposition of "us vs. them" and investigating whether refugees exhibit discrimination towards other minority groups, particularly through the lens of an intersectional perspective (Vessey 2024). Furthermore, it would be interesting to extend the study to other languages or to analyse data enriched with detailed metadata which would give the space for triangulation (Egbert and Baker 2016).

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MARIASOPHIA FALCONE

Youth Perspectives on Climate Change: Applying the Narrative Policy Framework to a Corpus of GenZ Online Environmentalism

Abstract

Teenagers and young adults, currently grouped under the generational label of GenZ, have recently taken a leading role in the efforts to address climate issues, both by taking to the streets through climate strikes and by engaging online in the cause of climate mitigation (Belotti et al., 2022). For this cohort, climate change has been a constant reality in their lives (Swim et al., 2022), resulting in emerging narratives centering their role as climate activists and their contentious relationship with older generations (Andersen/Fløttum, 2022). Narratives on climate change have been central in shaping collective opinions on this issue, making them relevant for climate mitigation as well (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2017). As any political endeavor is driven by a need to change a certain situation or respond to a challenge, texts on climate change have too been modeled as stories or narratives with complications, reactions, and resolutions (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2013a). Building upon these premises, the present paper aims to explore narratives of climate change in a corpus of web texts from three GenZ environmentalist organizations (GCWebC). The analysis follows the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) as illustrated by Fløttum and Gjerstad (2013b), combined with a corpus-driven perspective (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). In particular, grammatical keywords, examined within their broader co-text, have served as a starting point in investigating narrative components, in an attempt to bridge the micro and text level. Ultimately, the investigation is driven by two primary aims: determine and quantify the extent of narrative structures within online climate change texts by young environmentalists and assess whether these reflect the peculiarities of youth environmentalism and generational idiosyncrasies.

1. A generational perspective on climate change

Climate change has become an ever-present reality for younger generations, influencing significantly their views, behaviors, and values (Swim et al., 2022). This is especially true for teenagers and young adults, who are currently grouped under the generational cohort of Generation Z (GenZ), comprising individuals born between 1996 and 2012 (Seemiller/Grace, 2016 and 2018; Dimock, 2019 and 2023). Having experienced regularly occurring extreme weather events and yearly record-breaking temperatures, members of this generation, as a result, have taken a central role as activists in tackling climate challenges. More specifically, over the last few years, younger individuals have taken to the streets through school strikes and demonstrations while also engaging online and harnessing digital affordances for this cause (De Moor et al., 2021; Belotti et al., 2022).

Preliminary research on GenZ by Seemiller and Grace (2018 and 2016) has revealed that environmental concerns are considered central in the lives of younger individuals. In addition, they possess a remarkable depth of understanding regarding these issues. Their concerns encompass not only the widely recognized topic of global warming, but also extend to highly technical and specialized areas, such as renewable energy, recycling, and wildlife protection. Furthermore, two critical aspects of GenZ's concerns about climate change have emerged: a growing worry for the depletion of essential global public goods, such as clean air and land, and for the increasing acceptance of resource exploitation for personal gain. Consequently, it can be assumed that young people may view climate change as the most pressing issue facing society (see also Swim et al., 2022).

Climate change, therefore, is perceived as a shared experience among younger cohorts, acting as a point of convergence and a formative event

universally experienced by adolescents and young adults. This shared experience is further emphasized by the role of high schools and universities, which are the institutional environments that normally contribute to shaping the generational identity of young people. In these settings, climate issues are increasingly prominent, as shown by the high student participation in climate protests and the reliance of young climate activists on scientific arguments for climate mitigation (Belotti et al., 2022).

However, this focus on climate change as a shared experience and, consequently, the collective responsibility to act on it, may be contributing to the emergence of a generational divide. As revealed by Andersen and Fløttum (2022), a concerning narrative centering climate change as a matter of intergenerational conflict is emerging. This highlights how the younger generation may be perceiving a lack of acknowledgment from older generations and struggles to have its concerns on climate issues heard. Indeed, young people have a significantly higher interest in environmental issues, as they are likely to experience the effects of current environmental decisions. Older generations, on their part, have a responsibility to ensure that younger ones inherit a planet that is livable and not irreversibly damaged. Therefore, a narrative of intergenerational conflicts may be gaining ground, putting matters of intergenerational equity at the center of the climate debate.

As a generational perspective towards the struggle against climate change may be gaining traction, it is important to consider also how young people are pressuring institutions to implement effective actions and working to raise public awareness (De Moor et al., 2021). The resulting sense of generational belonging shaped around the climate crisis, may have the potential to provide additional meaning to what it means to be young in contemporary times (Belotti et al., 2022).

2. Analyzing climate change stories: the Narrative Policy Framework

Resorting to specific narratives, intended as stories used to communicate climate knowledge (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2017), plays a fundamental role in fostering the understanding of climate issues, which is one of the most important aspects in climate mitigation (see Fløttum, 2017; Hulme, 2017; Russo, 2018). These stories help individuals to cope with the reality of climate change by providing context and meaning as a way to make sense of the complexities and difficulties associated with environmental issues. In this respect, narratives on climate change can influence views and opinions as well, both individually and collectively, making them exceptionally relevant for climate mitigation. Therefore, from a climate-knowledge dissemination perspective, a narrative approach can be instrumental in aiding the understanding and explanation of complex climate texts and documents (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2017)

Arguably, climate change texts are frequently structured as narratives that include complications, responses, and resolutions. This narrative structure arises from the necessity to address specific situations or challenges, which is typical of all texts of a political nature, including environmental ones. In this case, political issues are made to resemble plots, i.e., presenting a problem or complication followed by a series of events and actions aimed at solving the initial complication (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2013b).

Yet, climate change texts have their own peculiarities (Fløttum, 2010). For this reason, the narrative policy framework (NPF) as theorized by Fløttum and Gjerstad (2013b) is particularly suited to investigate the possible presence of narratives in climate change texts. The framework is grounded in the assumption that texts about climate change typically follow a narrative structure. This structure comprises a plot that progresses from

an initial situation, through a complication, a reaction, and a resolution, leading to a final situation. In particular, the NPF is based on the five-part prototypical structure outlined by Adam (1992, 2008), which includes: (1) *Initial situation*, (2) *Complication*, (3) *Reaction*, (4) *Resolution*, and (5) *Final situation*. However, according to the NPF, in order for a climate text to have a narrative structure, the presence of all five components is not mandatory. Core components of the narrative are considered to be the *complication*, *reaction*, and *resolution*. This is because climate texts of a political or policy nature usually follow the same structured plot, i.e., an initial situation is disrupted by a complication, prompting a reaction that seeks to restore balance, ultimately leading to the resolution. The final situation represents a new state of stability, which can be either positive or negative with a possible lesson or moral (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2017).

Text linguistic approaches differ from the view of narratives proposed by the NPF. For instance, one of the main traditional elements of a narrative is the distance between the story itself and the moment it is told, as well as the separation between the story and the storyteller (Filliettaz, 2001). In contrast, the types of texts on which the NPF focuses do not exhibit this separation; rather, these texts, because of their nature, have to be closely tied to the real-world situations in which they are presented (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2017). More specifically, the framework is grounded in the idea of *homo narrans*, which posits that narratives are essential for how individuals process information, communicate, and reason (Jones et al., 2014). Therefore, one of the key purposes of narratives in climate texts is that of aiding information processing and decision-making, which does not require any distance between the story and the storyteller.

Texts that are typically the objects of the NPF (policy-oriented or political in nature) tend not to adhere to the traditional structure of storytelling. Climate change texts tend to be more deliberative than narrative because they focus on constructing arguments, reformulating ideas, and making comments to achieve specific rhetorical goals, using

storytelling in the strict sense only occasionally. Therefore, they tend to resemble argumentation, lacking a clear temporary beginning, middle, and end. However, they can still be understood as narratives, even if they are structured in formats like arguments and conclusions. This is because any political endeavor is driven by a situation that needs to be changed in response to challenges (i.e., *complication*), resulting in tension between events, actions, and actors, all core aspects of narratives. Additionally, other aspects shared by climate change texts and traditional narratives are dramatic events, the inclusion of actors or characters, categorized as heroes, villains, and victims (Gjerstad, 2017).

Fløttum (2010) has identified a fundamental narrative structure typical of climate change texts, referred to as climate change narrative. This structure well exemplifies most representations of climate change in discourse, as shown below:

- (1) Initial Situation: *CO2 emissions have drastically increased over recent decades.*
- (2) Complication: *Global warming has resulted in severe issues in many regions worldwide.*
- (3) Reaction: *International leaders and organizations have arranged to discuss potential solutions to climate change.*
- (4) Resolution: *However, no binding agreements on concrete actions were reached.*
- (5) Final Situation: *Climate change continues to be a major threat to the planet, disproportionately impacting those who have contributed the least to the problem.*

This prototypical representation of a climate change narrative highlights how climate change texts can lend themselves to a narrative plot due to their dramatic nature. Specifically, in these narratives the setting refers to widely accepted facts, such as historical events or national boundaries. The main

and ever-present complication is climate change itself, leading to additional problems and new stories (e.g., those related to economic or technological changes). The hero is someone who makes a positive contribution, the villain causes harm, and the victim suffers as a result of these events. These roles can apply to various entities, including individuals, groups, nature, or countries. Finally, the moral represents the policy solution (e.g., government actions to support renewable energy) (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2013a).

Finally, climate change narratives should not be viewed as standalone occurrences, but as part of the broader story of human existence and daily life, reflecting humanity's ability to adapt to survival challenges throughout history. Therefore, examining how these narratives appear in various types of climate change discourse can be instrumental to the necessity of developing strategies to cope with changing climate conditions, while simultaneously exploring the significant role of language in climate mitigation (Fløttum, 2017).

Building on this perspective, this study examines how climate change narratives are constructed in online texts by young GenZ activists their possible peculiarities. More specifically, the analysis aims to answer two key research questions:

- (1) To what extent do online climate change texts by young environmentalists present narrative structures?
- (2) Do the narratives reflect the distinctive features of current youth environmentalism or present a generational perspective on climate change?

3. Materials and methods

3.1. The GenZ Climate Website Corpus

In order to investigate the possible presence of narratives in the texts of young GenZ climate activists, a corpus of texts from the websites of three GenZ environmental organizations was compiled. The organizations included were Generation Climate Europe (GCE), Youth and Environment Europe (YEE), and E&U-for the Climate (E&U), which were sampled after a survey process conducted in 2021, in which organizations were interviewed to check for research criteria.¹

Texts for the corpus, whose time frame ranges from 2018 to 2022, were collected manually and automatically using the #Lancsbox software (Brezina et al., 2020).² The corpus comprises a variety of text types, namely blog posts, reports, press releases, and activist manuals. Despite this variety, the texts align by their use of the same type of platform and purpose: to provide in-depth information on climate issues. In particular, the compiling process was guided Biber's (1993) sampling frame, which requires text in a corpus to align in terms of primary channel, setting, addressee, purpose, and topic. This ensured that the corpus reflected a cohesive communicative function within the discourse community under study. The final composition of the GenZ Climate Website Corpus (GCWebC) is illustrated in Table 1, while the distribution of text types

¹ The selection process involved interviewing organizations to confirm alignment with the criteria: age group (1996–2012) and main communication medium(s).

² Integrating the two methods was necessary because of the diverse structures of the organizations' websites. While #Lancsbox facilitated data scraping, manual collection was more time-efficient for websites with inconsistent navigation or content, as the software's outputs would have required extensive cleaning.

across the three organizations is shown in Table 2.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Tokens</i>
Generation Climate Europe	63,829
Youth and Environment Europe	123,371
E&U for the Climate	28,787
TOT:	215,987

Table 1. Composition of the GCWebC.

NAME	Blog posts	Reports	Press Releases	Activist Manuals
Generation Climate Europe	19	16	3	-
Youth and Environment Europe	-	2	-	16
E&U for the Climate	14	7	-	-
TOT:	65	30	10	5

Table 2. Distribution of text types across the three organizations.

The choice to focus on online climate texts from GenZ activists was motivated by a reflection on the significant role played by digital platforms in climate activism over the last few years, especially among younger generations. In particular, the recent wave of climate activism, sparked by the #FridaysForFuture movement, has highlighted the importance of online platforms to mobilize and amplify climate action. As a result, digital tools have been used both to organize movements and as expressive spaces for sharing experiences and ideas. This has enabled young climate activists to integrate their online and offline networks seamlessly, using these platforms to share climate-related experiences while contributing to mitigation efforts (Belotti et al., 2022). Therefore, online texts on climate

change by young climate activists are to be considered particularly significant for the investigation of climate narratives as defined above.

3.2. Methodological approach and procedure

The NPF highlights how tension lies at the core of the complication portion in a prototypical climate change narrative, often involving opposing arguments. This tension between events, actions, and actors can manifest linguistically or text structurally through connectives, causal markers, value-laden words, or presuppositions. It can also be reinforced by elements such as reported speech, negation, or epistemic markers, which introduce alternative or competing narratives (Fløttum/Gjerstad, 2017). Therefore, identifying tension between events serves as a primary indicator of the presence of narrative structures in the text.

Given that the analysis was performed on a corpus rather than a single text, it was necessary to identify the structural indicators of narratives, starting at the word level and progressing to the macro level through an analysis of co-text. Specifically, the investigation followed a corpus-driven perspective (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Brezina, 2018; McEnery & Brezina, 2022), beginning with a quantitative exploration of the corpus to identify text segments likely to contain narrative structures. This was done by extracting keywords from the corpus using SketchEngine software (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). In this case, the analysis followed Groom's (2010) closed-class keywords-only methodology, focusing exclusively on grammatical keywords. This was based on the understanding that most potential indicators of narratives according to the NPF, such as connectives, causal markers, or negation, are to be found typically among grammatical words rather than lexical ones. Consequently, the cleaning process involved removing lexical words while retaining function words, which according to Groom (2010) are to be considered suitable candidate to investigate macro-

level features of highly specialized corpora.

Among the resulting key function words, connectives ranked higher than the other aforementioned potential indicators of narrative structures and were, therefore, selected as the primary possible markers of narratives in the corpus, guiding the subsequent qualitative analysis of narrative structures. To this end, it was posited that the presence of connectives could correlate directly with the presence of narrative structures, as indicated by the NPF, particularly in one or more of their five prototypical components. In this sense, the main hypothesis was that the presence of certain connectives may indicate a recurring pattern of presenting contrasting viewpoints, reflecting the tension aspect that is central to climate change narratives.³

The concordance lines of the connectives were then analyzed to determine whether narratives were present. In cases where narratives were identified, the analysis focused on how the connectives contributed to creating tension between events, actions, and actors, indicative of the complication phase. Additionally, the broader context of the connectives was examined with the aim of identifying the other components of narratives, namely *Initial situation*, *Reaction*, *Resolution*, and *Final situation*. To this end, the resulting textual portions were also checked for other potential indicators of narratives (e.g., causal markers, value-laden words, presuppositions, reported speech, and epistemic markers) which were considered as optional elements that could further confirm the presence of narratives. Lastly, the analysis sought to determine whether the narratives created by young environmentalists exhibited distinctive traits of contemporary youth environmentalism online, especially in cases where

³ This may be the case, for instance, of *but*, which normally indicates a contrast between two ideas or two opposing views, or *however*, which introduces contrast or contradiction, while acknowledging a preceding statement (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Therefore, connectives may signal a reasoning process that resembles storytelling in an organized way, particularly concerning tension, complications, and outcomes making them indicators of narratives in the text.

generational perspectives on concerns, values, and ethical stances were present.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Quantitative overview of connectives in the GCWebC

The exploration of narrative structure in the GCWebC started with an examination of the grammatical keywords in the corpus. Table 3 shows the highest-ranking grammatical keywords for the GCWebC, with the presence of some key connectives such as *but* (1,847.33), *however* (916.72), *because* (537.07), *thus* (453.73).

<i>Keyword</i>	<i>Fpm</i>	<i>Keyword</i>	<i>Fpm</i>
TO	30,293.49	WHO	1,106.55
OF	29,413.81	WHERE	1,037.10
THAT	8,815.35	WOULD	1,027.84
AS	7,565.27	HOWEVER	916.72
HAVE	6,611.51	COULD	865.7929
IT	6,509.65	WHILE	717.6358
BY	4,940.11	BECAUSE	537.0693
OR	4,333.59	THUS	453.7310
CAN	4,296.55	AGAINST	412.0618
THEY	2,819.61	WHETHER	319.4637
BUT	1,847.33	ITSELF	236.1253
IF	1,527.87	ALTHOUGH	217.6057
MAY	1,152.85	HIS	152.787
MUST	1,134.33	TOWARDS	50.93

Table 3. Grammatical keywords for the GCWebC.

As can be seen from Table 3, the connectives *but*, *however*, *because*, and *thus*, appear to be particularly key in the corpus. Most importantly, this group of connectives shares a capability of indicating reasoning and tension in the text, a central aspect of climate narratives, making them particularly suited as indicators of narrative structures.

Based on the results of the keywords list, the possible quantitative significance of narratives in the corpus could also be assessed. This was done by looking at the distribution of the connectives (*but*, *however*, *because*, *thus*) across the different text types in the corpus, namely activist manuals, press releases (PRs), reports and blog posts. The resulting distribution is illustrated in Table 4 below, based on the connectives' frequency per million.

<i>Connective</i>	<i>Blog Posts</i>	<i>Reports</i>	<i>PRs</i>	<i>Activist's Manuals</i>
BUT	934.09	3990.77	0	17057.74
HOWEVER	382.84	2228.18	547.15	6534.84
BECAUSE	153.09	1499.28	0	3750.91
THUS	536	871.08	304.07	1814.89

Table 4. Distribution of connectives across text types in the GCWebC.

In all categories, *but* and *however* appear to be the most frequent, especially in activist manuals and reports (17057.74 and 3990.77 for *but*, 6534.84 and 2228.18 for *however*), while *because* and *thus* are used much less frequently (532.48 and 453.63 combined fpm respectively).

