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Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions

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Abstract

From an interdisciplinary framework anchored theoretically in Critical Discourse Analysis and using analytical tools from Systemic Functional Linguistics, this article accounts for a crucial use of language in society: the process of legitimization. This article explains specific linguistic ways in which language represents an instrument of control (Hodge and Kress, 1993: 6) and manifests symbolic power (Bourdieu, 2001) in discourse and society. Taking into account previous studies on legitimization (i.e. Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997; Van Dijk, 2005; Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2007, 2008; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999), this particular work develops and proposes some key strategies of legitimization employed by social actors to justify courses of action. The strategies of legitimization can be used individually or in combination with others, and justify social practices through: (1) emotions (particularly fear), (2) a hypothetical future, (3) rationality, (4) voices of expertise and (5) altruism. This article explains how these strategies are linguistically constructed and shaped.

This study explains the use of these discursive structures and strategies through examples of speeches given by leaders with differing ideologies, specifically George W. Bush and Barack Obama, in two different armed conflicts, Iraq (2007) and Afghanistan (2009), to underline their justifications of military presence in the notorious 'War on Terror'.

Keywords

Critical Discourse Analysis, discursive strategies, legitimization, political discourse, US presidents

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Introduction: Legitimization in discourse

Legitimization refers to the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behavior. In this respect, legitimization is a justification of a behavior (mental or physical). The process of legitimization is enacted by argumentation, that is, by providing arguments that explain our social actions, ideas, thoughts, declarations, etc. In addition, the act of legitimizing or justifying is related to a goal, which, in most cases, seeks our interlocutor's support and approval. This search for approval can be motivated by different reasons: to obtain or maintain power, to achieve social acceptance, to improve community relationships, to reach popularity or fame, etc.

We often attempt to obtain people's support or acceptance by first presenting our proposal as the right thing to do, the appropriate way to proceed. 'Right' or 'appropriate' must be understood as 'sociocultural conceptualizations' (Silverstein, 2004) ideologically shaped and defined from and within a social group.

In theory and origin, 'legitimization' refers to making something legal or legalized. From the Latin word 'legitimus' (for example, lawful, legal), the word is related to 'lex/legis' (for example, law, agreement). Nowadays, the word is also used outside the legal jargon and often entails the semantics of 'justification'. In our daily lives, we come across conversations in which we hear legitimizations, often similar to the arguments other social actors employ in more formal settings such as political discourse (i.e. an address to the nation). For instance, when parents tell their children, 'If you are not good the boogey man will come and get you', the parents aim to coerce certain behavior from their children by using fear and the negative emotions associated with the 'boogey man'. When politicians claim that if we do not do what they say we could have another 9/11, they are alluding to the effects of emotions triggered by the tragic events of 9/11. And adults are as terrified of the image of another 9/11 as kids can be of the 'boogey man'. Therefore, even if there are obvious differences in contexts, style and repercussions, and even if both parents and politicians employ different linguistic choices to achieve specific goals, it seems plausible to believe that certain core structures of legitimization respond to cognitive structures that have been naturalized through time in our psyche, which we all share as a society.

Arguments of a different nature can be presented in the pursuit of legitimization, ranging from objective information such as scientific evidence in order to construct truth, especially in the scientific discourse (McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004), to personal experiences to legitimize cultural generalizations (Tusting et al., 2002).

One of the instruments social actors employ in the legitimization process is the use of personal experiences. The construction of generalizations in discourse, about a specific foreign culture, for instance, is often grounded in personal experiences. Therefore, a description of a social or cultural phenomenon can be solely based on the eye-witnessing experience by employing argumentations of the type: 'I know because I was there …'. These expressions perpetuate social and cultural stereotypes (Tusting et al., 2002). In the same vein, witnessing an event or sharing membership with a social group involved in an event (i.e. I am a fireman myself), legitimizes the speakers' opinions regarding the event, the news related to the event or the actions taken in response to a specific event (Hutchby, 2001).

Other times, those opinions or declarations about foreign or different cultures, societies or communities become overt expressions of racism, and that racism is legitimized at different levels, ranging from examples of extreme prejudice discourse, in which social actors blame the victim, 'to rationalized and justified discrimination' (Tileaga, 2005: 618), to more subtle forms of discrimination such as those sometimes presented in the media or the speeches of politicians. Expressions of racism and discrimination may, and often do, come from above, and are conveyed by political actors. In particular, 'political, media, academic and corporate elites play an important role in the reproduction of racism' (Van Dijk, 1992: 88) since they have access to and often control public discourse. In addition to reproducing stereotypes, discrimination and racism, politicians often exert their power to legitimize or delegitimize viewpoints or ideological positionings.

Intentionality is intrinsically related to political discourse and the act of legitimization. Political discourse has been considered planned (Ochs, 1979) or pre-planned discourse (Capone, 2010). Politicians generally think of the main ideas they want to convey, if not word by word, *grosso modo*, during scheduled public speeches and appearances. There is premeditation and often an advisory team to revise and edit politicians' speeches. Political actors aim to maintain their hegemonic power, through different means and particularly through discourse.

> (1) Linguistic intentionality is what animates a speech act: it is the reason why the speech act is proffered as well as the intended consequence of the speech act. If all goes well, and the speaker's communicative purpose is understood properly, the addressee will fulfill that purpose. 'Intention' originally meant 'aiming at'. So, it is reasonable that an utterance should aim at something (its purpose) and be fulfilled if the purpose is taken up. (Capone, 2010: 2965)

On the other hand, the very act of legitimization per se implies an attempt to justify action or no action or an ideological position on a specific issue. For these reasons, this article explains five strategies, although they could also be understood as scenarios that the speaker displays to achieve political goals.

This study presents strategies of legitimization and their linguistic means of realization in discourse. The article accounts for those strategies through the analysis of political speeches. Cap considers 'legitimization as a principal discourse goal sought by political actors' (Cap, 2008: 39). Legitimization deserves special attention in political discourse because it is from this speech event that political leaders justify their political agenda to maintain or alter the direction of a whole nation and, in the case of US leaders, the entire world. This work observes strategies of legitimatization revealing cause–consequence effects about shared beliefs within a cultural group.

Political discourse refers to a genre that involves political actors speaking publically. Those speech events are commonly made in public forums in which politicians attempt to project their political agendas. They can present their agendas in more or less subtle ways, sometimes by presenting the state of affairs as a simple narrator (Reyes, 2008a). These speeches are legally legitimized 'by its authoritative source and formal context' (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997: 530); they represent 'official, institutional discourse, produced by a person who … is authorized' (p. 530). These characteristics of 'the institutional political context … define the authority of this discourse' (p. 530).

The contextual elements of that specific setting invest the political actor with authority and the power rested upon his figure by different institutions. Therefore, speech acts are effective when they are situated. Not only do they rely on the situation in which they are uttered, but they actively create it (Mey, 2001: 219).