PRs are the least represented text type in the corpus and have, consequently, the least use of connectives overall, with fewer instances of *however* and *thus* (547.15. and 304.07 respectively) and no occurrences of *but* and *because*. Despite the limited significance of PRs in the corpus, the nature of these texts should be taken into account when considering the distribution of connectives and, consequently, the possible presence of

narratives. PR texts can be thought of as aiming to deliver clearly the organizations' positions while minimizing the presence of opposing arguments or complex explanations. Therefore, the limited use of connectives might indicate a preference for more monoglossic discourse, that would represent the organizations' own position and not allowing other contrasting viewpoints.

Blog posts show a significant use of *but* (934.09), while other connectives are used sparingly (e.g., *thus* with a fpm of 536). *But* often entails the engagement in the text with opposing viewpoints or present contrasting ideas, reflecting a more narrative approach. However, the sparing use of other connectives in blog posts might indicate that, while blog posts incorporate some narrative elements, they may not develop narrative structures fully.

4.2. Types of narratives in the GCWebC

As previously mentioned, narratives in the GCWebC were found starting from the exploration of the most salient connectives, i.e., *but*, *however*, *because* and *thus*. To identify the possible different narratives, the concordance lines of these connectives were manually inspected to find the components of narratives as indicated by the NPF. This process also aimed at identifying recurring narratives and resulted in three main types.

The first type of narrative identified concerned climate change as a matter of intergenerational justice, as illustrated in Example 1:

- (1) The world is facing an unprecedented environmental crisis. *Initial situation*
- (2) In response, young people across the world call for climate justice as they are expressing their concerns and demands in non-violent protests, campaigns, and direct actions [...] Usually, these tend to be one-time events that aim to achieve a specific goal. *However*, after one such event takes place people often part ways, regardless if it succeeds or not. *Complication*
- (3) Now it's time to change it and ensure a long impact on youth environmental

organisations and movements! After hundreds of thousands of students and young people join global climate strikes, youth movements have become an essential feature of the positive change and sustainable transformation of today's society. No matter if they are gathering in the streets or posting on social media, young people demand climate action which will address their concerns and needs. *Reaction*

- (4) We believe that the scale of the environmental crisis we are currently facing demands a rapid and better-structured response which will actually involve young leaders not just as a token. *Resolution*
- (5) The voice of young people and the future generation has to be better recognized and involved in the current and future developments of both climate action and environmental decision-making at all levels. *Final situation*

In this example, the use of several devices to create a narrative can be noticed, conveying a central message of the necessity of youth involvement in climate justice. Initially, the current environmental crisis is presented as the initial setting of the narrative (1). The complication portion is indicated through the description of young people's efforts that, despite their significance, do not always lead to sustained impact, highlighting a need for change. The contrastive connective *however* serves to introduce the complication, namely the temporary and limited nature of these efforts (2).

In the following portions, temporal markers can also be noticed, signaling transition into the subsequent portion of the narrative (*now*), while further emphasizing urgency. Furthermore, a more emotional appeal can also be found in the reaction, along with value-laden language (e.g., *positive change*). Here, youth climate movements are presented as central to positive societal transformation. In addition, young people (*hundreds of thousands*) are portrayed as heroes working for a greater cause (3). This leads also to the resolution (4), which introduces the stance of the organization, i.e., advocating for a better involvement of young leaders in climate-mitigation efforts. Along the same lines, the final situation (5) emphasizes the need for recognition and inclusion of young voices in climate decision-making, and the importance of youth leadership in addressing current environmental challenges.

A second type of narrative could also be detected. This time, in text

portions where more technical matters were discussed, as in the following example:

- (1) A main challenge of EU environmental law has been its proper implementation, meaning that environmental obligations continue to not be applied properly, even decades after they entered into force. This is a problem in itself *because* it means that environmental standards regarding e.g. emissions are not being met, objectives of cornerstone laws such as the Water Framework Directive are not achieved, or protected areas are not properly managed. *Initial situation*
- (2) *However*, it is also a problem beyond the obligation in question as not complying with legal obligations is also a rule of law problem. *Complication*
- (3) The rule of law is a key democratic principle, enshrined also in Art.2 TEU. At its core, it means that everyone is equal before the law and that all institutions and bodies exercising public powers are bound by the law, the law framing and legitimising the extent of their powers, and that they are subject to the control of independent and impartial courts. It means that the law is taken seriously and respected by all, including governments. *Reaction*
- (4) Where this is not the case, acts or omissions must be challengeable (justiciable) in a non-discriminatory, fair, transparent and effective process by everyone with a sufficient interest and those breaking the law must be held accountable. At EU level, this means that all EU institutions are bound by the law, including international law, and must comply with it. *Resolution*
- (5) This sets a bad example but also undermines the EU's aspirations to be a global leader for democracy and environmental protection. What happens now does not just determine whether or not the EU continues to be in breach of international law (which is a big deal) but also whether and how we can challenge decisions that affect our current and future lives [...]. As young people, we want to be involved in decision- making, but we must also be able to hold institutions to account in the implementation of commitments. *Final situation*

In Example 2 the narrative structure is used to illustrate the ongoing challenges surrounding the enforcement of EU environmental law (1). The negative consequences of this failure are introduced in the complication section, aided by the use of the contrastive connective *however*, further highlighting how environmental standards are not being met (2). The reaction (3) provides a detailed explanation of what the rule of law entails

and positions it as the solution that must be upheld to protect both democratic principles and the environment. Arguably, this section of the narrative may be presenting the role of the rule of law in relation to environmental protection with hero and protector-like qualities, as if it were a character in this story. This is particularly evident in the use of *enshrined, everyone is equal before the law, it means that the law is taken seriously and respected by all, including governments*. The resolution (4) presents a vision of how non-compliance should be managed, emphasizing accountability and transparency, thereby providing a solution to the issue illustrated above. The last portion (5) highlights what is at stake for the EU, presenting the concluding state of current actions and potential developments ahead. More specifically, the presence of a temporal reference (*what happens now*), emphasizes the narrative nature of text by reinforcing temporality and introducing a critical moment in which future decisions are foreshadowed. Interestingly, though this example concerns a highly technical matter, a narrative structure could still be detected, along with the other prototypical characteristics of narratives in climate change texts as presented by the NPF, namely, value-laden terms (*key democratic principle*), and a moral imperative (*we must also be able to hold institutions to account in the implementation of commitment*).

A third type of narrative emerged in the corpus, revealing an intersectional approach to climate change by the organizations (Example 3).

- (1) Scholars, historians and proponents of environmental justice acknowledge that certain environmentalist rationalities [...] mirror Western-centric biases. *Initial situation*
- (2) Mainstream environmentalism has *thus* remained strongly white and middle-class in character. It has repeatedly neglected the experiences and rights of people of colour [...]. *Complication*
- (3) Herein lies the weakness of the environmental movement: it traditionally seeks solutions "from the very demographic that is most complicit with causing and benefiting from exploitation and environmental degradation". *Reaction*

- (4) A widespread misconception has been that environmental protection has been primarily driven by Western activists [...]. Youth climate advocacy and action for change in different corners of the world have taken place for decades. The voices of environmental activists from the Global South have been blatantly silenced by systemic racism. [...] Therefore elevating racial justice within the movement has been a constant struggle, despite the scientific evidence that demonstrates that racial and ethnic minorities are the communities most at risk from climate change.
Resolution
- (5) Climate justice will never be achieved in a world that is deprived of racial and ethnic justice, therefore it is imperative to uplift the voices of BIPOC activists and amplify their narratives, as they are key to solving the environmental crisis. *Final situation*

In this example, a narrative representing the intersection of environmental justice and racial equity is presented. Initially western-centric biases in environmentalism are acknowledged (1), and then the complication is introduced. Here, the complication is represented by how mainstream environmentalism has remained predominantly white and middle-class, while ignoring the experiences of BIPOC (2). The reaction consists in the recognition of this failure that has weakened the environmental movement (3). Instead, the contributions of activists from marginalized communities, especially those in the Global South, have to be recognized, integrating racial and environmental justice (4). In the final situation, it is argued that true climate justice is unattainable without addressing racial and ethnic inequalities (5). In this passage, multiple narrative devices can be found including, introducing contrasting views (*thus, herein lies*), temporal markers (*for decades*), causality (relationships between biases, systemic racism, and the recognition of non-western environmental groups), value-laden language (*complicit, exploitation*), as well as reported speech. Moreover, similarly to the previous examples, in this case too are the actors mentioned portrayed in terms of the villains-heroes-victims paradigm: mainstream environmentalists are depicted as villains, grassroots organizations as heroes, and marginalized communities as victims respectively.

Overall, it was observed that the first narrative structure accounted for approximately 3.8% of the 810 total occurrences of the connectives *but*, *however*, *because*, and *thus*. The second type of narrative appeared in about 3.2% of the total occurrences, while the third type was less frequent, representing approximately 1.7%. These percentages reflect instances where all five narrative components, as defined by NPF, were fully realized as in order to find recurring qualitative characteristics, it was necessary to look at complete narrative structures. Based on this evidence, fully realized narratives may be considered less significant in the corpus. It is important to note, however, that a significant portion of the corpus included cases in which narratives were not fully realized, as many concordance lines displayed partial narrative structures. More specifically, while the *complication* (2) was indicated each time by the presence of the connective, only the two other core components on narratives, namely *reaction* (3) and *resolution* (4), could be found. This is the case of Example 4 below:

- (2). Raising environmental awareness among children is no doubt important, as children represent the next generation whose ideas and actions will shape the future of our planet. *However*, it is still important to also focus on adults - especially young adults. *Complication*
- (3). First, because they will be the ones who will raise the next generation. Even more importantly, because environmental destruction is already a reality. *Reaction*
- (4). Reducing the human impact on the environment is a question that has to be solved by the current generation of adults, whose decisions and behaviours can make a positive change for our environment and our societies as a whole. *Resolution*

Here, the first type of narrative is being presented, though only three components could be identified. In particular, the importance of raising awareness among young adults on climate matters similarly to what is being done with children is the tension aspect that sets the narrative in motion (2). The reaction to this issue is twofold: first, adults play a crucial role in influencing the next generation through their parenting role; second, the urgency of environmental destruction, which is already a reality, requires immediate action from the current adult population (3). Finally, the

responsibility for reducing the human impact on the environment is being given to the current generation of adults (4). In this case, the description of an *initial situation* and the culmination of the narrative in the *final situation* are not realized in the text. Nonetheless, the primary argument of the first type of narrative is still being presented.

Similarly, Example 5 shows only the three core components of the narrative structure while thematically recalling the first type of narrative.

- (2). Why young people are important? Young people and future generations will be the ones to disproportionately suffer the consequences of current inaction and harmful activities. Young people have the highest stake in the fight against environmental threats *but* can also be part of the solution if adequately empowered. *Complication*
- (3). This is why we demand a strong, urgent and ambitious law that fully and genuinely includes youth and contributes to intergenerational equity. *Reaction*
- (4). Therefore, young people need to be at the forefront of both policy-development and nature restoration projects to contribute to reducing the ecological rift separating humans to their natural environment. *Resolution*

In the example above, the critical role of young people in addressing environmental challenges is clearly introduced in the complication, as young people and future generations will disproportionately suffer the consequences of current inaction (2). Afterwards, a strong and ambitious (nature restoration) law is demanded, that would ensure intergenerational equity (3). The structure then culminates with the assertion that young people must take a leading role in policy development and nature restoration (4).

The examples presented above were excluded from the final count of narratives in the GCWebC because they were not found to exhibit all five components indicated by the NPF, though they still exhibited similar thematic characteristics. Therefore, while these did not meet the criteria for fully formed narratives, their thematic alignment with the identified types may still suggest a broader narrative orientation within the dataset, though to varying degrees, which should not be overlooked. Consequently, while

the quantitative analysis has provided clear results, this quantification should not be interpreted too rigidly. Instead, it should serve as a starting point to highlight a tendency that may be present in other parts of the corpus.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of narrative structures in the GCWebC has revealed an important significance of narratives in online climate change texts by GenZ environmental organizations. Indeed, the texts under analysis reported a frequent use of connectives, which are considered potential indicators of narrative structures according to the NPF. In particular, *however*, *but*, *thus* and *because*, emerged as salient from the keyword analysis, were employed in narrative structures due to their capability of signaling contrasting viewpoints and revealing the tension aspect considered central to climate change narratives. Consequently, by looking at the co-text of these connectives, as well as their distribution across text types, it was possible to assess the presence of narratives in the corpus (research question 1)

Afterwards, from a closer look at the connective's concordance lines and their wider co-text, three main narratives could be found. In particular, one narrative was identified when highly technical passages were discussed, entailing the tackling climate change through specific technical solutions. These structures emphasized the role of advancements in fighting climate change within the EU context, and of finding science-based solutions to current environmental challenges. Another type of narrative was found around the issues of addressing climate change through intersectionality, centering the relation between climate change and social issues such as race, gender, and economic inequality. In this case, it was

argued that climate action should consider the experiences of marginalized groups who are most affected by environmental issues, calling for the prioritization of equity and justice as effective solutions to climate struggles.

Despite the specific “stories” being told, the narratives often blended into a larger third narrative that reflected the activists’ generational perspective on climate issues. More specifically, this type of narrative followed a specific pattern: the initial situation presented climate change as an unavoidable and constant reality affecting everyone; the complication highlighted the threat to the future for younger generations and marginalized groups, emphasizing the need for a generational and intersectional approach to address these challenges; the reaction showed young people taking active steps to tackle the crisis (either implicitly or explicitly, as the organizations were serving as narrators); the resolution suggested a shift towards a new way of living that rejected anthropocentric views with the final situation envisioning a sustainable and livable future, by recognizing climate change while promoting a socially and environmentally responsible lifestyle. In these structures, a strong moral evaluation often emerged, stating that older generations and institutions were responsible for failing to take adequate action to prevent worsening of the climate crisis. This reflects a generational understanding of climate change, aligning with current research on new youth environmentalism presented above (research question 2).

Narratives realized fully in their five components were somewhat rare in the corpus, with their presence accounting for a small proportion of the total instances examined. While the quantitative results highlighted distinct patterns, a significant portion of the corpus included partial narrative structures that did not meet the criteria for full realization but still aligned thematically with the identified types. These partial narratives, characterized by the presence of the *complication* alongside core components such as *reaction* and *resolution*, suggested a broader narrative

tendency within the dataset. This thematic alignment underlines the importance of considering both fully realized and partial narratives in understanding the representation of climate-related issues in the form of *stories*. Alternatively, the absence of narrative structures in certain portions of the corpus may imply that not all texts align seamlessly with the theoretical framework applied in this study. This suggests that narrative structures may be more adaptable to texts addressing strategic aspects of youth environmentalism as opposed to others. In this sense, the presence of narrative structures in technical portions of the corpus was unexpected, as such texts are typically less associated with the presence of a *story*. This aspect suggests that even highly technical discussions of sustainability can incorporate narrative elements, particularly when addressing youth environmentalism.

Eventually, the dual focus on micro (word-level) and macro (text structure) elements has offered insights into the understanding of the strategies to construct their argument by GenZ climate activists, going beyond storytelling in the traditional sense. Additionally, this analysis has attempted to highlight that incorporating a generational perspective on contemporary climate environmentalism can address simplified views of youth and recognize the significance of youth-led climate action in shaping current environmental discussions.

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MICHELE SALA

In Defense of a Good Cause. The Rhetoric of Violence

Abstract

This study explores the rhetoric of violence, understood as the set of discursive practices that frame reality – individuals, events, and experiences – through references to coercion, aggression, and dominance by one group over another. Existing research has already highlighted the normalisation of such language in media, political, and social science discourse, particularly in discussions about social justice, human rights, environmental issues, and animal rights – where violence is broadly interpreted as anything obstructing inclusion, equality, and sustainability. The present analysis investigates how the notion of violence is exploited – notably in academic discourse, media discourse, and social platform discourse – as a representational resource (here referred to as the dominance paradigm), and examines how this framing produces or reflects a highly conventionalised vernacular (the rhetoric of violence) that simplifies the textualisation of complex socio-political phenomena, potentially leading to biased interpretations.

1. Introduction

By rhetoric of violence we refer to those discursive practices through which reality (people, events, experiences) is semiotised in ways which cognitively prioritise, explicitly word out, or tangentially evoke forms of coercion, cruelty, and aggression exerted by one group over another

(which, in return, may justify forms of resistance as a response). The main purpose of this analysis – which is qualitative rather than quantitative – is to investigate the functioning of this rhetoric – in terms of semantic dimension, evaluative potential and paradigmatic framing. As has been noted (Engels 2012, Giglioli 2014, Nie et al. 2016, Žisek 2023, Lloyd 2023), this way of using the language has been fully normalised in media, political and even social sciences discourse when presenting causes, discussing topics, or arguing points notably pertaining to the domain of social justice and human rights (whereby what prevents or limits inclusion and equality is considered a form of violence) and also animal rights and the environment (where what inhibits or blocks sustainability is considered violent).

More specifically, through the present analysis, we will provide an outline of those discursive resources that do not just codify contextual referents (i.e. individual X, group Y, action W), but distinctively frame them within an overarching paradigm presupposing default roles and actions (i.e. X as privileged, Y as victim, W as a form of dominance) thus positing evaluative matrixes (i.e. by identifying what is good, right, preferable vs bad, wrong, to be avoided) and interpretive pathways (what needs to be exposed, stigmatised and condemned; what is to be acknowledged, justified and valued; what is to be minimised, contextualised or concealed) which, on the one hand, facilitate representation and, on the other, may bias understanding by favouring given readings over others.