The contextual setting validates the authority of the politician and that power allows the politician to present his speech as truth. Consequently, the institutional authority of the discourse validates the truth or credibility of the political message (which is the political actor's interpretation of the events). The alleged truthfulness of the discourse supports the justification of the action taken (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997: 530).

Politicians enact the symbolic power (Bourdieu, 2001) latent in the use of language to 'naturalize' political goals (Fairclough, 2002). Chouliaraki (2005) understands the action of legitimacy, for instance in relation to the Iraq war discourses, as an instance of soft (symbolic) power. Therefore, politicians harness their power, from their status and position, to explain or justify acts in a specific way to elicit people's support. In this vein, political discourse constitutes an example of persuasive speech, to a certain extent organized and conceived to legitimize political goals (Cap, 2008). The persuasive nature of political discourse allows politicians to present their goals as their audiences' goals: '[T]he inspiring orator can also lead a people, or rather mislead them, into believing that the narrow self-interests of the governing party are actually the interest of the people as a whole' (Joseph, 2006: 13).

This article analyzes examples from former President George W. Bush's and current President Barack Obama's speeches in 2007 and 2009, respectively, where they announced the decision to increase troops to aid in the conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan. On 11 January 2007, former President Bush announced in Fort Benning, Georgia, the decision to send more than 20,000 US troops to Iraq. Less than two years later, on 1 December 2009, President Obama commanded in West Point, New York, 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan. Speeches from both presidents allow a cross-ideological study of the employment of these strategies, underlining in this case a very similar way of justifying military intervention.

Those speeches are historically situated within the post-9/11 political global arena. After the attacks of 9/11, the USA began a series of military actions that ranged geographically from Afghanistan to Iraq, and ideologically from the umbrella terms of the 'War on Terror' to 'Iraqi freedom'. Both military operations started under George W. Bush's administration. In the US presidential elections of 2008, due to the imminent economic crisis and the unexpected duration of those conflicts and, in particular, due to the unpopularity of the conflict in Iraq, Barack Obama won the elections and carried on with the task of leading those operations overseas. Both presidents, advised by high commanders of the army, saw the need to send more troops to each conflict overseas in 2007 and 2009 respectively.

Through these instances of discourse, I underline five crucial strategies of legitimization these social actors developed in their argument to achieve social goals.

The theoretical framework

This article aims to explain relationships between discourse and social practices. In this respect, this study is framed within the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

CDA practitioners analyze discourse practices to decode relationships between language and ideology, language and power, language and gender. Often studies under CDA account for the linguistic construction of national identity and the process of 'othering' (i.e. racism, definition of the enemy), among other things. I analyze the linguistic ways in which legitimatization is constructed in discourse.

In order to account for the relation between social practices and discourse, I pay close attention to the linguistic choices employed in the message. I apply tools from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze the linguistic representations of legitimization in discourse.

This study considers and further develops a set of categories proposed by Van Leeuwen (1996, 2007, 2008) addressing legitimization in discourse. Van Leeuwen underlines four main categories of legitimization: authorization (reference to authority figures or tradition), moral evaluation (reference to a value systems), rationalization (references to goals and uses of institutionalized social action) and mythopoesis (narratives that reward legitimate actions) (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 92).

These categories have been applied to the analysis of the discourse of political officials, for instance when they justify the rejection of immigrants' petitions to be reunited with their relatives in Austria (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999).

The present study expands on some of those strategies, proposes new ones, correlates them with specific linguistic means of realization and provides a new context of comparison, cross-ideologically contrasting the way the current and former US presidents build legitimization from different ideological positionings. Below, I explain the theoretical foundations of the categories proposed in this study.

1. Legitimization through emotions

The appeal to emotions allows social actors to skew the opinion of their interlocutors or audience regarding a specific matter. The negative representation of social actors and the attribution of negative qualities to their personalities or their actions allow speakers to create two sides of a given story/event, in which speaker and audience are in the 'us-group' and the social actors depicted negatively constitute the 'them-group'. Politicians accomplish this linguistically through 'constructive strategies', that is, 'utterances which constitute a "we" group and a "they" group through particular acts of reference' (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999: 92).

Van Dijk (2005) accounts for political implicatures of the former Spanish president, José María Aznar, such as 'negative other-presentation'. In the same vein, Wodak defines discursive strategies regarding the 'positive self- and negative other-representation' by posing several methodological questions (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 44; Wodak, 2001: 72, 2002: 40–1), later employed or developed by others (i.e. Blackledge, 2005: 21; Reisigl, 2008: 99). The answers to these questions constitute different strategies in discourse. For example, in answering 'How are persons linguistically named and referred to?', Wodak proposes 'Referential Strategies or Nomination Strategies' used for the construction and representation of social actors. In answering 'What characteristics, features, qualities are associated or attributed to them?', Wodak refers to 'Predicative Strategies' when social actors are identified or explained through evaluative attributions, for example. 'Argumentative strategies' are proposed to answer the question, 'By means

of what arguments or argumentation scheme, linguistic structures and rhetorical devices do these leaders try to justify, legitimize and naturalize the exclusion, discrimination or demonization of others?' (Wodak, 2001: 72; 2002: 40–1). These discursive strategies are relevant when legitimization is displayed through emotions, particularly fear, and social actors refer to what 'the other' is or does.

Similarly, Chilton (2004) provides descriptions of political discourses in relation to strategies of legitimization or de-legitimization and their emotive effects: fear of outsiders, destruction, madness, death, etc. (Chilton, 2004: 114–16).

2. Legitimization through a hypothetical future

To pose a threat in the future that requires our imminent action in the present is another strategy displayed in political discourse (Dunmire, 2007). Political actors exert their power addressing the future by employing specific linguistic choices and structures, such as conditional sentences of the type: 'If + past [protasis] → would + Infinitive without to [apodosis]', or 'If + present [protasis] → will + Infinitive without to [apodosis]', the order of protasis and apodosis being interchangeable as shown by the example: 'this danger will only grow if … Al-Qaeda can operate with impunity' (Obama, 1 December 2009).

3. Legitimization through rationality

This legitimization is enacted when political actors present the legitimization process as a process where decisions have been made after a heeded, evaluated and thoughtful procedure. Van Leeuwen refers to this rationalization as 'Theoretical Rationalization' (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Rationalization needs to be understood as a modus operandi defined and shaped by and from a specific society. In this sense, it can be considered 'rational' to consult other sources and explore all the options before making a decision. Consequently, this strategy of legitimization is linguistically articulated by clauses such as 'After consultations with our allies' (Obama, 1 December 2009), or verbs denoting mental and verbal processes (Thompson, 2004) such as 'explore' and 'consult'.

4. Voices of expertise

Voices of expertise are displayed in discourse to show the audience that experts in a specific field are backing the politician's proposal with their knowledgeable statements. This legitimization refers to the 'authorization' (Van Leeuwen, 2007) that a speaker brings to the immediate context of the current speech to strengthen his/her position. Authorization is also displayed by the fact that politicians stand as authoritative sources, presenting information in a formal context, producing official and institutional discourse (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997: 530).

Regardless of whether the authority is enacted through voices from authoritative figures evoked by the speaker or by the institutional position represented by the speaker, authority constitutes a strategy to legitimize actions. This phenomenon has been discussed as 'Authoritative speech' by authors such as Duranti (1994), Gal and Woolard (1995) and Philips (2004). Authoritative speech is a speech associated with authoritative

people; in this way, the 'speaker is more persuasive, more convincing, and more attended to' (Philips, 2004: 475).

In addition to reliable sources, social actors can display indicators of 'precision and exactness such as numbers' (Van Dijk, 1988: 84). Exact numbers can support or be part of the authority of those voices, reinforcing this legitimization through voices of expertise.

In narratives of personal experiences (Koven, 2002, 2007) and political discourse (Reyes, 2008a), these voices are enacted through the role of character.

5. Altruism

Public speakers, in particular, and social actors, in general, make sure their proposals do not appear driven only by personal interests. They present themselves, for example, as serving their voters, and therefore they legitimize proposals as a common good that will improve the conditions of a particular community. 'Institutional actions and policies are typically described as beneficial for the group or society as a whole' (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997: 528). This society can include the community of the politician and audience, or it can refer to a remote society that the speaker presents as in need of 'our' help. This legitimization responds to the well-being of other people and is related to the idea of altruism. This strategy is somehow related to a type of 'moral evaluation' (Van Leeuween, 2007) in the sense that it refers to a system of values.

This legitimization is often presented as part of what Lakoff considers the plot of a story, more specifically 'The Fairy Tale of the Just War' (Lakoff, 1991), where there is a villain, a victim and a hero.

The five legitimization strategies presented above are effective because we share, as a society, certain values and visions of the world. This study considers rhetoric studies to understand the construction of meaning throughout the variable of time (Hart and Sparrow, 2001; Hart et al., 2005). Along those lines, the 'collective memory' explains an instrument to carry meaning throughout generations, by observing the rhetoric of the present and the past (Hart et al., 2005). Other authors refer to that construction of meaning simply as 'shared beliefs' (Beasley, 2004). The meaning of words is shaped and reshaped thorough appearances in connection to different times and contexts, to the point that some words become, for example, part of a disapproved lexicon (Hart, 1997: 159) and, therefore, emotionally charged: 'Global and local voices are involved in continuous interchanges and negotiations' (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007: 31).

In anthropological linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, this relationship has been addressed as recontextualization and interdiscursivity (Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Blackledge, 2005; Fairclough, 2003; Silverstein, 1992; Wodak, 2008, 2009).

Throughout the development of these strategies or scenarios, there is a general strategy that prevails as a present and common move: the constant creation of two sides, groups and perspectives that allows for the construction of 'otherness'. This construction of the 'other' is displayed through the Foucauldian concepts of 'division' and 'rejection' (Foucault, 1972). As described by Martín Rojo (1995: 50), division establishes an inclusive 'us' and an exclusive 'them', and rejection evokes an ideological dimension that portrays the excluded as mad, irrational, immoral, evil, etc.

As shown in the next section, this binary conceptualization (Chilton, 2004) is displayed through an attribution of qualities and/or performance of actions by two different groups: 'us' versus 'them'. The politician clearly positions himself within the group performing rational, moral, correct and respectful behavior and the group who fights for the right cause (democracy, freedom, the innocent, defenseless and suffering people, etc.). This division and rejection is constructed through what 'they' are ('extremists', 'terrorists', 'killers' [Bush, 11 January 2007]), what 'they' do ('They killed innocent people' [Bush, 11 January 2007], 'They took the lives of innocent men, women, and children' [Obama, 1 December 2009]), what 'they' have done ('horrific attack' [Obama, 1 December 2009]), or what 'they' could do ('grave threat' [Bush, 11 January 2007]).

The same discourses that present this constant division of two groups of social actors, essentially good and evil, are validated by the institutional authority invested in the political actor, representing discourses of truth. It is through that validation that the situations are dramatized, provoking emotions such as fear.

Legitimization strategies

This section explains the discursive strategies social actors employ in discourse to legitimize their ideological positionings and actions.

Legitimization through emotions

The first legitimization strategy deals with the appeal to emotions. As social actors, we evoke different types of emotions to legitimize our actions or words, and elicit a behavioral or mental response from our interlocutors (we can search, for instance, for sympathy, a comforting hug or a simple, understanding nod). Social actors appeal to emotions to construct, impose, debate or legitimize certain perceptions of reality, contributing individually to form their community's vision of social behavior. In other words, emotions are generally predictable and the relationship between social behavior and emotions is part of our cognitive understanding of reality, yet emotions have the potential of distorting that same cognitive understanding of reality. In relation to emotions, Elster affirms that:

> (2) A crucial fact about the emotions is that they have the capacity to alter and distort the cognitive appraisal that triggered them in the first place. The object of an emotion is the emotionally distorted picture of its cause. This feedback from emotions is a key to the dynamics of the emotions. (Elster, 1994: 27)

The effect of this feedback from emotions can be understood through processes such as indexicality, which refers generally to the association of semantic nuances (socio, cultural, historical, political) evoked by semiotic resources in any given speech event (Silverstein, 1992, 1995/1976). For instance, the mention of the word 'terrorist' evokes a series of nuances in the reader's or listener's mind, which are linked emotionally with previous experiences. Through experiences, emotions and meanings are dialogically constructed and shaped (Bakhtin, 1981).

In this section, I explain legitimization through emotions with examples from political discourse. Emotions are often manipulated by political power to achieve goals in the political agenda (Reyes, 2010). Perhaps the most emotionally exploited events to legitimize political action in the modern political arena (at least in countries such as the USA, the UK and Spain) have been the attacks of 11 September 2001. From that moment on, politicians have legitimized and developed the 'War on Terror'. September 11 is not only the *Alfa* of this conflict, it is also the source of numerous negative emotions related to the tragic events. The events of 9/11 have been presented as the events that absolve the USA (leaders and citizens) from all responsibility in starting the 'War on Terror'. After the 2001 attacks, political leaders have clearly referred to the 'War on Terror', stating that 'we' did not ask for it nor did 'we' start it (i.e. 'We did not ask for this fight' [Obama, 1 December 2009]).

The coverage of the 9/11 events by the television channels of the world, the dramatic live images and the descriptions of those events in the media have altered the cognitive structure of our emotions. Since then, any allusion to 9/11 triggers in us emotions related to those events that have been shaped through the years. The media coverage of the 9/11 attacks created a compelling American national identity that 'establishes its own moral virtue through victimization and heroic restitution' (Anker, 2005: 25). These processes constitute a cultural mode of a melodrama, one of its main qualities residing in 'a cyclical interaction of emotion and action meant to create' suspense and resolve conflict (Anker, 2005: 24).

Through collective memory or shared belief, a brief reference ('killed 3,000 of our citizens') is enough for the audience to understand that the political actor is referring to 9/11. In short, indexical readings are constantly embedded in political messages (Silverstein, 2003).