1.1. Rhetoric as violence, rhetoric for violence, rhetoric of violence

Several studies have discussed violence-based rhetoric from sensibly different angles and according to different conceptualisations with respect to the one presented here. Some scholars, for example, consider such a rhetoric to be found in both the violent discursive practices containing “racial invectives, misogynous language, homophobic slurs among other forms of hate speech”¹ (Silva 2017, Polak/Trottier 2020), and in the abusive, vitriolic and aggressive language – often found in

¹ Blurb to Silva 2017 (<https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/books/9789027265227>). (Last accessed on August 30th, 2023, as all examples in the text.)

partisan discourse and used in conflict-based contexts (mostly political settings), as “the linguistic violence executed by power [and] based on supremacy and predominance” (Apressyan 1998: 589) – that is meant to be referentially derogatory and divisive (Barter-Godfrey/Taket 2009) and perlocutionary offensive for the targeted referent (Eatman 2020, Butler 1997b).

Another – and more politicised – interpretation of this rhetoric sees it embodied in the language typically used by proponents of social order (notably conservatives, who privilege control over solidarity and inclusion, as opposed to liberals, who instead champion social justice²), as “the angry, polarising, take-no-prisoner, violent talk of the Republican right [in the US] harnessing civic rage in a violent rhetorical politics of resentment” (Engels 2012: 121; 123), by which political figures – and notably US President Donald Trump (Nacos et al. 2020: 2; 5, cf. Winslow 2020, Garcia 2020) – “openly deride expertise, exalt opinion as fact, and favour brutal force [as well as] undermine any version of reality that does not align with their agenda [...] through weaponised language that demeans, demoralises, and confuses” (Pascale 2019: 898; 899). In the two cases above, violence is intended as the enactment of hate speech (i.e. rhetoric *as* violence, Rand 2009: 462), in that it is expressly meant to publicly denigrate and demean specific groups of people (cf. Delgado/Stefancic 1995, Bleich 2011, Maussen/Grillo 2014).

A third reading of the phenomenon considers violence-based rhetoric as the discursive expression of the intention to perform physical violence and/or the appeals to do so (i.e. rhetoric *for* violence) – on the assumption that “threats to violence are also violence” (Galtung 1990: 292). This can be worded out either implicitly – for instance through war-related or military terms like *attacking*, *defeating*, *annihilating* (Steuter/Wills 2008), *weaponising*³, or the use of the ‘targeting’ metaphor, fairly “common to a postmodern political discourse that has been thoroughly militarized [where] both parties talk about ‘targeting’ vulnerable incumbents” (Engels 2012: 122, see Weber 2005) – or it can

² <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/10/30/yes-political-rhetoric-can-incite-violence-222019/>

³ <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/08/how-weaponize-became-a-political-cultural-and-internet-term-du-jour.html>

be expressed more openly – see, for example, the slogan ‘Don’t Retreat, reload’ used by former Vice-President Candidate Sarah Palin for her 2010 mid-term election campaign (which explicitly refers to having your gun loaded and ready to be used), slogans like ‘*Kill the police!*’⁴ or ‘*Death to the West!*’⁵ heard at rallies or propagated through social platforms, or the notes ‘You’re an awful person and now you *get what you deserve*’⁶ found in an envelope containing a suspicious white powder and addressed to both Donald Trump and Barack Obama in February 2018.

In this analysis, instead, we will consider violence-related rhetoric from a broader angle, that is to say not restricted to its evaluative and transactional function – i.e. neither as the discursive expression of disparagement or discredit (rhetoric *as* violence) nor the incitement to carry out violent acts and produce harm (rhetoric *for* violence). For rhetoric of violence (RoV henceforth) we refer to the discourse that resorts to violence as an ideational and referential tool (i.e. rhetoric *of* violence proper, that is, about violence, or through violence-based conceptualisations), where references to violence function as semiotising facilitators and heuristics in order to simplify reality representation and prime interpretation. As such, RoV is not only a mode of expression but a model for understanding, in that, by representing given portions of reality as violent, it presupposes and attributes responsibilities, devises victims, establishes evaluative criteria and favours given stances.

Why use violence as a representational resource? Precisely because this notion – despite being “inherently confused”, vague and arbitrary (Wolff 1969: 602, Arendt 1970) – offers a simplified binary⁷ model of representation (Elbow 1993) which makes it possible to dissipate complexity and to index experience (Arendt 1970) according to two distinct axes opposing, on the one hand, what is (perceived as) violent – which, as such, is intrinsically bad or reprehensible – and, on

⁴ Often accompanied by the expression ‘ACAB’ (acronym of All Cops Are Bastards). (<https://www.texastribune.org/2016/07/19/patrick-ag-should-probe-black-lives-matter-protest/>)

⁵ https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/al-qaeda-jihadi-saudi-arabia-bin-laden-path-of-blood-a8441746.html

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43050806>

⁷ <https://www.clearerthinking.org/post/the-three-types-of-binary-thinking>

the other hand, what suffers from, opposes and exposes violence, which is *ipso facto* good, justified, and deserving sympathy (van Dijk 1995, Blommaerts 2009, Crichton 2018, Howard 2019, Druliolle/Brett 2019, Vollhardt 2020, Hoondert et al. 2021).

Given its intrinsic divisive (opposing a good vs bad side) and committing potential (favouring side-taking and alignment with the good side), RoV can be resorted to for antagonising and manipulative purposes, especially in partisan, political and propaganda discourse, in order to disqualify opponents and connote their ideas as dangerous or harmful. On the other hand, it can also be used to support or defend good causes – typically in social justice, human rights and environmental sustainability contexts, when this set of discursive resources is intended to make violence visible so as to raise awareness about it and favour action to contrast it.

In this analysis we will focus only on the latter case, for its constructive and practical character, where the depiction of violence is “a call for action, not a description of a state of affairs” (Douzinal 2017⁸). In this case, however, despite – or precisely because of – the high moral legitimacy of one’s intentions (Kjærgård/Simonsen 2017), the language used to unmask violence has become a highly conventionalised “vernacular [offering a] simple way of describing complex historical, social and political situations” (Douzinas 2017) for the benefit of unambiguous representation, guided interpretation and possible action, but possibly at the expenses of referential precision. This conventionalised vernacular – which is typified by easily recognisable, regular, patterned ways to semiotise reality – is precisely the RoV discussed here. In this analysis we will see how the RoV hinges on an overarching paradigm – namely, the dominance paradigm that, at a high level of abstraction, establishes violence as a general principle to explain social experience (through ideas such as oppression, exclusion, expropriation, etc., all carried out by a group to the detriment of another). Such paradigm is then discursively operationalised, at a lower level of abstraction, through recognisable violence-related referential handles – i.e., terms (like *violence*, *oppression*, *domination*, *hate*, *harm*, *offence*, etc.), metaphors (when representing social experience as *struggle*, labour as *social murder*, exclusion as *dehumanisation* or

⁸ <https://www.book2look.com/embed/9781317371403>

extermination, etc.), topoi (education as coercion, difference as discrimination, etc.), stereotypes (the privileged vs the oppressed), and archetypes (majority groups benefiting from oppressing minority groups, etc.) – which *de facto*, by being used/recognised in a text, function as codewords to trigger the dominance paradigm, whose activation then guides interpretation accordingly.

In the next sections we will seek to circumscribe the notions of violence and dominance, and see their relevance within the paradigm. This part of the analysis will be instrumental in outlining the epistemology of the paradigm, on the one hand, and, on the other, in introducing the discursive and cognitive mechanisms of RoV, that will be then discussed in the second part of this study.

2. Violence and dominance

Contemporary and current research (Galtung 1990, van Dijk 1995, Rand 2009, Enns 2012, Randall 2016, Silva 2017, Khatib 2018, Eatman 2020) assesses the notion of violence according to two different understandings, namely as a physical and patent phenomenon ('subjective' violence, Žižek 2008) or as a structural, pervasive and covert one ('objective' violence, Žižek 2008).

Physical or direct violence (Galtung 1990) refers to any act or behaviour which is performed with the intention to injure, hurt, damage, destroy or kill, as well as cause "psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (World Health Organization 2014: 2). As such, this notion functions as a descriptive category, referring to contextually situated acts carried out by identifiable individuals (i.e., perpetrators) against other equally identifiable individuals (i.e., victims), hence the label 'subjective'. Any such act can be unequivocally recognised as a form of aggression or attack irrespective of the context or motivation (i.e. murder, rape, theft, etc. are all expressions of direct violence independently of the perpetrator's identity, and of the time, place, way,

or reasons for their occurrence). Violent acts of this type are not mere wrongdoings, but, in most cultures – and typically in Western ones – proscribed and susceptible to sanction and punishment under the law, and the object of legal and criminology research (Zahn et al. 2004).

Systemic violence, on the other hand, is not “a substance or a well-defined content (bound to an action or site of social, political, economic life) but a relational concept” (Khatib 2018: 608) which does not concern specific individuals in specific contexts, but all members of a community, collectively, when dealing with social asymmetries taken to be more or less covert forms of subjugation, coercion, inequality and domination, which are intrinsic in social relations and which prevent specific groups from fulfilling “their goals and needs” (Vollhardt 2020: 5) and actualising their potential (Galtung 1969: 168). This notion is, thus, a normative and inferential category, in that it posits a structured model for interpreting experience which performs both an explanatory and evaluative function, by normalising reality, presupposing standard roles and relations (the oppressor → the oppressed, the perpetrator → the victim, etc.) and favouring given positionings (condemnation vs sympathy). This form of violence is the main concern of social justice movements, the object of cultural debate in the media and politics, and of investigation in social sciences, humanities and academic research (Verschuere 2001, Blommaerts 2009, Žižek 2023).

From a purely linguistic perspective, the idea of systemic violence metaphorises the meaning of physical violence to be applicable to cases where no immediately and explicitly visible violence is specifically involved. In fact, violence-related formulations (with their load of denotative, connotative and associative meanings) are used in their capacity of ‘vehicles’ for pointing to a ‘target’ referent represented by the set of social and interpersonal asymmetries or structural dynamics regulating social practices and interactions (*per se* not necessarily physically violent). These are conceptualised – in the wake of the Marxist tradition – in terms of ‘struggle’ (another metaphor), or oppression, or tension opposing a dominant group and a subordinate one, whose relationship is interpreted in terms of power, control, subordination, coercion, etc. It is therefore interpreted/constructed as violent, not because it physically injures, destroys or kills, but because it is intended to sustain some form of

dominance. Dominance is thus the overarching principle governing and structuring social reality, while systemic violence is the set of its phenomenological – if covert – instantiations. On this basis, it is the principle of dominance that flaunts and explains the phenomenon of systemic violence, which otherwise may remain undetectable due to its invisibility or “peaceful semblance” (Khatib 2018: 612) and the “fantasy of neutrality” (Eatman 2020: 60) under whose guise it operates.

3. The dominance paradigm

Given its web of semantic attributes and associations, the idea of dominance lends itself to be used as a readily-available, recognisable and compelling semiotising device, that can facilitate representation by functioning as a ‘cognitive map’ (Douzinas 2017) or, more specifically, as a paradigm, that is, a special “frame [that] does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality” (Butler 2009: xiii).

A paradigm, like all models of coherence (i.e. frameworks, scripts, schemata, see van Dijk 2019), offers criteria through which to assess and make sense of experience, typically through functional slots (presupposing responses to such questions like WHO? WHAT? TO WHOM? WHY? HOW? WHEN? WHERE? and hence helping identify agent, action, patient, motive, manner, and situation for an event to occur and be understood), all of which require referential fillers. However, while other cognitive models of interpretations are open and do not expect predetermined fillers – which are typically gathered from empirical reality⁹ – a paradigm is a closed model, by which each functional slot specifically presupposes a default filler. Within the domination

⁹ For example, the framework for ‘war’ has a slot for ‘enemy’ – as well as ‘ally’, ‘winner’, ‘loser’, etc. – but any referent could fill it – not only a group with specific national, cultural or political features.

paradigm, in fact, only the privileged can be agents of dominance (WHO); only privilege and structures meant to sustain dominance can produce violence (WHAT); only the underprivileged can be patients to violence (TO WHOM); only dominance-oriented intentions motivate oppressive actions (WHY); only certain practices are typically oppressive, whether openly or disguisedly (HOW), etc. As such, the paradigm, while ideationally effective, clear and easy to apply, also tends to be deterministic, essentialist and evaluative, by dissipating complexity and ruling out possible exceptions to default expectations (through processes of deletion, distortion and, notably, generalisation, cf. Müsseler et al. 1995, Busch-Jensen/Schraube 2019, Katan 2004, Bandler/Grinder 1975).

On the basis of this, it is when framed within the dominance paradigm that apparently neutral practices or behaviours appear to be violent. Also, it is within the same paradigm that references to violence lose their figurativeness – or are not perceived as being fully metaphorical – and acquire quasi-referential relevance and quasi-empirical informativeness. Typical examples would include the representation on women in Western culture as sexual or disposable *objects*, *victims of rape culture* (Phipps et al. 2018, Durham 2021, Kessel 2022); the expression *social murder* to refer to current labour condition (Fleming 2011: 24); the terms *lynching*, *segregation* or *modern slavery* to describe the condition of African Americans today (Embrick 2015); references to *genocide* or Nazi policies against homosexuality to point to current expressions of aversion against the LGBTQ community (Kidd/Witten 2007; Spivey/Robinson 2010). Conversely, and for the very same reasons, it is by withholding the paradigm and by discursively discarding any relevance of the dominance principle, that openly violent acts are portrayed as being little or relatively socially dangerous or as a mere “perturbation of the ‘normal’, peaceful state of things” (Žižek 2008: 2): this can be seen, for instance, in media discourse when outlets frame crimes and wrongdoings carried out by members of minority groups as situation-based ‘current affairs’, hence as exceptional rather than systemic (Dilulio 1996, McWhorter 2004, Grossman 2007, Chesler 2009, Adkins Covert/Wasburn 2009, Simmons 2012, Kramer 2017, Reilly 2019); or when physically violent events like the protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd (an African American citizen killed by a white

police officer), which despite causing several million dollars' worth of damage (looting, arson, and vandalism to public property)¹⁰ and causing the death of 25 people between May and July 2020¹¹ are reported (by *Associated Press*, *ABC*, *Reuters*, *CNN*, *BBC*, etc.) as being *mostly peaceful*¹², i.e., not paradigmatic or indicative of any dangerous trends.

In other words, the activation of the dominance paradigm allows for processes of cognitive 'zooming out', which reveal patterns over details, and favours interpretation of even situationally unrelated events as if they were instantiations of the same phenomenon: at a higher level of abstraction, they appear as forms of systemic violence primed by a principle of dominance. On the other hand, neglecting the paradigm favours the reading of comparable and frequent events – even those possibly pointing to a pattern – as being independent and eminently situation-based: at a low level of abstraction (by 'zooming in', through contextualisation and focus on details over patterns), even when tragic, events are mere instances of subjective violence – hence relative and socially little dangerous.

3.1. Social reality through the dominance paradigm

The dominance paradigm can expose and explain dominance-produced violence at various levels and according to different configurations.

At a structural level, in fact, dominance normalises *privilege* and *exploitation* (especially in economic, political, legal, societal, and educational settings; see Galtung 1990, Eatman 2020) on the basis of people's usefulness, expendability, and merit – all assets which are pivotal in capitalist societies (Marx /Engels 1848, Marx 1867) and their ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 1970/2010). At this level, dominance typically produces violence in the form of *class-structures*, *patriarchy*, *racism* (on the assumption that different ethnicities are

¹⁰ <https://www.axios.com/2020/09/16/riots-cost-property-damage>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/31/americans-killed-protests-political-unrest-acled>

¹² See also the tendency to frame such deaths on the 'subjective' axis, i.e. circumscribing them within the situational context of their occurrence. (<https://thehill.com/homenews/media/513902-cnn-ridiculed-for-fiery-but-mostly-peaceful-caption-with-video-of-burning/>).

taken to have different abilities and attitudes), *ageism*, *abilism*, etc., as well as economic and political *colonialism* and *imperialism* (Fanon 1961, Luxemburg 1951). The same form of dominance exerted on natural resources damages the environment and causes air and water *pollution*, *global warming*, *animal exploitation* and *extinction*.

At a cultural level, dominance normalises *hierarchy* and *order* through processes of ‘cultural hegemony’ (Gramsci/Gerratana 1975) – that is by representing them as being morally tolerable and justified (in news discourse, public debate, the media, in education, legal, healthcare settings, etc., cf. Black 2011, Galtung 1990) or by romanticising them (in literature, movies, etc.) – and produces violence in the form of *misogyny*, *xenophobia*, *homophobia*, *transphobia*, *relational racism* (on the basis of religion, beliefs, etc), cultural/ideological *colonialism*, or *disparagement* and *marginalisation* of what/who is perceived as ‘deviant’.

At the symbolic level, dominance normalises *representational control* and *stereotypes* through ideational repertoires, language internal mechanisms (i.e. the marking of gender) and conventional practices of semiotisation which restrict the possibility for self- and other-representation by favouring the codification of given meanings and exclude others (Bourdieu 2001, Lacan 1977, Wittgenstein 1967, Blommaerts 2001). This form of language-based dominance produces *psychological violence* in terms of *othering* or *alienation* (Barter-Godfrey/Taket 2009), notably as regards *identity construction*, *sense of safety*, *sense of belonging*, *sense of diversity*, etc.¹³.

It is the immanence of dominance and the pervasiveness of violence in all of its phenomenological configurations – their social danger and reprehensibility – and, at the same time, their possible little

¹³ The outline of these three levels – very schematically and with no presumption of exhaustiveness – synthesises a worldview which stems from Social theory, especially the Conflict and Marxist models (Marx/Engels 1848, Marx 1867, Weber 1994), providing the matrix for Critical theories (Marcuse 1969, Habermas 1971, Horkheimer 1972, Adorno 1973), Feminist, Women and Gender studies (De Beauvoir 1949, Reed 1975, Kristeva 1982, Butler 1990, 1997a, Cameron 1992), Post-colonial studies (Said 1978, 1993, Bhabha 1994, Spivak 1998), Critical race theory (Bell 1970, 1995, Delgado/Stefanic 1998, Matsuda 1987), etc. and, more recently, ‘Woke’ culture (Žižek 2023).

visibility or noticeability which require linguistic intervention for them to be exposed and clearly identified. This operation of rhetorical unmasking is carried out by RoV, through a special type of language (Douzinas 2017) that is interdiscursively recognisable (Fairclough 1992, Blommaerts 2009) and dialogistically accessible (Bakhtin 1981, van Eemeren/Grootendorst 2004). Recognisability is detected interdiscursively in that the (perceived) transparency of given formulations does not depend on their lexical correspondence to an extralinguistic referents (i.e. *social murder* does not literally reflect labourers' conditions; *genocide* or *lynching* do not align with disparagement or discrimination towards minorities), but rather on semiotising conventions, that is, by such formulations being frequently and typically used across texts dealing with the same contents.