(3) These are the same folks that came and **killed about 3,000 of our citizens**.[1] (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Political leaders, since 2001, have exploited the tragic events of 9/11 to trigger people's emotions in order to legitimize future actions. The following excerpts are examples of politicians referring to those events. Our shared experience and reading of reality as a cultural group allows the political message in (4) to evoke the tragic events of 11 September, by putting together three linguistic phrases: '19 men', 'airplanes' and 'murder 3,000 people'.

(4) On **September 11 2001, 19 men hijacked four airplanes** and used them to murder nearly **3,000 people**. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

What is the point of sentences like (4) in a political speech in 2009? There is no new information for the audience; the audience members have not forgotten 9/11. Nevertheless, this sentence triggers an emotional mode (fear, sadness, insecurity, revenge) in the audience, ideal to later on legitimize political actions based on the effects of those emotions.

Example (5) shows how the date has become a landmark in recent American history. A simple mentioning of it evokes a set of memories and emotions related to the events. Emotions are reconstructed over and over again by the media and politicians.

(5) Al-Qaeda has not reemerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before **9/11**, but they retain their safe havens along the border. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

Even though those events happened in 2001, political actors such as Bush and Obama continue to ask their audiences not to forget those attacks, as they constitute a main source of justification for further military action.

(6) I knew that right after **the attacks**, the American psyche being what it is, **people would tend to forget the grave threat** posed by these people. I knew that. As a matter of fact, I was hoping that would happen so that life would go on. But the fortunate thing for this country is that those who wear the uniform have never forgotten the threat. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

In the same vein, Obama's excerpt below, taken from the end of the speech, appeals to the core of emotions related to 9/11.

(7) **It's easy to forget** that when this war began, we were united – bound together by the fresh memory of a **horrific attack**, and by the determination to defend our homeland and the values we hold dear. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

That 'horrific attack' was executed by someone that is presented as the enemy and will undertake an intense campaign of demonization. On the other side of the coin, Al-Qaeda has presented itself to a global audience 'distributing their emotion-arousing messages worldwide' (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007: 34). Both messages have made world citizens aware, concerned and even afraid of the global risk.

Emotions are key in the legitimization process, because they condition and prepare the audience to receive proposals and courses of actions. Emotions skew the audience towards accepting and supporting the proposal of the social actor, who has triggered the emotions in the first place.

Legitimization through the emotion of fear. Fear is perhaps the most effective emotion to trigger a response from the interlocutors. Fear is employed to achieve goals in different speech events, such as the previous example: 'If you are not good, the boogey man will come and get you.' Fear is a powerful emotion that humans can employ to achieve some of the most challenging goals, such as persuading someone to risk his or her life, going to the front line and fighting.

The following are instances of political discourse that exemplify the use of the emotion of fear to legitimize social practices. Fear is often developed in political discourse by a process of demonization of the enemy, and that process is linguistically realized by attributes (such as negative moral attitudes) and actions (such as atrocities, including past and future atrocities [potential atrocities], as shown in the next examples). This process deals with the representation of social actors in discourse (Van Leeuwen, 2002).

Excerpts (8) and (9) display Referential or Nomination Strategies (Wodak, 2001, 2002) of social actors.

(8) … clear a neighborhood of **extremists** and **terrorists**. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

(9) They're tired of foreigners and **killers** in their midst. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Excerpt (10) presents an Argumentative Strategy (Wodak, 2001, 2002) defining actions by social actors.

(10) They **killed innocent** people. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

In the case of 9/11, there was a tendency to 'magnify the scope of the tragedy, to more fully demonize the opposition. And in the central core of *this* is the portrayal of America (its system, values, and so on) as the universal symbol' (Edwards, 2004: 157).

September 11 set the base to develop a War on Terror and create a fearful enemy. Chomsky (2004) suggests that '[f]or each of the superpowers, it is very useful to have a "Great Satan" that can be invoked to terrorize the domestic population into consent and obedience when it chooses to carry out one or another form of violence: subversion, aggression, destabilization, a war of terror' (2004: 349).

In excerpt (11) as in (10), we observe the emphasis on the death of the innocent to construct the idea of a merciless enemy in order to legitimize future action against that enemy.

(11) They **took the lives of innocent men, women, and children** without regard to their faith or race or station. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

In excerpt (11), the whole of innocent people is broken down into subgroups, displaying an 'Explicit Emotional Enumeration (EEE)' (Reyes, 2008b). The dramatism of the enemy's actions is emphasized by depicting an enemy that does not make distinctions among its victims.

In (12), the political actor is linguistically reconstructing the enemy 'them' according to different parameters that go from ideology to actions, spelling out their vision, ideology, attitude, beliefs and actions.

(12) See, **their vision** of life, their **ideology** can't stand the thought of free societies in their midst. They're totalitarians. You do it this way, or else, is their **attitude** about government. They don't **believe** in freedoms, like freedom to worship. I, frankly – well, speaking about religion, these are murderers. They use murder as a tool to achieve their objective. Religious people don't murder. They may **claim** they're religious, but when you **kill** an innocent woman, or a child to create a political end, that's not my view of religion. And yet, there are a lot of peaceful, religious people in the Middle East. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

We observe the use of Nomination Strategies, such as 'totalitarians' and 'murderers', and Argumentative Strategies (Wodak, 2001, 2002), such as 'kill', to define an enemy. Under

a Transitive Model (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 282), within Systemic Functional Grammar, the main verb-types employed in the construction of enemy are Mental ('believe'), Verbal ('claim') and Material ('murder' and 'kill'). In these processes, social actors in subject-position are described as 'Senser', 'Sayer' or 'Actor.' In other words, the construction of the enemy is based on what the enemy senses, thinks or does.

In the following excerpts (13) and (14), demonization of the enemy is portrayed through Predicative Strategies (Wodak, 2001, 2002).

(13) … the Taliban – **a ruthless, repressive and radical** movement. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

(14) … while engaging in increasingly **brazen and devastating** attacks of terrorism against the Pakistani people. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

The next excerpt, taken from the closing of a speech, reveals the importance of legitimization through fear in the political message. To legitimize his course of action, the political actor cautions the audience as to the terrible enemy we are facing and its horrifying potential: 'as brutal an enemy this country has ever faced … they will kill you in a minute …'

(15) **It's important for our citizens to understand that the terrorists and extremists are as brutal an enemy as this country has ever faced**. There are no rules of warfare. They don't – **they will kill you in a minute** in order to achieve an objective. And I know we're going to face difficulties as we take on this important duty and task, and so do you. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

In excerpt (16), we have a metaphor relating terrorism to cancer. This metaphor from the medical domain involves different actors: a doctor (the USA) trying to prevent a patient (the earth) from developing cancer in a specific area (the border region of Afghanistan–Pakistan).

(16) We're in Afghanistan to prevent **a cancer from once again spreading** through that country. But this same cancer has also taken root in the border region of Pakistan. That's why we need a strategy that works on both sides of the border. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

The fear factor is conveyed through a different semantic field by evoking one of the most fatal terminal illnesses found in humans: cancer.