Accessibility is worked out dialogistically – rather than referentially – that is, on the basis of the meaning that certain expressions have acquired over time and across texts: this is the main reason why even patent metaphors (*oppression*, *social murder*, *lynching*, *genocide*, etc.) may not be perceived as such and seem instead to have referential value. The functioning of RoV is the object of analysis of the next section.

4. The rhetoric of violence (RoV)

RoV consists of sets of easily identifiable lexical, idiomatic, metaphorical choices, conventionalised expressions, conceptualisations and topoi that favour the configuration of even apparently uneventful (normal? peaceful? not physically violent?) portions of social reality as expressions of dominance and evidence of systemic violence. More specifically, once they are detected in their function of pointers to, or vehicles for, the instantiation of the dominance paradigm, they legitimise the switch from a situation-based reading of a given event (i.e., one grounded on the contextual and 'subjective' level of its

occurrence) – to a paradigm-based one, whereby the event is taken to be the symptom, symbol or epitome of something larger and ‘objective’ that presupposes specific agents, patients, intentions and consequences, and may justify given reactions to it.

4.1. The model

RoV accommodates references to violence according to two dimensions, namely a *retrospective* and a *prospective* one.

The retrospective dimension corresponds to a stage of *blame* attribution for violence, where society is semiotised as a violent system, or individual wrongdoers are considered as emissaries for the system, that cause harm through ideas expressed and actions carried out in a moment preceding the present time (a few hours ago, a week ago, ten years ago, a century ago), which are taken to have been particularly violent and whose impact is still harmful today, even in cases where the system appears to have changed or the wrongdoer has distanced him/herself from given positions (Vollhardt 2020). Blame attribution can be expressed in terms of appreciation (with reference to socially shared values, i.e., good vs bad; cf. White 2015) and have a marked referential orientation (meant to quantify and qualify violence and violence-produced harm), or, on the other, in terms of judgement (based on ethics, morality or “other systems of institutionalized norms”, i.e., right vs wrong; White 2015: 2), with a distinct interpersonal orientation that is meant to elicit and justify aversion towards perpetrators.

These different orientations produce two different rhetorical categories, signifying respectively:

- PROSCRIPTION: when language codifies or alludes to dominance-driven or violent agency (evidenced in behaviours, practices, ideas, which have caused harm), thus projecting stigma upon individual or structural agents because of ‘what they do/did’);
- REPROBATION: when language evidences the agents’ intentionality (which may be more or less conscious) at the basis of harm-producing choices, thus attributing ethical responsibilities to agents, which are targeted because ‘they know/knew what they do/did’).

The prospective dimension, instead, is embodied by a stage pointing to forms of *repair*, where some compensation or balancing is expected or required on the part of society or wrongdoers, and some restorative measures are called for to be enacted in the (near) future. Repair for dominance-related violence, also, can be distinguished in terms of appreciation/referential orientation or judgement/interpersonal orientation, respectively identifying the categories of:

- REPARATION: when language codifies or alludes to the action of amending, recovering or restoring, which is represented as being necessary to compensate for some dominance-driven wrong or harm (REPARATION as positive repair – for the benefit of the victim/affected);
- REPRISAL: when language exposes or implies agents' accountability for harmful wrongdoings and calls for forms of sanctioning or retaliation (censorship, cancelling, silencing, firing, removing, etc.) (REPRISAL as negative repair – for the detriment of the agent).

As we can see, the two dimensions also have different foci: for retrospection the focus is on agent identification (an individual, some social structure, sets of practices, ideas, events, etc. responsible for corroborating dominance) and responsibility attribution, while for prospection the focus is on the patient (i.e. the one deserving repair or compensation).

The table below provides a layout of the various categories per dimension.

	Retrospection: Blame	Prospection: Repair
Appreciation	PROSCRIPTION	REPARATION
Judgement	REPROBATION	REPRISAL

Table 1. Outline of RoV.

These four RoV categories are relevant to the paradigm – and instrumental to its instantiation – in that they are interrelated according to a narrative trajectory of this type: dominance-based violent actions/ideas produce harm (PROSCRIPTION), for which their agents are responsible (REPROBATION), that may necessitate recovery

(REPARATION) and/or sanction (REPRISAL). Below, a synoptical representation of this interplay.

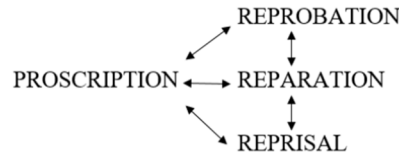


Figure 1. The functioning of RoV.

On this basis, the discursive positing of one category presupposes the being in place of the others (even if in the background): for instance, when only agency of violent actions is openly stigmatised (PROSCRIPTION), meanings concerning the agent's responsibility (REPROBATION) and accountability (REPRISAL) are also evoked, as well as, likely, ideas related to some harm-mending (REPARATION); similarly, when only sanctioning measures are explicitly called for (REPRISAL), this claim is the consequence of harm-producing actions (PROSCRIPTION) – possibly requiring mending (REPARATION) – whose agents are responsible for (REPROBATION). The activation of the dominance paradigm establishes such associations even when no link or correlation between the various categories is explicitly textualised.

As we see, the central element for the activation of any possible categorial constellation is the reference to PROSCRIPTION – either explicitly lexicalised or evoked and backgrounded: here is where the act that is perceived as violent is signified, thus activating the dominance paradigm and priming interpretation.

The four categories will be outlined in detail in the sections below, with special attention given to PROSCRIPTION, given its pivotal role within the paradigm.

4.1.1. Retrospection through PROSCRIPTION

PROSCRIPTION stigmatises either portions of reality, by signifying them as being essentially objectionable, intolerable and unacceptable, or people, for having first-handedly enacted behaviours, presented ideas,

or purposefully carried out actions which have caused harm. The marking of PROSCRIPTION can vary in terms of *target*, *effect*, *force*, and *articulation*.

4.1.1.1. PROSCRIPTION targets

The target of PROSCRIPTION, as already anticipated above, may be either (a) phenomena (resulting from privilege-based practices or revealing collective violent agency) or (b) individuals (acting as, on behalf of, or in favour of the system).

a. Violence-related phenomena can variably be represented at various levels of abstractions, notably in *symbolic*, *thematic* or *specific* terms. Pointers to symbolic violence are those expressions lexicalising dominance through very general and denotatively vague expressions (like *domination*, *violence*, *oppression*, *discrimination*, *aggression*, *harm*, *privilege*, *hate*, *inequality*, etc.) or hyperbolic ones (*social murder* or *genocide* to refer to labour condition; *extermination*, *segregation*, etc. for gender-based or other forms of discrimination, etc.), or conventionalised formulations (notably, *hate speech* and *hate crime*) where the mapping and matching between such labels and their referent is taken for granted (1) (2 [SYMBOLIC MARKER]). Thematic formulations are those explicitating the configuration of dominance, that is the social area where given forms of dominance-based violence are exerted (i.e. *patriarchy*, *misogyny*, *sexism* [men vs women], *capitalism* [elite vs labourers], *imperialism*, *colonisation* [Western cultures vs other cultures], *racism*, *xenophobia*, *white supremacy* [white people vs other ethnicities], *homophobia*, *transphobia* [prejudice against non-heteronormativity], *abilism* [prejudice against people with disabilities], etc.) (2 [THEMATIC MARKER]) (3). Finally, specific formulations are those explicitating the guise under which forms of dominance are exerted in particular social contexts (i.e. *aversive racism*, *cultural appropriation*, *colourblindness*, *female misogyny*, *tokenism*, *mansplaining*, *deadnaming*, etc.)¹⁴ (4). Some instances can be

¹⁴ Lists of such lexical handles (or ‘codewords’) and their meaning can be found in online resources, some meant to promote their use (<https://www.the519.org/education-training/glossary/>), others to alert against it

observed in the examples¹⁵ below (emphasis added).

- (1) The Lemkin Institute believes that the so-called “gender critical movement” that is behind these laws is a fascist movement furthering a specifically *genocidal* ideology that seeks the complete *eradication* of trans identity from the world.¹⁶
- (2) Perhaps it is helpful to say that everything in *capitalism* [THEMATIC MARKER] is violent. [...]. [T]he participants in this study describe their attempts to resist or to comply with the *inequalities* [SYMBOLIC MARKER] of capitalism as drawing them only further into *violence*. In resistance or conformity, it is inevitable that they enact *violence* in some form.¹⁷
- (3) This page, an excerpt from ‘Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups’, lists characteristics of *white supremacy* culture that show up in our organizations, including perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, and more. The page explains why these characteristics are harmful and offers antidotes to help dismantle *white supremacy culture*. [...] The characteristics listed below are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group.¹⁸
- (4) *Revealing a transgender person’s birth name* [deadnaming] without their explicit permission is an invasion of privacy. It undermines a trans person’s true authentic identity and can put them at risk of discrimination, harassment and violence.¹⁹

and point out the simplification and distortion at the basis of some of these formulations (<https://newdiscourses.com/translations-from-the-wokish/>).

¹⁵ All examples in the text were collected from online liberal/progressive sources – i.e. those championing causes such as equality, inclusion, social justice, sustainability, etc. – notably media outlets, social platforms (in this case only the most widely shared or commented items were selected), and research publications (with ISBN or ISSN), thus ideally attesting to the circulation and relevance of such discursive practices and rhetorical conventions in communication settings, the humanities and popular culture when dealing with contents concerning social and environmental issues.

¹⁶ <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-on-the-genocidal-nature-of-the-gender-critical-movement’s-ideology-and-practice>

¹⁷ Lohmeyer, B. 2020. *Youth and Violent Performativities*. Singapore: Springer: 69.

¹⁸ <https://vawnet.org/material/characteristics-white-supremacy-culture>

¹⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/dead-naming-act-violence-please-stop-chris-mosier>

b. When individuals are the target of PROSCRIPTION, stigma is referred to what these individuals do/have done, what they believe and stand for, irrespective of their being fully conscious or completely unaware of the harm they produce. A large number of those PROSCRIPTION markers are adjectival forms of the labels seen above for phenomena (i.e. *hater*, *racist*, *supremacist*, *xenophobe*, *sexist*, etc.), while some of them appear to be specific to this individual-centred sub-category, notably *bigot* and *fascist*, as well as their nominal derivation *fascism* and *bigotry*,²⁰ and their synonymous forms, either when openly lexicalised – (5) (6) and also (1) above – or simply implied (7).

The term *bigot* proscribes the attitude of exclusion and prejudice towards views diverging from one's own, while embracing beliefs on the basis of ingroup consensus, notably with the purpose to emphasise and corroborate group membership. People's bigotry is therefore proscribed as a passive way of accepting and replicating existing forms of dominance and violence. The label *fascist*, instead, stigmatises the attitude of wilfully embracing exclusionary views and confrontational practices meant to actively promote, support and favour forms of dominance, and mark ingroup privilege and supremacy. Such a label does not necessarily point to any anti-Semitic positions, or affiliation to far-right ideas, but is primarily intended to disqualify misalignment or criticism towards progressive or inclusive views. In fact, *reductio ad Hitlerum* (Strauss 1953) is an effective – if logically fallacious – strategy by which to vilify the target – through 'guilt by association' mechanisms – and "celebrat[e] one's own moral high ground" (Laruelle 2019: 307).

(5) Aided and abetted by Europe's Eastern widening, which has not proved a tool for tolerance, prejudices suppressed for decades by communist regimes have re-emerged to underpin new quirky racist, xenophobic and *bigoted* politicians and parties.²¹

(6) Under Trump, neoliberal *fascism's* most distinctive feature is its war on

²⁰ We consider the nouns *fascism* and *bigotry* – as used in RoV – as the nominal derivations of the modifiers *fascist* and *bigot* in that the terms do not refer to the historical or religious-based referent, respectively, but rather to the state/condition produced by individuals or groups blindly following ingroup beliefs.

²¹ <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/wake-xenophobia-new-racism-europe>

undocumented children and immigrants, women, Muslims, and Blacks. [...] Reason and compassion give way to a rhetoric of rancid *bigotry* which works to inform policy and inflict humiliation, misery, and suffering on diverse groups at all levels of society who are viewed as degenerate and repugnant.²²

- (7) Psychiatry's disturbing history regarding the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community shares many aspects with the group's persecution by the *National Socialist regime in Germany*. [...] If psychiatry is to learn from the past, there is a need for a more sophisticated understanding of the *Holocaust's* contemporary significance for psychiatric ethics.²³

4.1.1.2. PROSCRIPTION effect

PROSCRIPTION may also be signified in terms of effect, by referring to either the physical or psychological consequences of forms of violence (i.e., *dehumanisation, alienation, annihilation, exclusion, misrepresentation, under-representation, criminalisation*, etc.) (8) (9), or as the social condition or status produced by such violence (i.e., *victim, oppressed, underprivileged, exploited, outcast, excluded, different*, etc.) (9) (10).

- (8) [The] impact [of homophobic epithets] is not merely increasing negative attitudes toward and evaluation of a target. It goes beyond that as their specific nature induces heterosexuals *dehumanizing* and maintaining *distance* from gay men, with all the risks that this implies for *discrimination* and both intergroup and inter-personal relations.²⁴
- (9) Racism from within the Royal household and the media had played a part in her feeling she "didn't want to be alive anymore", Meghan [Markle] said. [...] The impact of "*systematic oppression* and *victimisation* are *devastating, isolating* and all too often lethal," tennis star Serena Williams, who is a friend of Meghan, posted on Instagram.²⁵
- (10) The addition of feminine suffixes and adjuncts has a weakening, diminishing

²² Giroux, H. 2019. Neoliberal Fascism's War on Immigrants Echoes a Dark and Haunting Past. *Beijing International Review of Education* 1/1, 39-53: 40.

²³ Robertson, M. et al. 2016. Psychiatry and the 'Gay Holocaust': The Lessons of Jill Soloway's Transparent. *Australasian Psychiatry* 24/6, 571-574: 571.

²⁴ Fasoli, F. et al. 2016. Not "just words": Exposure to homophobic epithets leads to dehumanizing and physical distancing from gay men. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 46:2, 237-248: 245.

²⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56320101>

and trivialising effect [and] feminine markers contribute to the construction of negative semantic space for women because, no matter what women do, language marks them as *being different* (e.g. a female surgeon, a woman lawyer) or *less important* than men who do the same thing (e.g. waiter vs waitress, steward vs stewardess).²⁶

4.1.1.3. PROSCRIPTION force

The marking of PROSCRIPTION may also vary in terms of force. In fact, RoV may resort to formulations that maximise the impression of referential neutrality – typical of research and academic domains – or, conversely, may be expressly formulated in evaluative and judgement-based terms (usually and typically in media and more specifically social media discourse). The more nuanced the force, the greater the impression of objectivity of a claim (11) (12). Conversely, the more explicit writer engagement is, the clearer the writer's positioning and stance (13), which does not necessarily affect claim credibility, but clearly reveals the writer's commitment to contrasting certain causes or ideas.

- (11) Human experience has been characterized by a history of male domination, control and violence – in short a history of patriarchy and power [...]. Although patriarchy is now draped in the clothing of postmodern civilization with all its superficial artifice and guile, it operates in exactly the same way as it did thousands of years ago.²⁷
- (12) This defensiveness is rooted in the false but widespread belief that racial discrimination can only be intentional. Our lack of understanding about implicit bias leads to aversive racism.²⁸
- (13) [I]t saddens me to admit that not a finger has been lifted by this government to tackle Islamophobia and racism.²⁹

²⁶ Wheatherall, A. 2003. *Gender, Language and Discourse*. London: Routledge: 24.

²⁷ Bahlleda, R. 2015. The Legacy of Patriarchy. *Counterpoints* 488, 15-67: 16.

²⁸ Diangelo, R. 2018. *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press: 44.

²⁹ <https://greens.org.au/news/speech/speech-time-reckoning-racism>

4.1.1.4. PROSCRIPTION articulation

Articulation of PROSCRIPTION depends on the amount, quality and sequencing of information used to evidence the violence and harmfulness of certain practices. Peculiar forms of articulation are (a) *circularity* and (b) *accumulation*.

a. Circularity can be found in those claims that assess the problematic nature of given acts through either reflexive and circular reasonings – which do not provide new information or any *tertium comparationis* to facilitate understanding, but merely different sequencing of information already given (X is Y because Y is like X, or is perceived as such; X explains Y because Y can be explained in terms of X (14); X is such, but also Y is such (15)) – or through assertions whose processability and tenability is postulated on the basis of paradigm-triggering codewords and PROSCRIPTION-based terms – rather than neutral and referential ones – hence relegating interpretation solely within the boundaries of the dominance paradigm, while excluding alternative understandings (16).