As we have seen, social actors can justify a call for action by appealing to emotions. Among those emotions, fear is key to attract our interlocutors' attention and legitimize actions, thoughts, words, ideologies, etc. This legitimization is constructed linguistically through specific linguistic choices to first create an enemy – a they-group – and then later demonize it. The 'other' is then described by what they are (Nomination Strategies) and what they do (Argumentative Strategies). The 'other's' actions denote mainly material processes, that is, actions that are syntactically combined with a 'goal': a Systemic Functional Grammar category occupied by subjects who suffer those actions, often innocent and defenseless people.

Legitimization through a hypothetical future

Legitimization often occurs through a time frame or time line connecting our past, present and future. Political actors display the present as a period that requires making crucial decisions about taking actions. These actions are related to a cause (which occurred in the past) and a consequence (which may occur in the future). In other words, the cause of our present problem is in the past, and it now triggers imminent action in order to avoid the same problem repeating itself in the future. Only in this way can we enjoy a successful future.

In political discourse, the legitimization process projects the future according to the possible actions taken in the present. In this way, the future displays two alternatives depicted in two different ways:

(a) If we do not do what the speaker proposes in the present, the past will repeat itself. Terrorism will spread:

- … radical Islamic extremists would grow in strength. (Bush, 11 January 2007)
- … this danger will only grow if … Al-Qaeda can operate with impunity. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

(b) If we do act according to the speaker's suggestion, we will have security at home and we will enjoy a series of familiar values: freedom, liberty, happiness. This constitutes a '"moral evaluation", legitimation by reference to discourses of value' (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 109–10).

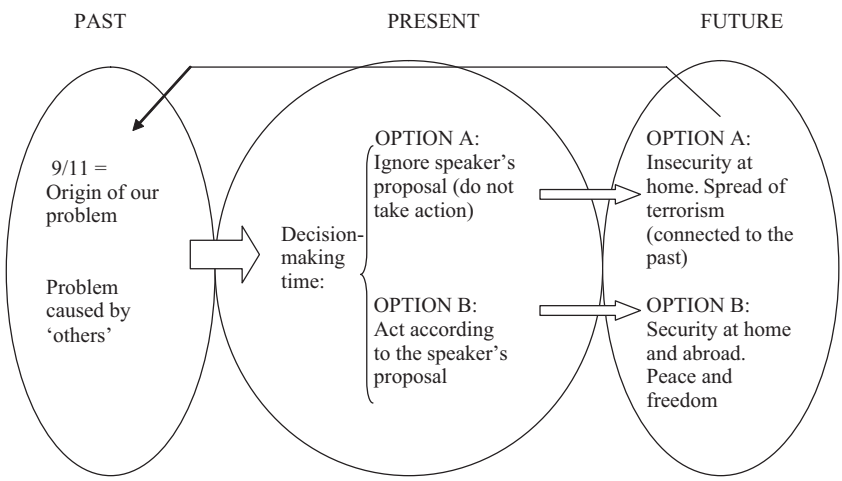

Figure 1. Legitimization of arguments through a sample time line

Figure 1 shows how political actors legitimize their arguments through a time line.

In the following excerpt, we observe the linguistic construction of Option A in the figure above: if we do not follow the speaker's proposal.

(17) 'Yet, it's important for our fellow citizens to understand that **failure in Iraq would be a disaster for our future.** And here's why. One of the wisest comments I've heard about this battle in Iraq was made by General John Abizaid – smart guy, a great soldier. He told me – he said, Mr President, **if we were to fail in Iraq, the enemy would follow us here to America.**

It's a different kind of war in which **failure in one part of the world could lead to disaster here at home.** It's important for our citizens to understand that as tempting as it might be, to understand the consequences of **leaving before the job is done, radical Islamic extremists would grow in strength.** They would be emboldened. It would make it easier to recruit for their cause. They would be in a position to do that which they have said they want to do, which is to topple moderate governments, to spread their radical vision across an important region of the world.

Imagine what would happen if these extremists who hate America and our way of life gained control of energy reserves. You can bet they would use those reserves to blackmail economies in order to achieve their objective. If we were to leave before the job is done, if we were to fail in Iraq, Iran would be emboldened in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Our enemies would have safe havens from which to launch attacks. People would look back at this moment in history and say, what happened to them in America? How come they couldn't see the threats to a future generation? That is why we must, and we will, succeed in Iraq (Applause). (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Hypothetical future problems are linguistically constructed mainly by the use of conditional structures of the type: '(protasis) If + past → (apodosis) would + Infinitive without to', that is 'If we were to fail in Iraq, the enemy would follow us here to America' (Bush, 11 January 2007). This example shows how political actors attempt to achieve political goals by legitimizing actions through a hypothetical future, employing very specific linguistic choices. The future, then, constitutes 'an ideologically significant site in which dominant political actors and institutions can exert power and control' (Dunmire, 2007: 19).

In this case, politicians present a hypothetically fearful scenario (with the use of markers of modalization [Fairclough, 2003]: would and could), speculating about a disastrous future, imagining scenarios instead of mentioning actual facts: 'Imagine what would happen if these extremists who hate America and our way of life gained control of energy reserves' (Bush, 11 January 2007).

Figure 2 shows the apodosis clauses of the conditional constructions employed to express the consequences of not acting now.

Even though these situations are hypothetical and, therefore, not real, the indexical meaning evoked by them into the 'collective memory' (Hart et al., 2005) participates in forming a 'shared belief' (Beasley, 2004) that is reinforced by the repetitive pattern in which they are being presented. This repetitive structure 'naturalizes' (Fairclough, 2002) discursive goals, so that the audience assimilates the situations they are exposed to as 'the way it is'. By the time the decision needs to be made, this hypothetical association of cause–consequence has been exploited in the discourse so that the decision stands as natural, necessary and, often, the only way to proceed. The focus on a dangerous future allows politicians to deviate the attention from the present itself and to avoid pertinent questions about the decision making, such as: Why do we need more soldiers? Why now? Is this the result of a miscalculation? And, if so, who is responsible for it?

Apodosis
=> would be a disaster for our future. => the enemy would follow us here to America. => could lead to disaster here at home. => radical Islamic extremists would grow in strength. =>They would be emboldened. =>It would make it easier to recruit for their cause. =>They would be in a position to do that which they have said they want to do, which is to topple moderate governments, to spread their radical vision across an important region of the world. =>Imagine what would happen. =>they would use those reserves to blackmail economies in order to achieve their objective. =>Iran would be emboldened in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. =>Our enemies would have safe havens from which to launch attacks. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Figure 2. Apodosis of conditional sentences: consequences to the protasis 'if we do not act now'

These legitimizations do not respond to an ideological position, nor are they idiosyncratic characteristics of a particular political actor. The same type of legitimization is displayed by Obama when he uses a scary future to justify present decisions.