- (14) Something is a *homophobic, biphobic or transphobic hate incident* if the victim or anyone else thinks it was carried out because of *hostility* or prejudice against your sexual orientation or transgender identity. This means that if you believe something is a hate incident, it should be recorded as this by the person you are reporting it to. [...] There are no specific *homophobic, biphobic or transphobic hate crimes*. Any criminal offence can be a *hate crime* if the offender targeted you because of their *prejudice* or *hostility* to LGBT people.³⁰
- (15) Of course it's true, as Shulevitz asserts, that "*a woman seeking higher office faces obstacles that a man does not face, no matter what the color of her skin.*" But this doesn't suggest that gender is the greater obstacle generally – only that gender poses distinctive obstacles. It's also true that *a black person seeking higher office faces obstacles that a white person doesn't face, no matter his [sic] gender.*"³¹
- (16) Capitalism constitutes *genocide* [...]. [V]iolence is inherent in the internal logic

³⁰ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/law-and-courts/discrimination/hate-crime/sexual-orientation-and-transgender-identity-hate-crime-s/>

³¹ <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2008/04/which-is-worse-racism-or-sexism-or-asking-which-is-worse.html>

of capital and, therefore, it is a permanent feature of the capital system. [N]ot only is this *structural violence* inherent in the capitalist system, but it results in death on a genocidal scale, thereby constituting a class-based genocide that targets the poor, particularly in the global south.³²

b. Accumulation is found in those claims that maximise stigma by listing and correlating different markers of PROSCRIPTION even though pertaining to different thematic and social areas, and being unrelated among themselves (like *racist* + *misogynist* + *no-vaxer* + *fascist* + *climate denier*, etc.). By postulating their interrelatedness, this strategy amplifies the danger of given ideas and practices by associating them to other similarly dangerous ones, as if the former were by default reflected or necessitated by the latter, and vice versa.

- (17) [There is a] tsunami of *hate* and *xenophobia*, *scapegoating* and *scaremongering* around the world [through] *scapegoating*, *stereotyping*, *stigmatization* and the use of *derogatory*, *misogynistic*, *racist*, *xenophobic*, *Islamophobic* or *antisemitic* language.³³
- (18) However, there is still a part of the population (that) is fiercely against [being vaccinated]. They *don't believe in science/progress* and are very often *misogynistic* and *racist*.³⁴
- (19) As Calvert explains, “*meat-eating* can be seen to feed into the *patriarchal* structure of *human-male supremacy*, celebrating a primitive masculinity and normalizing *aggressive characteristics* by tying them to male, gendered (‘natural’) behaviors” [...]. In other words, men attempt to demonstrate their allegiance to *hegemonic masculinity* by *eating meat*, the act of which symbolically suggests that they have *violently dominated a body*.³⁵

As we have seen in this section, through different degrees of ideational

³² Leech, G. 2012. *Capitalism: A Structural Genocide*. New York: Zed Books: 4, 5.

³³ <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Guidance%20on%20COVID-19%20related%20Hate%20Speech.pdf>

³⁴ https://www.westernstandard.news/news/trudeau-calls-the-unvaccinated-racist-and-misogynistic-extremists/article_a3bacece-2e14-5b8c-bf37-eddd672205f3.html; see also video in French here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5I0tk6OO5sw>

³⁵ Carson, S. 2021. Eat Like a White Man: Meat-Eating, Masculinity, and Neo-Colonialism. *The Pegasus Review*: 13/2: 50-61: 52.

specificity (focus on phenomena vs individuals), different perspectives (focus on harmful effects), different commitment (neutrality vs interpersonal engagement) and discursive articulation (in terms of information packaging), markers of PROSCRIPTION facilitate the identification of asymmetries, their representation in terms of dominance and their understanding as (variably wilful) expressions of violence.

4.1.2. Retrospection through REPROBATION

REPROBATION is the category that points to the intentionality and awareness on the part of the agents when carrying out harmful actions or disseminating proscribable ideas – which may be due to wilfulness (desire to hurt), interest (personal profit or stake), or carelessness (lack of consideration or empathy for others). Through REPROBATION, specific responsibilities are attributed to agents of dominance, and its textualisation may be distinguished in terms of *force* and *target*.

4.1.2.1. REPROBATION force

According to force, REPROBATION can be signified through different forms of engagement and graduation, which can be (a) *maximal* or (b) *controlled*.

a. Maximal engagement and sharp graduation are found in those formulations expressing misalignment in terms of outrage, reproach or shaming which, as such, are meant to produce or contribute to face loss of the targeted agent. These are typically found in media and activism discourse – often circulated through social platforms – whereas they are less common in (although not absent from) research and academic texts.

- (20) *You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!*³⁶

³⁶ <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit>

- (21) Campus police violently removed Dr. Melina Abdullah from the LA mayoral debate hosted on her own campus for no apparent reason...other than she's Black. *Shame on @CalStateLA!* And *shame on every candidate* on that debate stage who watched in silence.³⁷

b. Controlled engagement and graduation are found in more interpersonally nuanced formulations meant, nonetheless, to expose deliberate choices on the part of agents which determine/have determined harm. This way of expressing REPROBATION, precisely because it is less aggressive and confrontational and more constrained, is found typically in academic research, especially in humanities and social sciences.

- (22) Meanwhile, whole populations in modern urban society *have been subjected to scientifically based technological experiments*. Some of these [...] have turned out to *have disastrous consequences, and have led to a crisis in confidence for science and technology*. Linked to this is an *ecological crisis, which calls into question the systems of economic and technological development* of the last 250 years, and the culture of consumer capitalism which has established itself in the last 75. Moreover, the *concentration of power in the traditional news media has brought about a crisis of democracy*, as can be seen from the context and results of the UK general election in 2015.³⁸
- (23) *Once established as a functioning system* of complex hierarchical relationships, *patriarchy transformed sexual, social, economic relations* and *dominated* all systems of ideas [on the basis of the assumption that] men are 'naturally' superior, stronger and more rational, therefore designed to be *dominant*.³⁹

4.1.2.2. REPROBATION targets

A specific realisation of REPROBATION concerns its targets. Unlike the case of PROSCRIPTION, where the agent's intentionality is not at stake,

³⁷ <https://ktxs.com/news/nation-world/blm-leader-forcibly-removed-from-mayoral-debate-didnt-have-a-ticket-to-attend-black-lives-matter-california-los-angeles-state-university-calstate-melina-abdullah>

³⁸ Goatly, A. / Hiradhar, P. 2016. *Critical Reading and Writing in the Digital Age*. London: Routledge: 2.

³⁹ Lerner, G. 1993. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy*. Oxford: OUP: 1, 4.

REPROBATION applies typically to agents who are taken to be fully aware of ‘what is good’ and ‘right’, yet consciously opting for or privileging ‘what is bad’ and ‘wrong’. Such agents may be identified and named or their identity can be left underspecified, yet their responsibility can be gathered from the mentioning of all the intentional wrong choices attributable to them (see also (22), above). Even though in some cases the boundaries between PROSCRIPTION and REPROBATION are blurred – since elements of agent intentionality may be linguistically implied or retrievable from context and content – there are two specific instances where intentionality is obvious: the cases of *deniers* or *traitors*.

Deniers are those responsible of questioning the reliability and veracity of certain states of affairs, rejecting and disavowing accepted views, jeopardising consensus, and accepting instead ideas which (are taken to be) blatantly false/wrong (*deniers*, *revisionists*, *conspiracy theorists*, etc.) (24). Traitors are individuals who are responsible of wilfully sidelining with those having proscribable and violent views (i.e., *accomplices*, *deceivers*, *traitors*, *hypocrites*, *impostors*, etc.) (25). A specific case of such targets is represented by members of a marginalised minority who do not identify as victims or claim not to feel marginalised.⁴⁰ In fact, in so doing, they are not only accepting, justifying and corroborating forms of dominance, but, in terms of semiotisation, they are vacating the slot for victim in the dominance paradigm, thus invalidating or jeopardising its tenability as a model of coherence (26).

- (24) “The *denial of structural racism* appears to be a big *barrier to racial equity* because it allows for more victim-blaming explanations of systemic inequality,” Yi said. “The more that BIPOC [Black, indigenous and people of color] individuals are blamed for racial disparities, the less likely it is for white people and institutions to take *responsibility for the continued effects of systemic racism*.”⁴¹

- (25) It breaks me that we continue to allow what I call ‘white silence’ [silence about

⁴⁰ Under this category, slurs which are specific to Afro-Americans who are perceived as being ‘traitors’ to their race (i.e. too close or subservient to white people) are *Uncle Tom*, *home negro* or *coconut*.

⁴¹ <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2022/05/denial-structural-racism-antiblack-prejudice>

racism on the part of white people]. Silence is the worst kind of violence. Silence is that deep anxiety knowing all you see and hear is wrong but [you are] not sure of what to say or do because of fear, so you keep quiet.⁴²

- (26) These women are *gender traitors*, to borrow a term from the dystopian TV series ‘The Handmaid’s Tale.’ They’ve made standing by the patriarchy a full-time job. The women [...] also probably tell their daughters to put on less revealing clothes when they go out.⁴³

As we have seen in this section, markers of REPROBATION, by expressing judgement – either interpersonally, through critical or negative evaluation, or ideationally, by depicting given groups as responsible for harm – identify agency of violence, determine responsibilities for dominance-produced harm and condemns its agents.

4.1.3. Prospection through REPARATION

REPARATION is the rhetorical category that points to restorative responses to (physical, psychological or symbolic) damage, injury or loss. REPARATION can be self-controlled, self-/other-controlled, or other-controlled.

Self-controlled REPARATION consists in restorative measures that those affected by oppressive practices, individually or as a group, decide to resort to as a way to contrast or come to terms with their oppression, without the need of external supporting structures or ‘allies’ (by referring to or implying processes of *healing*, *awareness developing*, *engagement*, *militancy*, *participation*, etc.) (27). Self-/other-controlled REPARATION can be signified by reference to measures that, in addition to the victim’s willingness and active involvement, may require and benefit from organised activities and practices meant for ending oppression (processes of *empowerment*, *enfranchisement*, *liberation*, *identity affirming*, *transformative practices*, etc.) (28). Other-controlled REPARATION is to be found in those measures that – independently of the willing and active involvement of the victim – are the result of structural implementation,

⁴² <https://www.allyenergy.com/blog/white-silence-is-violence>

⁴³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/06/opinion/lisa-murkowski-susan-collins-kavanaugh.html>

external organisation or institutionalised intervention for them to be in place (i.e. *reparation, redistribution, affirmative action, quota*, etc.) (29).

- (27) The explicit incorporation of *healing* within *activism* and the recognition of healing as activism is what we refer to here as “healing justice.” The work of healing justice addresses the need to heal from generational trauma and ongoing oppression, to prevent burn out, and to create communities that strive to enact a vision of justice that does not leave anyone out.⁴⁴
- (28) I will argue that the *appropriation* of discourse is a valid educational aim for those wishing to promote and support a social justice agenda. [...] Through such critical understanding, the aim is to help learners make representations, agendas and positionalities more lucid, and to be aware of the opaqueness and provisionality of language use. In Morgan’s (1997: 59) terms, it seeks to enhance opportunities for *empowerment* through *appropriation*.⁴⁵
- (29) America historically prided itself on being a melting pot of cultures. Some people may pretend college admissions are based on a meritocracy, but, of course, they aren’t, and race-based *affirmative action* has been a critical mechanism to help create diverse communities at schools.⁴⁶

As can be observed, REPARATION codifies positive repair, in that it points to recovery measures which are intended to positively affect the ones being harmed.

4.1.4. Prospection through REPRISAL

The rhetorical category of REPRISAL functions by subsuming agent accountability for violent and harm-producing behaviours and, on this basis, points to responses to such damages by ways of disciplining those who are responsible for them. While not directly benefiting patients of dominance, REPRISAL may be perceived as the enactment of some form of (social) justice. REPRISAL can be textualised in two different ways,

⁴⁴ Doetsch-Kidder, S. / Harris, K. 2023. Healing Justice as Intersectional Feminist Praxis: Well-being Practices for Inclusion and Liberation. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 25.1,4: 3.

⁴⁵ Hyatt, D. 2006. *Quaderns de Filologia. Estudis Lingüístics* 11, 113-124: 114.

⁴⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/01/30/needed-affirmative-action-in-college-admissions/>

notably through *censorship* or *retaliation*.

REPRISAL by censoring is found in those claims that call for, urge or justify the adoption of measures meant to prevent harmful behaviours from taking place, to remove wrongdoers from positions or block for them access to resources through which they could disseminate harmful contents (i.e. through *silencing*, *boycotting*, *cancelling*, *firing*, *deplatforming*, *banning*, etc.) (30) (31) – this being the epistemology of Cancel Culture.⁴⁷ REPRISAL by retaliating, instead, is codified by alluding to the need, justification or legitimacy of forms of physical, psychological or symbolic counter-violence to compensate for loss or damage (within the boundaries of the dominance paradigm, in fact, counter-violence can be seen as a form of self-defence, protection, preservation, rather than aggression or attack) (32).

- (30) Social media should have mechanisms by which racist, fascist, misogynist or transphobic speakers *are removed*, where misinformation *is removed*, and where there is no way to pay to have your messages amplified.”⁴⁸
- (31) It requires an extraordinary ignorance of history to presume that, in defending the unbounded protections and privileges of white supremacists, we also somehow ensure the fair treatment of people historically marginalized by the media and oppressed by the state. *Shutting down* white supremacist and other oppressive speech reflects a robust understanding of how speech functions in the world.⁴⁹
- (32) A Black Lives Matter sign outside of a church was recently vandalized. More profound than the crime (which was bad enough) was the nonchalant reaction by other fellowships who seemed to say “hold my beer” at the opportunity to marginalize, thus lending value, to harm. [...] Shame on you. Trust and believe there is something about YOU that another person *cannot wait to deface with a marker*. Give them time, *they will get to you soon* enough because until black lives matter, none of them will.⁵⁰

As we see, REPRISAL signifies negative repair in that it is intended to counter harm with harm, or a negative deed with a negative response,

⁴⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/opinion/cancel-culture-.html>

⁴⁸ <https://theconversation.com/does-deplatforming-work-to-curb-hate-speech-and-calls-for-violence-3-experts-in-online-communications-weigh-in-153177>

⁴⁹ <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/a-struggle-not-a-debate>

⁵⁰ <https://eu.newsleader.com/story/opinion/readers/2020/08/14/shame-people-silence-when-churchs-blm-sign-vandalized-letter/3320674001/>

by neutralising, excluding or punishing agents who are held accountable of harmful choices.

5. Concluding remarks

Reality is an articulated phenomenological complex, a continuum of contiguous, juxtaposed or sequenced events, either causally linked or totally unrelated, which, as such, is difficult to be entirely grasped and coherently made sense of. Its representation, both in cognitive (i.e., producing a mental picture) and discursive terms (i.e., producing textualisations), requires processes of filtering and modelisation (Bandler/Grinder 1975), in that “we cannot perceive all of ‘what it is that is going on’ (deletion); we tend to focus selectively or fit what we see to what we know, expect, or what attracts our attention (distortion); and we tend to fill details in from our own model or level out salient differences (generalisation), to make the resulting ‘map of the world’ useful” (Katan 2009: 75). This operation of modelisation, which depends on and is biased by the motive and aim behind it, ranging from speculative (to facilitate understanding) to operational (to favour decision-making and action), to persuasive (to change people’s mind), confers perspective and purpose to representation, posits relevance, gives priority to given portions of reality over others and bestows recognisable shapes on reality.

On this basis, the present analysis hypothesises that the dominance paradigm and RoV are effective resources through which any representation of reality is made purposeful and relevant, especially in those communicative contexts where some elements of reality need to be exposed as wrong or dangerous in order to promote and favour change in terms of inclusion, fairness, and sustainability.

On the assumption that “human beings are unable to see shapes [...] without seeing ‘patterns’” (Scott/Tribble 2006: 6), RoV helps identify ‘shapes’ of dominance by discursively emphasising or construing (Fairclough 1992) its patterning, through structurally

recognisable, semantically accessible and highly predictable formulations, that trigger the dominance paradigm. In turn, the paradigm activates webs of meaning associations (through functional slot + default filler pairs) which prime text interpretation accordingly.

In fact, irrespective of its possible empirical and referential accurateness (in some contexts, in fact, forms of dominance – coercion, exclusion, etc. – are physical, direct and self-evident), the notion of dominance is indeed exploited as a paradigm when reality is indexed, construed or modelled – almost deterministically – according to two main and necessarily epistemological tenets: namely, the immanence of privilege – established structurally, culturally or symbolically – and its enforcement through (usually little noticeable) acts of agency on the part of a dominant group at the expenses of another – this being understood as evidence of ‘objective’ violence. In this sense, the dominance paradigm can be said to offer the perspective through which to model reality representation, while its operationalisation is made possible by RoV: in other words, the paradigm is the shape, whose patterns are made visible through RoV.

On the basis of what has been discussed in the latter part of this analysis, when considered in systemic functional terms (Halliday/Matthiessen 2013), RoV appears to be a special use of the language that, at the textual level, exploits very recognisable forms (i.e., established lexical or figurative handles, conventionalised conceptualisations, etc.) which facilitate (as well as shape and bias) reality representation at the ideational level, and ultimately guide evaluation and interpretation at the interpersonal level, by “both establishing and challenging emotional regimes” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019: 9).

In this sense, in terms of appraisal (White 2015), RoV is far from being referentially neutral, in that, on the one hand, it discloses the writer’s positioning, stance, and attitude, and, on the other, anticipates and favours reader’s alignment. Both functions are performed by fixing conceptualisations (certain referents are almost automatically associated to certain formulations, and vice versa, irrespective of the fact that such associations may not match our experience of reality) and judgements (certain referents are almost automatically – and possibly uncritically – associated to certain evaluation). These crystallised associations and evaluative meanings may indeed serve or reproduce

ideologies (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019), hence reflect bias and even be used for manipulative purposes. However, RoV is not *per se* a tool for manipulation or demagoguery, “whereby skilled speakers and writers seek to influence public opinion by employing the traditional tools of rhetoric with complete indifference to truth” (Lomas 1961: 161), but is instead a maximally transparent and impactful way of expressing and eliciting engagement towards relevant causes, and, conversely, concern and aversion for harm-producing practices, behaviours and ideas.

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ANDRÉS ORTEGA GARRIDO

Confrontación a través del discurso político en la Asamblea de Madrid

Resumen.

El enfrentamiento político en sede parlamentaria puede analizarse a través de discursos como los que se pronuncian en las sesiones de investidura y las intervenciones que componen el género de la pregunta oral de control, caracterizado por la brevedad y su difusión mediática. Analizaremos cualitativamente los discursos entre la presidenta de la Comunidad de Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, y la líder de la oposición, Mónica García, entre 2021 y 2023, durante las intervenciones en el espacio dedicado a la pregunta oral en los Plenos de la Asamblea de Madrid, dada la repercusión mediática de que gozaron. De las cuatro intervenciones que componen el turno de pregunta oral, examinamos las dos primeras, es decir, la pregunta en sí y la respuesta inmediata, en la línea del análisis pragmático-discursivo presentado por Fuentes Rodríguez (2011, 2012). Como resultado, observamos que el enfrentamiento puede activarse ya desde la primera intervención, sin necesidad de esperar a la respuesta, a la réplica o a la contrarréplica, de modo que el género puede configurarse, de entrada, como una escenificación del desencuentro. Ofrecemos asimismo un examen cuantitativo de los discursos cruzados de investidura entre Ayuso y Mónica García y de sus intervenciones en las preguntas orales, basado en las palabras clave de estos textos, mediante la metodología de la lingüística de corpus, a través del cual se observa la tendencia al empleo de léxico coloquial en tales discursos.

Palabras clave: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, Mónica García, discurso político, análisis del discurso, lingüística de corpus

Discurso político y enfrentamiento verbal

En España, el discurso político de los últimos tiempos se caracteriza cada vez más por la confrontación y el enfrentamiento, a través del ataque al oponente político mediante estrategias retóricas variadas, como ha sido puesto de manifiesto en más de una ocasión (Blas Arroyo 2011; Gallardo Paúls 2014; Fuentes Rodríguez 2013, 2016, 2018, 2023; Fuentes Rodríguez/Alcaide Lara 2020), incluso más allá del ámbito estrictamente institucional, cosa que sucede, por ejemplo, en las redes sociales (Herrero Izquierdo *et al.* 2022, Del Saz-Rubio 2023). Dentro del discurso pronunciado en sede institucional se ubican diferentes géneros, como el discurso de investidura, el debate sobre el estado de la nación, la moción de censura o la llamada pregunta oral o pregunta de control (Alvar Ezquerro 1987, 1991; Bathia 1993; Santos López 2010).

En el presente trabajo llevaremos a cabo un examen de las intervenciones durante las preguntas orales y los discursos de investidura pronunciados por la presidenta de la Comunidad de Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, y la portavoz de Más Madrid y líder de la oposición en esta región, Mónica García, durante la XII Legislatura de la Asamblea de Madrid, que se extendió del 8 de junio de 2021 al 4 de abril de 2023. Aparte de los cinco discursos de investidura de ambas políticas (tres pronunciados por Ayuso y dos por Mónica García), tenemos en cuenta la totalidad de sus intervenciones durante los 44 turnos de preguntas de control celebrados durante esa legislatura, intervenciones que alcanzaron un amplio seguimiento en los medios de comunicación, entre otras cosas por su marcado tono polémico y agresivo. Nuestro análisis se fundamenta en una aproximación tanto cualitativa, a partir de los presupuestos del análisis del discurso, como cuantitativa, llevando a cabo un examen basado en las metodologías de la lingüística de corpus, concretamente mediante la extracción y análisis de palabras clave.

De entrada, hemos de tener en cuenta que nos enfrentamos a textos pertenecientes a un lenguaje de especialidad muy peculiar, ya que la lengua de la política, de difícil definición (Santos López/Mapelli 2023: 227-229), no difiere especialmente de la lengua común en el caso del discurso parlamentario, que necesariamente debemos entender como alocución *urbi et orbi*, por así decirlo, reduciendo aquí el orbe a la nación española. Podría argumentarse que unos discursos pronunciados en una sesión de control de un parlamento regional se dirigen únicamente a los políticos interpelados, pero esto sólo es así desde un punto de vista meramente formal, si nos atenemos a un esquema binario formado por un emisor y un receptor. Sin embargo, conviene considerar el discurso político español actual una forma de comunicación al menos ternaria, con unos interlocutores presentes en la sala, que cubren los papeles de emisor y receptor, y un destinatario implícito, que corresponde al ciudadano a quien llega el mensaje, ya sea entera o fragmentariamente. Como se ha señalado, la ciudadanía resulta ser un destinatario privilegiado del discurso parlamentario (Albadalejo 1999, 2000, 2010, 2012; Calvo Revilla 2003; Ilie 2010, 2016, 2020; Ortega Garrido 2024: 13-14), discurso que será construido en forma y fondo teniendo en cuenta en última instancia a ese destinatario final y no tanto al receptor, que queda reducido a mero instrumento con que dotar de contenido y forma institucional al discurso. Por ello, la lengua empleada en ellos podrá manifestar una tendencia al registro coloquial (Gallardo Paúls 2014: 83-85) y a la introducción de referencias que no sobrepasen el horizonte de expectativas del destinatario medio, a saber, el ciudadano común. Esa tendencia puede igualmente relacionarse con la intención evaluativa que adopta el emisor a la hora de seleccionar tal registro, de manera similar a lo que ocurre en los relatos dramatizados presentes en la conversación coloquial (Briz 2016).

Por otra parte, en el ámbito de la descortesía en el discurso político, hay que tener en cuenta el ‘giro moral’ (Kádár 2017; Kádár/Parvaresh 2019) que, en muchos casos, está en la base de los comportamientos verbales dirigidos hacia políticos y que, igualmente, los propios políticos pueden poner en marcha en sus ataques contra sus rivales. Para Parvaresh (2019), quien propone el concepto de ‘perspectiva moral básica’, la agresión verbal puede analizarse desde el marco del orden moral en que se ven inmersos los interactuantes. La

violación de una serie de principios que, desde la perspectiva moral del atacante, ayudan a entender el mundo y a mantener una visión determinada y ordenada de él está en la base del ataque realizado al oponente político, que habría conculcado tales principios morales.

Así las cosas, el discurso político se delinea como una forma de persuasión que tiene en la ciudadanía a su interlocutor mudo final, quien tomará metafóricamente la palabra, si lo desea, a la hora de introducir su voto en la urna. Desde el punto de vista del político, dada la amplia gama de géneros discursivos que incluye esta lengua de especialidad, del debate parlamentario a la propaganda electoral (Santos López/Mapelli 2023) y, por ende, la diversidad de particularidades lingüístico-discursivas es necesario en primer lugar detenerse en las características propias del género *pregunta oral*, *pregunta de control* o, más técnicamente, *pregunta de respuesta oral en Pleno*.

El género parlamentario de la pregunta de respuesta oral en Pleno como estrategia de enfrentamiento político

Si comenzamos con definiciones por negación, podemos decir que el género de la pregunta de respuesta oral se diferencia, por ejemplo, del discurso de investidura en que este, por regla general, mantiene una dimensión programática orientada a la reafirmación de las identidades políticas (Álvarez Muro/Chumaceiro 2009; Álvarez Esteban 2011; Salgado López 2016) y presenta una escasa tendencia a la confrontación. En cambio, la pregunta de respuesta oral comparte el tono encendido del discurso pronunciado en ocasión de una moción de censura, donde el ataque al adversario político adquiere una mayor relevancia (Simón Yarza 2015, 2019; Duce Pérez Blasco 2018; Cortés Rodríguez 2020; Cortés Rodríguez/Álvarez Rosa 2024).

Por otro lado, la pregunta oral en cierto modo forma parte de una interacción, pues de entrada se configura como una sucesión de discursos, ya que a la pregunta le seguirá razonablemente una respuesta; en esto se diferencia de los dos géneros citados, tanto del discurso de investidura como de la moción de censura, discursos concebidos como alocuciones cerradas (aun cuando sea posible que tengan a su vez una respuesta en forma de discurso) de extensión notablemente mayor respecto a las preguntas de control. Por el contrario, comparte estructura con el macrogénero político del debate parlamentario, que igualmente consiste en una sucesión de discursos. Además, desde un punto de vista pragmático, hay que subrayar que las preguntas introducen implícitos discursivos enfocados a la evaluación, a modo de marco general en que tales presuposiciones e implicaturas están actuando de manera, por así decir, soslayada (Sbisà 2007, Gallardo Paúls 2014: 85-108).

Tal como ha sido puesto de manifiesto por Fuentes Rodríguez (2011, 2012), las preguntas orales tienen una estructura hasta cierto punto fija, compuesta por una serie formada por la pregunta inicial, una respuesta, una réplica a esta y una contrarréplica final. En el caso de la Asamblea de Madrid, este género se denomina técnicamente ‘preguntas de respuesta oral en Pleno’ (según el título XI, capítulo primero, artículos 191 y siguientes del Reglamento de la Asamblea de Madrid, consultable en línea¹), las cuales se llevan a cabo durante las sesiones plenarias de la Asamblea, que por regla general se celebran cada jueves. El artículo 193 de dicho reglamento establece que las preguntas de respuesta oral no pueden sobrepasar los seis minutos cada una, concediendo un máximo de tres minutos en total a cada político que tome la palabra:

La sustanciación de las preguntas de respuesta oral en Pleno dará lugar, desde sus respectivos escaños, a la formulación de la pregunta por el Diputado, a la que contestará un miembro del Consejo de Gobierno. Aquel podrá intervenir a continuación para repreguntar o replicar, contestando seguidamente el miembro del Consejo de Gobierno. El tiempo para la tramitación de cada pregunta no podrá exceder de seis minutos, disponiendo el Diputado que la formule y el

¹ https://gestion.comunidad.madrid/wleg_pub/secure/normativas/contenidoNormativa.jsf?opcion=VerHtml&nmnorma=10635&cdestado=P&eli=true#no-back-button (consulta del 20/01/2025).

miembro del Consejo de Gobierno que la conteste, cada uno, de tres minutos como máximo para los dos turnos que les correspondan.

El momento dedicado en el Pleno de la Asamblea a las preguntas de respuesta oral se divide en una primera parte en que los portavoces de cada grupo parlamentario plantean una pregunta al presidente del Gobierno de la Comunidad, en nuestro caso la presidenta Isabel Díaz Ayuso, y en una segunda parte donde las preguntas se dirigen a los consejeros regionales de las distintas áreas.

Fuentes Rodríguez (2011, 2012) ha analizado las preguntas orales de la oposición dirigidas al presidente del Gobierno en el Congreso de los Diputados, estableciendo una clasificación que corresponde en líneas generales con la situación existente en el gobierno regional de Madrid. Desde un punto de vista formal, este tipo de discurso parlamentario se presenta como una interacción fijada, con una alta formalidad y unos usos lingüísticos específicos (2012: 129), a saber, el tratamiento de usted entre los intervinientes y el vocativo peculiar *señoría*, vocablo restringido al contexto político o judicial, señales ambas de una cortesía rutinaria o cortesía formal, que escondería la verdadera norma, es decir, la descortesía en cuanto a los contenidos (2011: 56).

Por lo que respecta a la pregunta de control en sí, su objetivo “no es realmente conseguir una respuesta, sino criticar o acusar al gobierno, o solicitar el cumplimiento de compromisos. Para ello usan la cortesía, las formas indirectas y la acusación fuerte” (2012: 133). Así, puede afirmarse que, en el lenguaje parlamentario, la pregunta se convierte en un instrumento de ataque y en un mecanismo indirecto de descortesía (Burguera Serra 2010). Efectivamente, en la mayor parte de los casos analizados en nuestro estudio, con la pregunta no se busca obtener un conocimiento, sino activar un debate que puede terminar discuriendo por caminos muy alejados del contenido de la pregunta. En este sentido, nos encontramos ante la denominada *falacia de las preguntas complejas*, con la que se plantea “una pregunta de modo que el destinatario tenga que asumir, responda lo que responda, una crítica que dañe su imagen como líder” (Sánchez García 2010: 286).

Por lo que se refiere a la respuesta, se revela clarividente la distinción que indican Partington y Taylor (2018: 157), siguiendo a

Harris (1991), entre *answer* o respuesta que satisface la pregunta previa y *response* o texto que viene después de una pregunta, pero sin responder a lo que en esta se plantea. En efecto, en gran parte de las respuestas que observamos se lanzan nuevos discursos, que incluso evitan cualquier referencia a lo dicho en la pregunta.

Por lo que concierne a la estructura externa del turno de preguntas orales, podemos hablar de dos intercambios, cada uno de ellos formado por dos intervenciones, de modo que obtenemos un esquema de cuatro intervenciones en total. Esta estructura, que para la Asamblea de Madrid resulta ser igual a la delineada por Fuentes Rodríguez (2012: 131) respecto al turno de preguntas de control en el Congreso de los Diputados, presenta en nuestro caso la peculiaridad de que el primer intercambio, que incluye las dos primeras intervenciones, es decir, la pregunta y la respuesta, tiene una duración acusadamente menor respecto al segundo intercambio, con las dos últimas intervenciones, la réplica o repregunta y la contrarréplica. Esto se debe al peso discursivo y argumentativo que la líder de la oposición, Mónica García, y la presidenta, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, otorgan a sus discursos durante el turno de preguntas orales: las dos primeras intervenciones vienen a ser una especie de trámite administrativo para poner en marcha el despliegue retórico y argumentativo, que tiene lugar en las dos últimas intervenciones, donde, por regla general, se concentra la mayor parte del contenido de estos discursos. En efecto, el valor otorgado a las preguntas es argumentativamente escaso, dada la poca entidad de estas, ya sea por plantear cuestiones generales, ya sea por tratarse de ‘preguntas complejas’ en el sentido visto anteriormente, es decir, falaces, pues dan por sentada la mala actuación de la presidenta, responda lo que responda; asimismo, las respuestas de Ayuso son generalmente breves, ya que reserva la artillería retórica para su segunda y última intervención, que, además, cuenta con la ventaja de ser la última, de modo que no puede tener réplica. A pesar de que la pregunta de la oposición debe registrarse por escrito con anterioridad al Pleno y, por ende, la presidenta podría preparar una contraargumentación para responder directamente en su primera intervención, prefiere concentrar todo el tiempo de que dispone en esa contrarréplica final, que cierra el turno de pregunta oral formulada por

Mónica García y que, además, le puede servir a Ayuso para rebatir lo dicho por esta durante la repregunta.

Fuentes Rodríguez (2011) establece tres posibilidades de pregunta en el Congreso de los Diputados, que podemos encontrar sin apenas cambios en los turnos de pregunta de la Asamblea de Madrid: la *pregunta colaborativa*, que es cortés y pretende tender la mano al oponente; la *pregunta evasiva*, en la cual la crítica se oculta a través del recurso a las fórmulas genéricas, a la impersonalidad y a formas verbales en condicional; finalmente, la pregunta como *enfrentamiento directo*, donde la descortesía funcional o de rol desempeña un papel decisivo. Por otro lado, las preguntas dirigidas a los ministros, que en la Asamblea de Madrid encontrarían su correlato en las preguntas formuladas a los consejeros, cuentan con tres posibilidades, que, en cualquier caso, también se constatan en las preguntas de Mónica García a Díaz Ayuso: por un lado, la *atenuación del enfrentamiento*, con mantenimiento de la cortesía y ausencia de formas indirectas, aunque todo ello puede disfrazar un ataque encubierto a la imagen del político o grupo rival (Fuentes Rodríguez 2011: 65); por otro lado, el *enfrentamiento personal* y los *insultos directos*, ya que los abundantes ataques *ad hominem* (Lo Cascio 1998: 293) pueden derivar en el insulto. En estas dos últimas categorías se detecta una mayor presencia de formas indirectas, como la tendencia a referirse al oponente en tercera persona, y una predominancia de la valoración y del léxico de corte coloquial.

Fuentes Rodríguez (2011) insiste en la necesidad de considerar que la descortesía es normativa en los turnos de pregunta, pues los rituales de cortesía formal, con el empleo del usted y el tratamiento de señoría, no impiden en absoluto la introducción del ataque, el insulto y las acusaciones mutuas de todo tipo, que, a fin de cuentas, resultan estar a la orden del día, pues el enfrentamiento se ha convertido en la tónica general. Ello, según señala la citada estudiosa, rebaja la fuerza del ataque, habida cuenta de que se ha convertido en costumbre (2011: 56):

Por tanto, el contexto interactivo predetermina el ataque. En el Congreso van a atacar y ser atacados. Lo importante es ser más brillante que el contrario [...]. Es decir, no se trata de obtener información sobre un dato concreto, sino acosar al Ejecutivo, y conseguir desestabilizar al gobierno, mostrar su debilidad. En suma, realizar su tarea de oposición, de crítica, de la forma más *brillante*

posible. Es un duelo cuerpo a cuerpo con el gobierno. [...] Estamos, pues, ante lo que podemos denominar *descortesía normativa*.

Aparte del componente de confrontación y ataque verbal, las preguntas de control también pueden estar caracterizadas por la presencia de metáforas y metonimias (Alcaide Lara 2016; Santibáñez 2021), fraseología y refranes (Brenes Peña 2016), así como por la ironía y el humor, mecanismos todos ellos que pueden orientarse hacia el ataque al adversario político, pero también funcionar como modo para ganarse al votante (Romero Nieto 2017, 2020; Ortega Garrido 2024).

Nos detendremos a continuación en el análisis cualitativo de las dos primeras intervenciones de la secuencia, que conforman el primer intercambio de la pregunta oral, a saber, la pregunta y la respuesta. De este modo, será posible determinar si existe algún tipo de enfrentamiento ya desde el comienzo de las intervenciones o bien aquella surge en las repreguntas o en las contrarréplicas.

En principio, la pregunta inicial de control que constituye la primera intervención no presenta un carácter especialmente polémico ni busca la confrontación directa, pues en muchos casos la pregunta se reduce a inquirir de modo muy general sobre la actuación de la presidenta regional o de su Gobierno, como en los ejemplos de (1) a (4):

- (1) Señora presidenta, le pregunto por las prioridades de su Gobierno. (Mónica García, DSAM, 3, 8 de julio de 2021)²
- (2) Presidenta, ¿qué planes tiene pensado el Gobierno regional de cara a este verano? Muchas gracias. (Mónica García, DSAM, 23, 15 de julio de 2021)
- (3) Señora Ayuso, ¿cómo valora su Gobierno el primer semestre de la legislatura? (Mónica García, DSAM, 106, 2 de diciembre de 2021)
- (4) Señora presidenta, ¿cuáles son las principales preocupaciones de su Gobierno? (Mónica García, DSAM, 448, 16 de marzo de 2023)

² Indicamos el nombre de la política y a continuación la sigla DSAM (Diario de Sesiones de la Asamblea de Madrid), seguida de un número, que indica de qué diario se trata dentro de los correspondientes a la XII legislatura, y de la fecha en que tuvo lugar la sesión.