(18) We know that Al-Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that **they would use them**. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

(19) And **this danger will only grow** if the region slides backwards, and Al-Qaeda can operate with impunity. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

The use of nuclear weapons by the enemy (18) and a danger that grows (19) are hypothetical consequences of not following the speaker's proposal, and they are presented with a type of conditional structure explained before. In the next excerpt, Obama specifies the consequences of not following his suggestions. Those future consequences evoke the past, more specifically 9/11.

(20) To abandon this area now – and to rely only on efforts against Al-Qaeda from a distance – would significantly hamper our ability to keep the pressure on Al-Qaeda, and **create an unacceptable risk of additional attacks on our homeland and our allies**. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

In excerpt (21) below, Obama pronounces a sentence about a hypothesis without the elements of modality normally displayed in some types of conditional structure, such as 'could' or 'would'.

(21) It is from here [Afghanistan] that **we were attacked on 9/11**, and it is from here that **new attacks are being plotted as I speak**. This is no idle danger; no hypothetical threat. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

This excerpt exemplifies the legitimization through time we are referring to.

(22) We were attacked → attacks are being plotted → attacks will happen in the future.

The modality in the first sentence does not express hedges or modal adjuncts (i.e. probably, maybe, perhaps). Since modality 'signal[s] a higher or lower degree of certainty about the validity of a proposition' (Thompson, 2004: 69), it is related to commitment – the degree to which speakers commit themselves to their validity of what they are saying. The fact that we have no hedges or modal adjuncts expresses the commitment of the speaker towards the statement: strong commitment. In other words, he is presenting this statement as a fact. Lack of modal adjuncts and hedges gives the speaker's message the validity he pursues to make a fact of this statement. This is an important strategy to achieve political goals by presenting hypothetical assumptions as factual reality.

By stating the information in such a way, the speaker introduces the notion of 'new attacks are being plotted' to legitimize the agenda he proposes. The emotional effect is reached by displaying a terrifying situation. This analysis shows the function of syntactic structure and how language is used to achieve political goals such as legitimization. A lack of modality adverbs and modal verbs in this sentence calls for imminent action.

The future is open and unknown, and therefore any hypothetical situation has the possibility of manifesting. The future allows political actors to extend the demonization process to other enemies, for example to Iran.

(23) **Iran's desire to have a nuclear weapon** has caught the attention of the world. It is a very dangerous – **that would be a dangerous situation if the Iranians** were able to achieve a nuclear weapon. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Option B in Figure 1 (if we follow the speaker's proposal) depicts a future with enduring prosperity and familiar values for the audience. A positive future is emotionally appealed to by referring to the genealogical line of the audience ('children and grandchildren').

(24) And therefore, in the long run, **your children and grandchildren are more likely to live in peace with the advent of liberty**. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

The positive outcome of taking the proposed 'sacrifices' in the present is again underscored in the next excerpt by mentioning peace for 'our own children'. The sacrifices are necessary in order that our children can live in peace.

(25) And the task, immediate task of America, and the long-range goal of this country must be to help those who desire to live in free societies to do so, **for the sake of peace for our own children**. And that's the call. **And it's going to require sacrifice**, and I appreciate the sacrifices our troops are willing to make. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

This is a legitimization that refers to an immediate, tangible and personal goal – 'the sake of our own children' versus a more abstract and collective goal, such as the sake of our government, democracy, the USA, etc.

And that future, if we follow the speaker's proposal in the present, is also good for others. The next excerpt shows a combination of two important legitimization strategies: a hypothetical future and altruism. To follow what the politician proposed is also beneficial for other people who need our help. The next text announces a list of positive consequences in the future.

(26) **Yet over time, we can expect to see positive results**, and that **would be the Iraqis chasing down the murderers**; that **there will be fewer brazen acts of terror inside of Baghdad**; that **there will be growing trust between the different neighborhoods**. In other words, you'll begin to see a **society that is somewhat more peaceful**. Daily life will improve, the Iraqis will gain confidence in their leaders, and the government will have the breathing space necessary to be able to do other things, to do the politics necessary, to reconcile, to pass an oil law, to allow there to be provincial elections, to make sure that deBaathification rules are altered, to say to people, this society is a **unified society**. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Excerpt (27) reflects the way the time line legitimization strategy works. If we do not act now, people in the future will recriminate us for the fact that we did not take action in the present to stop future threats.

(27) People would look back at this moment in history and say, what happened to them in America? **How come they couldn't see the threats to a future generation? That is why we must, and we will, succeed in Iraq** (Applause). (Bush, 11 January 2007)

In the following excerpt, Obama announces that working for the future benefits not only America but America's allies also.

(28) Our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to **prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future**. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

As shown in this section, political actors attempt to legitimize present decisions through a hypothetical future. Common linguistic structures to do so are conditional sentences of the type 'If + past [protasis] → would + Infinitive without to [apodosis]' or 'If + present [protasis] → will + Infinitive without to [apodosis]', the order of protasis and apodosis being interchangeable. However, as we have seen, politicians may also present the hypothetical future without modality markers as a factual statement. Legitimization through a time line allows political actors to achieve very specific political goals.

Legitimization through rationality: Heeded, thoughtful and evaluated decisions

This legitimization strategy attempts to present the action-taking process as a process where decisions have been made after a heeded, evaluated and thoughtful procedure. The speaker presents his choice as rational. Rationality is employed here as a social construct within a cultural group, that is, something that 'makes sense' for the community and constitutes the 'right' thing to do. I use the adjective 'right' to index that 'rational'

decisions are often based on morals and values that constitute recognizable variables within the community.

In this section, I show the way social actors exploit rational constructs shared within a culture to justify the actions taken, especially when those actions involve sacrifices on behalf of their listeners.

In relation to political speeches, US politicians have emphasized on several occasions, in relation to the War on Terror, that the USA did not start the conflict, as we observe in the following excerpt:

(29) **We did not ask for this fight.** On September 11, 2001, 19 men hijacked four airplanes and used them to murder nearly 3,000 people. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

The first sentence in (29) seems to 'absolve' the subject '[w]e' of all responsibility in posteriori actions, even if those actions are being legitimized in 2009. This sentence represents the tip of the iceberg of a rational construct, implying the following approximate message: a party is allowed to respond to and maintain or perpetuate a violent act if that party did not start the fight. Van Leeuwen named this legitimization through rationalization 'theoretical rationalization', which, according to him, seems founded in some kind of truth; it is part of our social knowledge and refers to 'the way things are'. Those 'things' end up being rational or the right thing to do due to a process of 'naturalization' (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 103). For instance, to be the party that does not start the fight but rather responds to it has been naturalized as justified violence in the name of self-defense.

Under a specific cultural framework of rationality, political actors present themselves as rational, understanding, well-heeded, considered and honest. In the excerpt below, the speaker is equating listening to experts with being a good leader.

(30) The commanders on the ground in Iraq, **people who I listen to – by the way, that's what you want your Commander-in-Chief to do**. You don't want decisions being made based upon politics, or focus groups, or political polls. **You want your military decisions being made by military experts.** And they analyzed the plan and they said to me, and to the Iraqi government, this won't work unless we help them. There needs to be a bigger presence. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

To listen to 'commanders on the ground' and 'military experts' in order to make decisions regarding Iraq is an example of how politicians present themselves as well-heeded, considered and rational. In this way, politicians justify their actions when those actions are a consequence of listening to other expert voices about specific issues.