De todos modos, en algunos casos la pregunta de Mónica García, aun sin llegar al enfrentamiento directo, se caracteriza por recurrir a la falacia de la pregunta compleja, con la cual cualquier respuesta total (sí o no) que diera Ayuso necesariamente dañaría su imagen, pues implicaría la aceptación de un error o de una culpa en algún sentido. Así, una respuesta afirmativa a la pregunta planteada en (5) indicaría que Ayuso considera ejemplar la presunta contratación irregular de su hermano, sobre el que existían sospechas en ese sentido, mientras que una respuesta negativa supondría aceptar la acusación de haber procedido con una contratación irregular y, en consecuencia, la comisión de un delito; en (6) se produce la misma situación, ya que responder afirmativamente significaría que Ayuso se contenta con dar pocas explicaciones y responder negativamente conllevaría aceptar que se ha ocultado información acerca del caso:

- (5) Mire, ¿considera la presidenta ejemplar la contratación de la Comunidad de Madrid? (Mónica García, DSAM, 144, 10 de febrero de 2022)
- (6) Señora Ayuso, ¿considera que ha dado todas las explicaciones necesarias con respecto al contrato de su hermano? (Mónica García, DSAM, 179, 10 de marzo de 2022)

En una de las sesiones, rompiendo la tendencia a la pregunta escueta y general, Mónica García decide consumir buena parte de su tiempo en la pregunta inicial, anunciando este cambio de estrategia con un comentario metadiscursivo (*hoy no le voy a hacer una pregunta de control al uso, sino más bien una reflexión sobre la calidad de estas sesiones de control al Gobierno*) y pasando directamente al ataque con acusaciones directas (*que usted convierte jueves tras jueves en un barrizal irrespirable*) y un repaso a las ironías e insultos que Ayuso le ha dedicado en sesiones anteriores. En (7) reproducimos parte de esta primera intervención de Mónica García, donde la pregunta en sí viene precedida de un largo e inusitado marco argumental, también detectado, por otra parte, en algunas intervenciones de las sesiones de control del Congreso de los Diputados (Fuentes Rodríguez 2012: 135-136):

- (7) Buenos días, señora Ayuso. Mire, hoy no le voy a hacer una pregunta de control al uso, sino más bien una reflexión sobre la calidad de estas sesiones de control

al Gobierno que usted convierte jueves tras jueves en un barrizal irrespirable. Por ello, me he molestado en repasar las últimas sesiones del último año y, mire, le voy a dar dos datos. Dato número uno, le voy a enumerar en orden alfabético las cosas con las que usted ha respondido a mis preguntas, mire: Bildu, bolivarianos, capillas, Cuba, dictadura, entrecot, ETA, indigenismo, liberados sindicales, okupa, el Papa, patinetes, Phoskitos, pistolas, rebequita en misa y Venezuela. Dato número dos, le voy a decir las cosas que ha dicho sobre mí, a la postre la líder de la oposición más votada, por más de medio millón de madrileños y madrileñas, mire: que estoy desesperada, que tengo la cara mustia, que sonría un poco más, que pongo cara de asquillo, que me hago tirabuzones peperos en el pelo, que si vivo así o asá, que si como esto o lo otro, que si bailo o dejo de bailar y que si trabajo más o menos. Mire, señora Ayuso, cuando quiera, usted y yo comparemos nuestras vidas laborales a ver quién ha trabajado más. (Aplausos). [...] Por eso, le pregunto, señora Ayuso: ¿va a seguir usando la sesión de control al Gobierno para faltarme al respeto a mí y a todos los demócratas? (Aplausos). (Mónica García, DSAM, 239, 12 de mayo de 2022)

El marco argumentativo previo a la pregunta se repite en otros plenos posteriores, sustituyendo la generalmente aséptica pregunta de control por un discurso en que se busca desde los primeros segundos el enfrentamiento con la oponente política, dado el copioso léxico axiológico con una fuerte carga evaluativa que ya prefigura un escenario discursivo negativo, como vemos en (8):

- (8) Señora Ayuso, antes de que usted empiece con su carrusel semanal de insultos y bullying político y su expendedor de bulos semanales, deje que le haga una humilde propuesta, porque es que, ya que usted acaba de decir en su congreso que el Partido Popular no está para gestionar, que está para sus cositas ideológicas, y ya que usted viene aquí todos los jueves a hacer de oposición de la oposición, ¿qué le parece si hago yo de presidenta y ocupo la vacante que lleva desierta desde hace tres años? (Aplausos). (Mónica García, DSAM, 256, 2 de junio de 2022)

En otros casos, el ataque se combina con el argumento de la *exigencia* (Fuentes Rodríguez 2012: 136-137), el cual, sin demasiados preámbulos, abre la intervención de Mónica García en el ejemplo (9) o precede inmediatamente a la pregunta de control en sí, como sucede en (10):

- (9) Buenos días, señora Ayuso. Antes de formularle la pregunta me gustaría exigirle que, si ustedes tienen todavía un mínimo de dignidad y respeto, ¡cese a su

vicepresidente por esas declaraciones miserables que hizo ayer! (Aplausos.)
(Mónica García, DSAM, 310, 6 de octubre de 2022)

- (10) Señora Ayuso, le pido que abra las piscinas, salvo que considere que los madrileños y madrileñas somos unos malcriados por querer darnos un chapuzón en plena ola. Por eso, le pregunto -con más intriga que esperanza- si ha adoptado o piensa adoptar alguna medida contra las olas de calor que están sufriendo los madrileños. Muchas gracias. (Aplausos). (Mónica García, DSAM, 277, 16 de junio de 2022).

Por su parte, la presidenta de la Comunidad de Madrid presenta igualmente un repertorio variado de respuestas. Por una parte, respuestas colaborativas, ejemplos (11) y (12), cercanas al sentido de las *respuestas directas* que analiza Fuentes Rodríguez (2012: 141-142), limitadas a responder a la pregunta formulada por Mónica García.

- (11) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): [...] ¿Cómo afronta la Comunidad de Madrid la emergencia climática? Gracias.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Gracias, señora García. Señora presidenta.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Muchas gracias, señoría. Las políticas de la Comunidad Madrid van en tres sentidos: primero, en consumir de manera más eficiente; después, procurar un aire cada vez más limpio y, muy especialmente, cuidar de nuestro patrimonio natural. Gracias. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 42, 23 de septiembre de 2021)
- (12) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): [...] Señora Ayuso, ¿considera que el Gobierno regional está dando suficiente apoyo a la juventud madrileña?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Señora presidenta.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Yo considero que los jóvenes en la Comunidad de Madrid están mucho mejor que en numerosas zonas del país, y no digamos de fuera, y, por eso, tantos vienen a vivir, a estudiar y a trabajar con nosotros; pero no nos conformamos y vamos a hacer todo lo posible para que siempre vayan a mejor. Gracias. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 86, 11 de noviembre de 2021)

Estas respuestas colaborativas pueden rozar en un optimismo que, como en (13) y (14), podría llevarnos a pensar en una posible ironía ante la pregunta de Mónica García, cuyas cuestiones, pese a su enunciación neutra, cabe interpretar como acusaciones de inacción o inanidad por parte de Ayuso y su Gobierno:

- (13) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): Señora Ayuso, ¿cómo valora su Gobierno el primer semestre de la legislatura?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Señora presidenta, tiene la palabra.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Muchas gracias, señoría. La primera parte de esta legislatura ha sido muy positiva: seguimos controlando la epidemia mientras la economía no deja de crecer y el paro de caer. Gracias. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 106, 2 de diciembre de 2021)
- (14) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): [...] ¿Cómo encara el Gobierno el nuevo curso político?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Señora presidenta.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Gracias, señoría. El curso empezó en septiembre y muy bien, lo que comienza ahora es el nuevo período de sesiones y lo estamos encarando con más fuerza e ilusión que nunca. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 133, 3 de febrero de 2022)

Con todo, Ayuso tiende a responder con un ligero ataque al final de su intervención, como en el ejemplo (15), sin llegar a profundizar demasiado, quizá para no restar tiempo a su segunda intervención:

- (15) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): [...] Señora Ayuso, ¿considera que el Gobierno regional está en disposición de escuchar y atender las dificultades de la sociedad madrileña?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Señora presidenta.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Muchas gracias, señoría. Por supuesto que estoy en disposición de escuchar y atender las dificultades de la sociedad madrileña, que no ni las dificultades ni los problemas de la izquierda madrileña. Gracias. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 109, 9 de diciembre de 2021).

A esta modalidad de respuesta con ataque breve final se suma el ataque directo, ejemplo (16), ahora apoyándose en el clásico argumento *tu quoque*, entendido como variante del argumento *ad hominem* (Partington/Taylor 2018: 78-79), pero en la vertiente del llamado *whataboutism* (Aikin/Casey 2024) en su versión española, es decir, el y *tú más* (Rodríguez Hidalgo/Fotopoulos/De Cleen 2024: 864) (no solamente se acusa al oponente de haber incurrido en lo mismo que este denuncia, sino que lo ha hecho de modo aún más intenso o grave), que en esta ocasión sería más bien y *tú menos*:

- (16) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): [...] Señora Ayuso, ¿considera que ha dado todas las explicaciones necesarias con respecto al contrato de su hermano?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Señora presidenta.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Sí, ¡y mil veces!, y más que usted con el sueldo que cobró de esta Cámara. Gracias. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 179, 10 de marzo de 2022).

De todos modos, una respuesta colaborativa puede estar seguida de un ataque frontal, presentando así dos visiones contrapuestas acerca de un mismo tema, pues el orador actúa correctamente, mientras que el oponente aplica soluciones catastróficas, como se trasluce en (17), donde, además, se recurre al ataque *ad hominem* (Lo Cascio 1998: 293):

- (17) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): Señora presidenta, ¿cuáles son las prioridades de su Gobierno?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Tiene la palabra la señora presidenta del Gobierno.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Muchas gracias. Señoría, defender los intereses de la mayoría de los ciudadanos, crear empleo, fomentar la seguridad jurídica, tener la mejor sanidad de España, estar a la cabeza del cuidado de la naturaleza y vivir en libertad, frente a los modos autoritarios de su partido, mientras usted, que no reflexiona, que todo es ataque que siempre lanza contra mí, borra tuits y baila en los tejados. Gracias. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 439, 9 de marzo de 2023).

El ataque puede contener un comentario metadiscursivo, como en (18) y (19), introduciendo presuposiciones y significados implícitos (Sbisà 2007) a fin de negar la propia capacidad argumentativa de Mónica García y anulando la validez de sus preguntas:

- (18) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): [...]. ¿Cómo valora la presidenta la imagen que ha trasladado de Madrid?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Gracias, señoría. Señora presidenta.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Señoría, como todas las preguntas que usted me realiza, esto es una vaciedad y es tan subjetiva como si habláramos de la imagen que proyectan ustedes o usted en concreto cuando señala a punta de pistola a los grupos que tiene enfrente, al Gobierno y al Partido Popular, o anima a boicotear un hospital público como el Isabel Zendal. (DSAM, 52, 7 de octubre de 2021).
- (19) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): Señora Ayuso, ¿cómo valora la credibilidad del Gobierno regional?
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Señora presidenta.

La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Señoría, pues la típica pregunta suya que no hace para fiscalizar la labor de gobierno, que es lo que debería hacer usted estando en la oposición, sino que imagino que para desahogarse y hacer terapia conmigo, que seguro que se lo agradecen en su casa. Así que coja la pistola y dispere. (Aplausos). (DSAM, 227, 5 de mayo de 2022).

Por último, cabe preguntarse cuál es la reacción de Ayuso ante las preguntas de Mónica García que directamente suponen un ataque o una exigencia. A la larga alocución inicial de la portavoz de Más Madrid que veíamos en el ejemplo (7), Ayuso responde escuetamente ignorando todo lo dicho y recriminando a la líder de la oposición que exponga quejas personales (“Gracias, señoría. Mire, a la política se viene llorado de casa. Gracias”, DSAM, 239, 12 de mayo de 2022), mientras que a los ataques de (8) responde con un ataque *ad hominem* (“¡No, mire, señoría, no sabe lo que está diciendo!”), DSAM, 256, 2 de junio de 2022) y una argumentación donde pone de relieve los avances del Gobierno autonómico de Madrid frente a las políticas del Gobierno socialista de la nación. Al ataque que veíamos en (10), donde se preguntaba por la apertura de las piscinas durante una ola de calor, Ayuso responde, como vemos en (20), recurriendo a la ironía mediante la desautomatización de una unidad fraseológica (Timofeeva 2009), a partir del dicho *agarrarse a un clavo ardiendo*, que Ayuso convierte en *aquí lo que más arde es el clavo al que usted se agarra pleno a pleno*; a ello le sigue una serie de mecanismos retóricos que refuerzan el ataque, desde la metáfora (*fruto de su desesperanza*) hasta la polifonía irónica (Bruzos Moro 2009), atribuyendo a Mónica García enunciados absurdos (*dirá que esta ola de calor es culpa de Ayuso que tiene perspectiva de género*), recurriendo de nuevo a los ataques *ad hominem* (*la veo muy callada, usted tanto presume*), introduciendo referencias al conocimiento enciclopédico del destinatario –con la mención a la foto de las Azores de Aznar, Bush y Blair en 2003 (*la foto de las Azores ha pasado a ser la foto con Colau y con Oltra*)– y sacando a colación casos de corrupción que afectan al PSOE (*a su partido le está señalando la Fiscalía del Tribunal de Cuentas por posible financiación irregular*):

- (20) Mire, señoría, aquí lo que más arde es el clavo al que usted se agarra pleno a pleno, fruto de su desesperanza. Además, dirá que esta ola de calor es culpa de

Ayuso que tiene perspectiva de género, ¿verdad?; es lo que me va a decir. Por cierto, la veo muy callada con los temas de corrupción ahora que a su partido le está señalando la Fiscalía del Tribunal de Cuentas por posible financiación irregular (Aplausos.) o porque la foto de las Azores ha pasado a ser la foto con Colau y con Oltra, amigas de las que usted tanto presume y que están las dos camino del banquillo. Muchas gracias. (Aplausos). (Isabel Díaz Ayuso, DSAM, 277, 16 de junio de 2022).

En el caso del ejemplo (9), donde Mónica García le exigía a Ayuso el cese de su vicepresidente, la política popular ignora en su totalidad el largo marco argumentativo previo y, como vemos en (21), se limita a responder escuetamente a la pregunta en sí, evitando no sólo plegarse a la exigencia, sino también cualquier ataque en esta primera intervención suya, pues reserva todo su arsenal para la segunda:

- (21) La Sra. GARCÍA GÓMEZ (Desde los escaños.): [...] Dicho esto, voy a la pregunta: ¿qué modelo fiscal inspira su política de Gobierno? (Aplausos).
La Sra. PRESIDENTA: Señora presidenta, tiene la palabra.
La Sra. PRESIDENTA DE LA COMUNIDAD (Díaz Ayuso.- Desde los escaños.): Gracias, señoría. El que nos ha situado como la mejor economía de España. (Aplausos). (Isabel Díaz Ayuso, DSAM, 310, 6 de octubre de 2022)

En definitiva, atendiendo a la presencia de elementos explícitos de confrontación y ataque, las dos intervenciones que abren el turno de pregunta oral entre Mónica García e Isabel Díaz Ayuso pueden corresponder a las siguientes categorías:

- 1) una pregunta general no polémica seguida de una respuesta colaborativa (11 casos);
- 2) una pregunta general no polémica seguida de un ataque con mayor o menor intensidad (17 casos);
- 3) una pregunta inicial con ataque e incluso exigencia, a la que seguirá un ataque o bien una respuesta colaborativa que ignora el ataque o la exigencia de la primera intervención y solamente responde a la pregunta en sí (16 casos).

De este recuento se desprende que Mónica García suele formular preguntas sin ataque directo a la imagen de Ayuso (aunque no siempre exentas de ironía o de falacias), mientras que la presidenta de la Comunidad tiende a responder con ataques de distinta intensidad, incluso cuando la pregunta no los incluía.

Análisis de palabras clave en los discursos cruzados entre Díaz Ayuso y Mónica García

Planteamos a continuación un somero análisis de palabras clave en estos discursos cruzados entre Ayuso y Mónica García, partiendo de los presupuestos metodológicos de la lingüística de corpus. Para ello, empleamos la herramienta informática Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014), diseñada para el trabajo con corpus textuales. El corpus que hemos elaborado, formado por los discursos que configuran las 44 preguntas orales efectuadas durante los plenos de la XII Legislatura de la Asamblea de Madrid más los discursos de investidura de ambas políticas, cuenta con un total de 112 266 palabras y 134 480 *tokens*. Igualmente, hemos elaborado dos subcorpus que recogen respectivamente las palabras de la presidenta regional (subcorpus “Díaz Ayuso”) y las palabras de la líder de Más Madrid (subcorpus “Mónica García”) en los discursos en cuestión.

El análisis a través de las palabras clave (Scott 1997, Baker 2006), tanto simples como múltiples, nos revela ciertas idiosincrasias del texto, al menos desde un punto de vista léxico-semántico, poniendo de relieve lo que ha dado en llamarse *aboutness* del texto (Phillips 1989: 7-10, 26, 53-54, citado en Gabrielatos 2018: 225), es decir, los principales contenidos de este, en cuanto a la singular recurrencia de ciertas palabras en comparación con un corpus de lengua general. En nuestro caso, el corpus de referencia es Spanish Web 2018 (esTenTen), alojado en Sketch Engine y compuesto por diecisiete mil millones de palabras.