In the following excerpt, we observe how legitimization is conveyed through an analysis with considered 'consequences' and a process of thinking 'long and hard', which is presented as key to success.

(31) The purpose really is to crush these insurrections now, so that the – democracy in Iraq can develop, has a chance to make it. **That's why I made the decision I made**. I understand the consequences of failure; they're not acceptable. **And so I thought long and hard how best to succeed. That's what I'm interested in, is success.** The American people are interested in success. And I laid out a plan that is our best chance for success. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

In (31), rationality is expressed in relation to the notions of failure and success. Rationality is expressed from parameters such as failure and success and between those two, to be rational is choosing success versus failure. Therefore, in order to comply with a rational decision (something we think makes sense), the speaker follows the following process: understanding the consequence of failure + thinking long and hard = success. In excerpt (31), legitimization is conveyed through instrumental rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008) in which the rational justification of practices is deployed by 'reference to the purpose or function they serve, or the needs they fill, or the positive effect they will have' (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999: 105).

In the following excerpt, the political actor prefaces his announcement with an introductory clause (in bold), indicating how decisions can be legitimized, for example after a dialogue or consultation, listening to other people, etc.

(32) **After consultations with our allies**, I then announced a strategy recognizing the fundamental connection between our war effort in Afghanistan and the extremist safe havens in Pakistan. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

Consulting with other sources to verify or support a decision seems to be the 'right' way to proceed in these circumstances. The rational way to proceed is marked chronologically in the discourse with time adverbs: '[a]fter', 'then'.

In the excerpt below, the speaker emphasizes the different steps involved in the rationale to arrive at those political decisions.

(33) The **review** has allowed me to ask the hard questions, and **to explore all the different options**, along **with my national security team, our military and civilian leadership in Afghanistan, and our key partners**. And given the stakes involved, I owed the American people – and our troops – no less. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

There is a review, an exploration of all the options and a decision made together with a national security team, the military and civilian leadership in Afghanistan, and key partners. And in (34) the speaker specifies how that decision is not made lightly.

(34) **I do not make this decision lightly**. I opposed the war in Iraq precisely because I believe that we must exercise restraint in the use of military force, and always consider the long-term consequences of our actions. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

The speaker understands the importance of presenting a decision that has been seriously considered and rationally evaluated, where many different angles have been thoroughly examined. Figure 3 shows the rational decision process that can be developed from the speaker's words.

These examples indicate how social actors exploit rational constructs shared within a culture to justify specific courses of action that involve sacrifices on behalf of the audience. These texts above indicate a rational process culturally bound to our society in which the decision maker legitimizes his decision through a process we understand as 'rational', which consists of consulting different parties and experts before reaching the

I DO NOT MAKE THIS DECISION LIGHTLY			
REVIEW (view a 2nd or 3rd time) →	**EXPLORE** all the options →	**CONSULT** allies, national security team, military and civilian leadership in Afghanistan, key partners (other countries) →	**DECISION**

Figure 3. The decision-making process

decision in order that the decision is presented as neither rushed, nor taken lightly, and therefore represents the right way to proceed.

Legitimization through voices of expertise

This legitimization strategy refers to the voices that the speakers bring into the here-and-now speech event to support their positions on a specific issue or event. It is a type of 'authorization' (Van Leeuwen, 2007) or 'authoritative speech' (Duranti, 1994; Gal and Woolard, 1995; Philips, 2004) that the speaker brings to the immediate context of the current speech to strengthen his/her position.

Linguistically, this legitimization strategy normally appears in the text with quotation marks and/or verbs indicating verbal processes (Thompson, 2004: 100), such as 'say', 'announce', 'report', etc. Direct or indirect speech is relatively easy to identify in discourse since the speaker uses this discursive strategy (Reyes, 2008a) to support his argument, and therefore it is in his best interest to make sure the audience knows he is evoking someone else's words. In journalistic style, Garretson and Ädel consider it an instance of 'evidentiality' when the reporter presents information and mentions the source of this information (Garretson and Ädel, 2008: 159).

In political discourse, politicians evoke a voice of expertise or authority that supports claims they (politicians) are presenting into the here-and-now moment of discourse. At the same time, politicians share possible blame with the voices of expertise they bring into the discourse if mistakes are made in the future (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997: 536).

In excerpt (35), the speaker quotes a Prime Minister to support his decision (the speaker's).

(35) **The Prime Minister** came and **said**, look, I understand we've got to do something about this violence, and here is what I suggest we do. Our commanders looked at it, helped fine-tune it so it would work. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

As in the previous text, excerpt (36) displays a quote from authoritative figures and experts with whom the speaker has consulted for opinions.

(36) And so **our commanders** looked at the plan and **said**, Mr President, it's not going to work until – unless we support – provide more troops. And so last night I told the country that I've committed an additional – a little over 20,000 more troops. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

The speaker quotes the commanders and brings their voices into the here-and-now moment of discourse to legitimize his decision: sending a little over 20,000 more troops to Iraq. His decision is backed up by the voices of expertise.

In excerpt (37), the voice of expertise is identified as the higher authoritative figure in charge of military actions: General Casey.

(37) I asked **General Casey**, can we accomplish that mission? He **said**, you bet, we can accomplish that mission. It's got enough troops to accomplish the mission. But one other thing must happen – that our troops and Iraqi troops must have proper rules of engagement. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

The excerpt in (38) also brings with it the message of a general – General McChrystal – but on this occasion, the message is presented as a reported speech and not as a verbatim quote of the general's words. Interpretations of reporting statements often become part of the message itself (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994; Fairclough, 1995), as we see with the speaker clarification: 'In short …'

(38) Our new commander in Afghanistan – **General McChrystal** – **has reported** that the security situation is more serious than he anticipated. **In short**: the status quo is not sustainable. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

The next excerpt is an example of direct speech. Direct speech constitutes a powerful strategy by incorporating another person's words as a whole distinctive voice, maintaining the 'integrity and authenticity' of the other voice (Voloshinov, 1973). Reporting another's words verbatim is likely to increase readers' level of confidence in the person reporting (Garretson and Ädel, 2008: 167).

(39) I'm mindful of the words of **President Eisenhower**, who – in discussing our national security – **said, 'Each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs'**. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

These voices are evoked by speakers in discourse to justify their ideological positioning and ultimately the actions they take. The speakers act in accordance with those voices of authority or expertise, legitimizing the course of actions.

Politicians also display authority implicitly, that is, by the institutional authority they represent. From that official angle, they present the version of the events as truthful and credible and that representation further justifies operations (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997: 530).

Legitimization through altruism

One way to legitimize our actions, as social actors, is to propose them as actions beneficial to others. Doing things for others, especially the poor, the innocent, the vulnerable, is well-perceived in our society and can help the process of justification. It presents the action as beneficial for a community and circumvents judgment about the selfishness of the speaker.

In political discourse, leaders claim that their actions will benefit others, where 'others' normally is used to refer to the poor, or people without democracy, equality, freedom of expression, etc. Those values are often Western values that we somehow assume others need or want. This legitimization strategy justifies its rationale from other people's well-being. The action we need to take will make other people's lives better.

This idea gets developed into what Lakoff defines as the plot of a story, more specifically, 'The Fairy Tale of the Just War' (Lakoff, 1991).

In this story, we have a villain (Al-Qaeda for the scenario in Afghanistan; Saddam Hussein for the scenario in Iraq), a victim (citizens in those scenarios suffering an evil and merciless villain) and a hero (the USA). The hero, after undertaking sacrifices, defeats the villain and liberates the victims.

In the following excerpt, the political actor emphasizes the purpose of the political action.

(40) The Prime Minister and I have had some plain talking. I have made it clear that the patience of the American people is not unlimited. And now is the time to act. It's time to act not only for our sake, **it's time to act for the sake of people in Iraq**. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Political actors legitimize their actions by projecting an altruistic motivation: providing service and help, not only by protecting the 'people of Iraq' or 'Iraqi citizens' and 'training Iraqi security forces', but also, as seen in the following excerpt, with education improving lives generally.

(41) Troops from Fort Benning are now serving in Iraq right now, **helping to protect the troops and the Iraqi citizens, training Iraqi security forces. You're doing something else remarkable here, rebuilding schools and helping improve lives**. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Excerpt (42) shows some elements that Lakoff describes as actors of the story regarding the Gulf War in 1991. In 'The Fairy Tale of the Just War' (Lakoff, 1991), we have a villain (Tyrant in [42]), victims liberated (people in Iraq) and a happy ending (values restored) expressed by the image 'proudly able to wave their fingers'.

(42) I hope you still remember the moments when people were proudly able to wave their fingers saying, **we have shed ourselves from a tyrant**, **and we're able to express our individual wills about the future of our country**. (Bush, 11 January 2007)

Again, the image of doing good things for others is displayed in the following excerpt. In this case, Iraqis are given a chance for a better future.

(43) Thanks to their courage, grit and perseverance, **we have given Iraqis a chance to shape their future,** and we are successfully leaving Iraq to its people. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

Further, it is important to clarify that self-interest is not a motive. Rather, all actions are merely a sign of pure altruism:

(44) So tonight, I want the Afghan people to understand – America seeks an end to this era of war and suffering. **We have no interest in occupying your country**. We will support efforts by the Afghan government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and respect the human rights of their fellow citizens. And we will seek a partnership with Afghanistan grounded in mutual respect. (Obama, 1 December 2009)

In (45) the logic behind helping other people reverberates in the very life of our children and grandchildren. Freedom and opportunity for other people's children and grandchildren equal a better future for our children and grandchildren.

(45) What we have fought for – what we continue to fight for – is a better future for our children and grandchildren. And **we believe that their lives will be better if other people's children and grandchildren can live in freedom and access opportunity** (Applause). (Obama, 1 December 2009)

Altruistic manifestations can help social actors to legitimize their decisions or actions. It seems that when our actions benefit other groups, especially the innocent, the unprotected and the poor, etc., they are more likely to be accepted and approved by our interlocutors.

These two political figures seem to be using similar strategies (the five strategies described in the article) to promote and legitimize their respective political agendas. These politicians differ in the style in which they present their arguments. These differences range from the use of complex sentences (i.e. subordination) to the use of simple syntactic structures; direct versus indirect speech (i.e. 'Can we accomplish that mission? He said, you bet, we can accomplish that mission' [Bush, 11 January 2007] versus 'Our new commander in Afghanistan – General McChrystal – has reported that the security situation is more serious than he anticipated' [Obama, 1 December 2009]); familiarity indexicals such as personal opinions, that is 'I, frankly – well, speaking about …' (Bush, 11 January 2007), or certain colloquial expressions such as 'you bet', 'see' (Bush, 11 January 2007). This detailed analysis deserves complete attention in a future study.

Another difference between the politicians lies in the nature of the conflicts themselves. The Iraq war was unpopular from the very beginning because a link between Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein was never found. And that is precisely one of the ways Obama legitimizes his actions in Afghanistan, while he makes sure that a distinction between Afghanistan and Iraq is drawn, especially to differentiate himself from his predecessor. However, when it comes to the arguments and the linguistic strategies employed in the legitimization process of belligerent scenarios and an increase in troops, there are irrefutable similarities between these politicians, which underline that the strategies presented in this article could be more general characteristics of political discourse, or at least within the latest US administrations, than individual idiosyncrasies of specific politicians.

Conclusion

This article has explored different linguistic paths in which legitimization takes place in discourse. The strategies of legitimization proposed can appear alone or in combination

with other strategies. This article has shown how social actors justify social practices through: (1) emotions (particularly fear), (2) a hypothetical future, (3) rationality, (4) voices of expertise and (5) altruism. These strategies unfold in a general scenario where discourses are presented as truth. Moreover, in a dichotomy, legitimizing one position automatically implies the (de)legitimizing of alternative positions.

I have accounted for the data interdisciplinarily, employing theoretical concepts and frameworks from Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics and anthropological linguistics to explain an important use of language in society: the process of legitimization. Legitimization can be pursued by appealing to emotions and predisposes our interlocutors to agree with us by activating certain feelings such as fear, sadness, anger, etc. Legitimization can be achieved through the idea of a future that can be depicted as negative for our impending generations if we do not act now. Social actors can also legitimize through rationality, presenting their proposal as making sense, as logical, as the right thing to do, and therefore, the result of a thoughtful and measured process. Social actors mention, in the here-and-now moment of discourse, voices of expertise, that is, people whom the community admires or people with authority, such as previous leaders (i.e. presidents). These voices allow speakers to validate proposals or social actions by association with those voices. Finally, if our actions are presented as beneficial for other members of the community, especially the innocent and unprotected, we are legitimizing through altruism to obtain approval from our interlocutors.

This study draws on examples mainly from political discourse. It would be interesting for further studies to test these proposed strategies in other speech events, such as casual interaction. I believe there is a common ground with other speech events, as shown from the example of the 'boogey man', to infer fear, and to obtain the attention of and possibly a physical response from our interlocutor. In the same vein, in daily conversations we quote other people (voices of expertise) to support or give validity to the information we are presenting, as seen in examples such as 'The teacher said so' or 'My mom told me'.

I encourage future studies to analyze which types of legitimization strategies are culturally bound and which are inherent to the human psyche. For instance, it is my assumption that employing rationality is culturally bound since what makes sense or sounds logical in one culture may not make sense in other cultures. However, when social actors position our innocent and defenseless children as victims of the enemy, our reaction to the use of the emotion of fear may respond to a sense of protectionism, more remote and inherent within the human psyche.

Note

1. The bolded text in this article represents linguistic choices relevant to the process of legitimization.

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