Aun cuando la presencia de ciertas palabras clave pueda resultar predecible, no lo es tanto que determinados adverbios o conjunciones resulten ser palabras clave, cosa que el programa informático es capaz

de detectar (Scott 2008: 166); igualmente, la presencia o la ausencia de algunas palabras en contextos determinados puede no ser evidente a primera vista, así como tampoco son predecibles al 100% ciertos sustantivos o verbos, como veremos a continuación.

Centrándonos en los elementos léxicos que pueden ponerse en relación con la confrontación, vemos que, tomado en su totalidad, el corpus presenta entre las primeras treinta palabras clave (tabla 1) una que se relaciona directamente con el enfrentamiento verbal, esto es, el verbo *insultar*, en 26ª posición; igualmente, *boicotear* y *boicoteador*, *politizar*, *malcriar*, *negacionismo*, *negacionista* y *bulo* se sitúan en la esfera de la crítica y de la acusación, así como el sustantivo *chapuza*, que ocupa el quinto puesto en la tabla, posición muy relevante, ya que las cuatro primeras palabras clave corresponden a dos nombres propios (*Ayuso*, *Zendal*) y a dos de las indicaciones rutinarias presentes entre paréntesis en el Diario de Sesiones, con las que se indican las reacciones de los presentes en la sala (*aplausos*, *rumores*). De ese modo, la palabra *chapuza* resulta ser la primera palabra clave no previsible en todo el corpus; en relación con *chapuza* aparece aquí también el adjetivo *chapucero*, en 19ª posición. Todas estas palabras clave que señalamos configuran en cierto modo una tematicidad (*aboutness*) concentrada en la diatriba y la acusación, no tanto en el intercambio de ideas sobre políticas concretas; en este ámbito se situarían, *a priori*, voces como *natalidad*, *sanidad* o *descarbonización*, pero son minoría frente a las palabras orientadas a la confrontación.

	Item	Frequency (focus)	Relative frequency (focus)	Score
1	aplausos	712	5294,46777	1397,78
2	ayuso	391	2907,49561	739,129
3	zendal	42	312,31409	276,978
4	rumores	57	423,85486	256,096
5	chapuza	67	498,21536	237,786
6	sesiones	93	691,55267	234,183
7	señoría	181	1345,92505	204,547

8	lasquetty	25	185,90125	174,391
9	escaño	188	1397,97742	158,281
10	madrileño	271	2015,16956	97,495
11	protestas	15	111,54075	89,559
12	boicotear	28	208,2094	80,035
13	presidenta	97	721,29688	73,731
14	negacionismo	13	96,66865	69,527
15	natalidad	26	193,3373	66,979
16	boicoteador	9	66,92445	66,237
17	bulo	25	185,90125	64,65
18	barracón	13	96,66865	61,593
19	chapucero	11	81,79655	55,621
20	politizar	22	163,59309	55,502
21	sanidad	215	1598,75073	53,857
22	malcriar	11	81,79655	53,261
23	descarbonización	15	111,54075	53,076
24	usted	1345	10001,48633	52,5
25	telemadrid	13	96,66865	49,587
26	insultar	58	431,29089	49,427
27	negacionista	10	74,3605	43,45
28	indignamente	6	44,6163	42,659
29	lgtbi	15	111,54075	42,628
30	suap	6	44,6163	42,118

Tabla 1. 30 primeras palabras clave del corpus de estudio completo

Si tenemos en cuenta las primeras treinta palabras clave múltiples (en la tabla 2 ofrecemos las que son relevantes para nuestro estudio), observamos que sólo un puñado se puede englobar en el ámbito de la confrontación, a veces únicamente por lo que implica la expresión. En

ocasiones se le confiere un carácter negativo y crítico, como en *protocolos de la vergüenza* o *colas del hambre*, fórmulas cristalizadas en el discurso de Mónica García con las cuales se refiere, respectivamente, a la gestión de las residencias de ancianos por parte del Gobierno de Ayuso durante la pandemia de 2020 y a los ciudadanos que acuden a centros sociales para recibir alimentos. Igualmente, *fondos buitres* o *problemas de los madrileños* automáticamente se situarán en una esfera de crítica, pero no necesariamente de enfrentamiento. Más cerca de este se encuentran *mentira número*, *chapuza sanitaria*, *bullying político* y *culpa mía*. En el primer caso, se trata de la fórmula con que Mónica García comienza a enumerar las mentiras de Ayuso (*mentira número uno*, *mentira número dos*...); la alusión a la *chapuza sanitaria* hace referencia a la gestión de la sanidad madrileña por parte de Ayuso, mientras que la expresión *bullying político* la emplea para atacar la actitud de la presidenta madrileña durante las sesiones de control. Por su parte, *culpa mía* es una palabra clave múltiple de Ayuso, con la cual introduce autoacusaciones irónicas para desprestigiar los ataques de su adversaria política, como vemos a través de las concordancias (tabla 3).

	Item	Frequency (focus)	Relative frequency (focus)	Score
5	protocolos de la vergüenza	15	111,54075	112,54
7	fondo buitres	17	126,41285	81,828
8	lista de espera	45	334,62225	81,523
10	bajada de impuestos	11	81,79655	67,399
11	crisis energética	15	111,54075	66,671
18	problema de los madrileños	7	52,05235	52,847
22	colas del hambre	7	52,05235	50,72
26	emergencia climática	10	74,3605	46,468
27	mentira número	6	44,6163	45,452
38	chapuza sanitaria	5	37,18025	38,18

39	bullying político	5	37,18025	38,093
41	forma indigna	5	37,18025	37,642
45	culpa mía	6	44,6163	35,867

Tabla 2. Primeras palabras clave múltiples del corpus de estudio en la esfera del enfrentamiento, el ataque o la crítica

culpa mía	si los madrileños se contagian o los estudiantes franceses, ¡hordas de estudiantes franceses que vienen aquí a beber!, es <i>culpa mía</i>
	si matan a un chico en Galicia, es <i>culpa mía</i> y, si los políticos decentes de este país se solidarizan conmigo, también es <i>culpa mía</i> , como he oído.
	Si sube el contagio en Madrid, ¡es <i>culpa mía</i> !
	Si el Orgullo se celebra en Madrid, ¡debe ser <i>culpa mía</i> !
	cuando las cosas van bien en la sanidad pública madrileña es porque sí y, cuando van mal, es <i>culpa mía</i>

Tabla 3. Concordancias de la palabra clave múltiple *culpa mía* en el subcorpus “Díaz Ayuso”

Si observamos las primeras cincuenta palabras clave en los dos subcorpus, comprobamos que en ambos casos hay un importante número de voces que se pueden englobar en ámbitos del enfrentamiento, el ataque o la crítica fuerte, 16 en el subcorpus “Díaz Ayuso” (tabla 6) y 18 en el subcorpus “Mónica García” (tabla 7). En Ayuso destacan ciertos verbos como *abochornar*, *mofar*, *emponzoñar* y *frivolizar*, que pueden relacionarse con aspectos de la comunicación que Ayuso le afea a Mónica García, como vemos en los ejemplos de la tabla 4, tomados de las concordancias:

abochornar	Quiero decirle que a mí me ha <i>abochornado</i> que tengan que tratar a su partido político y a su grupo parlamentario de esa manera...
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mofar	La izquierda de caviar me vuelve a hablar y se vuelve a <i>mofar</i> del Isabel Zendal.
	vienen a una región próspera, a una región libre, y vienen a emprender, vienen a vivir a su manera –sí, se <i>mofan</i> de "a la madrileña", a su manera, no a la de la izquierda
	Yo lo que tengo claro es que volviendo a faltar el respeto a los votantes de Madrid poco se puede hacer [...] </s><s> Primero, quienes se <i>mofan</i> de 100 Montaditos. </s><s> ¿Por qué nos vamos a <i>mofar</i> de los camareros, de los autónomos, de los propietarios, de los proveedores de estas cadenas?
	Y eso es lo que ha permitido, ¿no?, ahorrar a esa gente de la que usted luego se <i>mofa</i>
	Y me habla de hipocresía una persona que se <i>mofa</i> del 100 Montaditos
emponzoñar	Ustedes lo único que hacen es siempre <i>emponzoñar</i> el debate parlamentario
	Y podrán <i>emponzoñar</i> una y otra vez los debates, pero el tiempo nos da la razón
	Hablan de comisiones, hablan de corrupción..., pero como no hay nada de nada [...] tendrán que <i>emponzoñarlo</i>
frivolizar	¿saben ustedes el daño que está causando la droga en España en tantas y tantas familias como para que ahora ustedes <i>frivolicen</i> con el asunto y hablen con esa condescendencia [...]?
	Y, para los jóvenes que quieran ser libres, ¿fomentas únicamente el consumo de drogas e intentas <i>frivolizar</i> con ello?
	Efectivamente, el cannabis, el consumo del cannabis, con el que ustedes tanto <i>frivolizan</i> , es el causante de la mayoría de estos trastornos

Tabla 4. Concordancias de los verbos *abochornar*, *mofar*, *emponzoñar* y *frivolizar* en el subcorpus “Díaz Ayuso”

Por otro lado, *manosear*, *boicotear*, *politizar*, *adueñar* o *deslegitimar* se enfocan hacia el ataque a actitudes de la líder de la oposición, de su grupo parlamentario o incluso de toda la izquierda (tabla 5).

manosear	Cuando se <i>manosea</i> la educación, ¿a quiénes están perjudicando?
	islas que han sido <i>manoseadas</i> [por el comunismo] y de países que han sido secuestrados por sus políticas
	Mire, señoría, aquí los únicos que están <i>manoseando</i> los derechos de los trans son ustedes
boicotear	¡todos ustedes!-, se organizaron para <i>boicotear</i> , o auspiciar, o respaldar el boicot que se estaba haciendo sobre un hospital público
	tuvieron la poca vergüenza, el poco tacto, de intentar <i>boicotearlo</i> , insisto, y de que saliera mal
	les importa tanto que en el resto de España han <i>boicoteado</i> y bloqueado cualquier comisión de investigación en sus parlamentos
	Usted, que ha animado, ha incentivado que se <i>boicotee</i> un hospital público ¡con enfermos dentro curándose!
	Usted es la única sanitaria, la única servidora pública que se aprovecha de lo público para <i>boicotearlo</i> desde dentro para que funcione mal
politizar	ni siquiera han sido capaces de respetar la voluntad de una familia que les ha pedido encarecidamente que dejen de <i>politizar</i> la muerte de su hijo
	¿Ustedes qué hacen? <i>Politizar</i> agresiones de jóvenes
	le demostraré una y otra vez que lo único que hace es <i>politizar</i> siempre el dolor, mentir y ser una profunda hipócrita
	su propaganda izquierdista, ¡que lo único que hace es volver a <i>politizar</i> los espacios de todos!
	una persona [...] que <i>politiza</i> el atropello de una niña, que <i>politiza</i> el asesinato de un chico en Galicia, que <i>politiza</i> con su silencio los abusos sexuales que ha cometido el entorno familiar de su amiga la de Valencia, o la politización de una agresión homófoba falsa, ahora viene, evidentemente, a <i>politizar</i> también lo que es la modificación, que no supresión, de estas leyes
adueñar	es otro de los colectivos de los que ustedes pretenden <i>adueñarse</i>
	piensan que hablando de los barrios humildes se van a <i>adueñar</i> de los barrios humildes

deslegitimar	una inmensa mayoría de los médicos se hartan de cómo usted se <i>adueña</i> de ellos;
	¡La izquierda se <i>adueña</i> de los servicios públicos!
	he vuelto a escuchar otra vez lo de los intereses de unos pocos, <i>deslegitimando</i> nuevamente el resultado de las urnas
	Usted [...] se ha estado inventando agresiones para intentar <i>deslegitimar</i> a este Gobierno
	es ahora cuando intentan <i>deslegitimarme</i> a mí

Tabla 5. Concordancias de los verbos *manosear*, *boicotear*, *politizar*, *adueñar* y *deslegitimar* en el subcorpus “Díaz Ayuso”

Menos numerosos son los sustantivos (*bulo*, *boicot*, *ultraizquierda*, *soflama*) y aún menos los adjetivos (*maniqueo*, *sectario*, *desastrado*). No se contabiliza ningún adverbio entre estas primeras palabras clave de Ayuso.

	Item	Frequency (focus)	Relative frequency (focus)	Score
10	boicotear	21	324,58499	124,555
11	politizar	21	324,58499	109,789
13	bulo	14	216,39	75,196
17	boicot	14	216,39	68,658
19	abochornar	4	61,82571	53,658
21	mofar	6	92,73857	51,678
24	deslegitimar	6	92,73857	49,729
28	adueñar	10	154,56429	41,649
29	emponzoñar	3	46,36929	41,544
30	ultraizquierda	3	46,36929	41,246
31	frivolizar	3	46,36929	40,405
33	soflama	3	46,36929	39,652
37	maniqueo	4	61,82571	38,222

45	manosear	4	61,82571	31,409
47	sectario	6	92,73857	30,933
50	desastrado	2	30,91286	29,944

Tabla 6. Primeras palabras clave en el subcorpus “Díaz Ayuso” en la esfera de la confrontación, el ataque o la crítica

Mónica García, a diferencia de Ayuso, lleva a cabo su ataque prevalentemente mediante sustantivos (*chapuza, negacionismo, negacionista, boicoteador, indecencia, buitres, bulo, chanchullo, soberbia, bledo, bazofia, chiringuito*) y en menor medida adjetivos (*chapucero, malcriado, mustio*) y adverbios (*indignamente*). Los únicos dos verbos que aparecen se pueden dividir, al igual que en el caso de Ayuso, en un verbo con que se reprende el comportamiento verbal de la presidenta (*insultar*) y otro que condena actuaciones de la política de Ayuso (*desguazar*).

	Item	Frequency (focus)	Relative frequency (focus)	Score
3	chapuza	67	960,133	457,806
8	negacionismo	13	186,29446	133,328
9	boicoteador	9	128,97308	126,745
11	chapucero	11	157,63377	106,568
15	malcriado	10	143,30344	92,827
16	negacionista	10	143,30344	83,2
17	indignamente	6	85,98206	81,343
20	insultar	45	644,86542	73,846
24	indecencia	6	85,98206	66,526
28	buitres	20	286,60687	64,082
32	mustio	5	71,65172	57,953
33	bulo	11	157,63377	54,872
36	chanchullo	5	71,65172	52,818

38	soberbia	14	200,6248	52,081
43	desguazar	5	71,65172	49,877
47	bledo	4	57,32137	43,711
48	bazofia	4	57,32137	43,482
50	chiringuito	10	143,30344	41,753

Tabla 7. Primeras palabras clave en el subcorpus “Mónica García” en la esfera de la confrontación, el ataque o la crítica

Las observación y criba de las palabras clave nos permite entresacar del discurso elementos léxicos que, en buen número, contribuyen a la confrontación y al ataque entre la presidenta y la líder de la oposición madrileñas, más allá del debate sobre ideas o políticas concretas, que queda en un segundo plano frente al brillo del ataque, muchas veces basado en voces de un ámbito más bien coloquial (*manosear, chanchullo, bazofia...*).

Conclusiones

El discurso político español actual no se entiende sin tener en cuenta la presencia constante de los medios de comunicación en las distintas sedes parlamentarias, ya que el político construirá su discurso en función del público de votantes a quienes en última instancia llegará ese discurso y que constituyen su destinatario. Por ello, el político buscará la expresión llamativa a fin de conseguir mayor visibilidad en los medios. Este afán parece haber llevado a construir una retórica del ataque, deslegitimando al adversario político a cada paso. En este contexto, uno de los géneros de la lengua de la política que mayor concisión necesita y donde se puede observar mejor esta predominancia de la confrontación es la pregunta oral durante las sesiones de control.

Aun cuando nuestro estudio se limita a un caso muy concreto, como es el de la Asamblea de Madrid en su XII Legislatura, estimamos que puede ser representativo de una forma de discurso político que, por sus propias características, alcanza una relevancia pública y mediática destacada. En efecto, el parlamento regional de la capital española se convirtió en el escenario del enfrentamiento entre la presidenta de la Comunidad, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, y la portavoz de Más Madrid y líder de la oposición, Mónica García, hasta el punto de que muchos de sus encontronazos retóricos alimentaban semanalmente titulares de prensa y televisión. Los discursos intercambiados durante las preguntas de respuesta oral en Pleno, con su limitación de tiempo restringida a tres minutos por interviniente, se revelan significativos a la hora de estudiar el comportamiento del político a través de un discurso necesariamente breve que puede tener gran repercusión mediática.

Como hemos observado, la pregunta oral en sí lanzada por la oposición puede plantearse en términos corteses, así como la respuesta ofrecida por la presidenta, que puede ser colaborativa. Sin embargo, a menudo la propia pregunta oral se plantea desde la confrontación, incluso precedida de un marco argumentativo amplio, y en ocasiones incluye también una exigencia a la presidenta. Por su parte, la respuesta de esta puede asimismo contar con un ataque relativamente suave o bien alcanzar un tono más áspero, si bien tanto la líder de la oposición como la presidenta prefieren cargar el peso de los ataques sobre todo en la réplica y en la contrarréplica.

Teniendo en cuenta un acercamiento cuantitativo, el análisis de palabras clave nos demuestra que una parte sustancial de estas se sitúa en la esfera de la confrontación, el ataque y la crítica. En ocasiones se recurre a un léxico de tono coloquial, quizá pensando en el destinatario final de los discursos, es decir, el ciudadano común, cuya atención se intenta captar mediante el empleo de un léxico más colorido y connotado. Futuros trabajos podrían abordar un estudio diacrónico de este tipo de discursos a fin de conocer, al menos desde la instauración de la actual democracia constitucional, la presencia, el peso y los modos en que ha evolucionado la confrontación política en España en los últimos 40 años, tanto en los parlamentos autonómicos como en el Congreso de los Diputados.

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