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The Dangerous Discourse of "Us" vs. "Them:" Spain's VOX Discursive Practices

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Abstract

Since the entry of the far-right party VOX into the Spanish government administrations in 2018, Spain's political scene has gone through a deep transformation. The disparity in opinions among the different parties concerning migration seems to tear the country's democratic foundation apart. This paper is a study of the language and discursive strategies used by VOX's leader, Santiago Abascal, articulating the party's populist propaganda for a united country to "make Spain great again." The analysis was grounded on the theoretical underpinnings of Wodak's (2001) discursive strategies and Van Dijk's (1993) "*Us" vs. "Them"* framework. The data were based on Abascal's closing political campaign speech during the Madridlenian elections, which was televised in May 2021. The 30-minute video recording was transcribed, annotated, coded, and analyzed. The findings suggest a pattern of discursive practices aimed at diminishing other political parties and their representatives, vilify immigrants, and impugn government measures that were against VOX's authoritarian conservatism and nationalism. There was a predominant use of predication strategies to positively present VOX while denigrating its political rivals. Referential/nomination strategies were also used to divide the society between in-groups and out-groups. Strongly embedded in these strategies were perlocutionary acts used to incite hate toward the out-groups and evoke fear and anxiety toward the in-group, strategically employed as tools to gain votes in the elections.

Keywords

VOX; Spanish government; discursive strategies; perlocutionary acts; discourse analysis

Introduction

The Spanish regional elections of Andalucía in 2018 initiated the establishment of radical right ideologies within the Spanish political system. The ascension of popularity and support for the far right-wing political party called VOX

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represented the end of the "Spanish exceptionalism" (Ortiz 2019, 2). VOX ideologies are in line with other European radical right parties whose discourse is based on the defense of national unity and the rejection of policies in favor of immigration and feminism among others, employing ultranationalist and authoritarian measures (Anduiza 2018; Gould 2019). According to Falter and Schumann (1988, 101) right-wing extremists advocate "extreme nationalism, ethnocentrism, anti-communism, anti-parliamentarianism, anti-pluralism, militarism, law-and-order thinking, a demand for a strong political leader and/or executive, anti-Americanism and cultural pessimism." Hainsworth (2008, 70) also posited that one of the most significant issues related to radical right-wing parties is immigration, and various studies affirm that their discourse is, to a large extent, focused on the animosity against immigrants and the government's measures to support immigration (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007; Van Spanje 2017). Muddle (2019) suggests that these radical parties link the escalation of delinquency in European societies with immigration, and thus, their discourse is focused predominantly on the crimes committed by immigrants. Consequently, extreme right-wing parties tend to include in their speeches a discourse of fear: fear toward immigration (Zaslove 2008) and fear of the possibility that left-wing parties supportive of communism could govern the nation (Ferreira 2019).

This study analyzed the types of discursive strategies grounded on the "Us" vs. "Them" framework used by VOX leader, Santiago Abascal, during the closing campaign of the Madrilenian elections and how he employed these strategies to convey fear and hate through perlocutionary acts, reinforcing their discourse on issues surrounding immigration, economy, security, and politics. We will also discuss the ways in which discourse was used to augment their own actions and justifications while vilifying the government and other political parties' practices. This research also aims to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning polarization and fragmentation of the Spanish political scene, which consequently affects Spanish society.

The Rise of VOX

VOX was founded on December 17th of 2013 under the leadership of Alejo Vidal-Quadra, who was a member of the Partido Popular (PP). Initially, most of the members of VOX were affiliated with the PP, which traditionally was the major right-wing party in the Spanish political scene. Some reasons for this cleavage were found in the passive attitude adopted by the then president of the government, Mariano Rajoy, concerning the independence movement crisis of Catalonia (Rubio-Pueyo 2019). The disappointing results in the

European elections of 2014, in which VOX failed to win a seat, caused a division in the political party. Therefore, the president of VOX, Alejo Vidal-Quadra, and some other founders of the party announced their renunciation to diminish the tensions caused by the fragmentation of the party due to the setback of the European elections (Sangiao 2019). In 2014, Santiago Abascal replaced Alejo Vidal-Quadra as the new president of VOX. It was on the Spanish regional elections of Andalucía in 2018 when VOX started to receive major citizen support, obtaining 10.96 percent of the votes[2] compared to the 0.46 percent of votes that were obtained in 2015.[1] This increment of more than 10 percent allowed VOX to form a governmental coalition with PP and Ciudadanos to control the regional government of Andalucía to the detriment of the "Partido Socialista Español" (PSOE). This coalition caused a historic change in the government of Andalucía, which had overseen the PSOE since the beginning of democracy in Spain. The support obtained by VOX was also reflected in the Spanish general elections of 2019, when VOX obtained 15.08 percent of the votes, fifty-two deputies, becoming the third political force in Spain, behind PSOE (28 percent of the votes, 120 deputies) and PP (20.81 percent of the votes, eighty-nine deputies).[3]

In 2019, for the first time in history, VOX entered the Madrid Assembly, which is the unicameral regional legislature that represents Madrilenian citizens; any party member who gets a seat in the Assembly can exercise their legislative power, i.e., the power to make laws. It is also in charge of approving the budgets of the regional government. It controls and promotes political and governmental acts. In its first appearance in 2019, VOX got twelve seats in the Madrid Assembly (287,667 votes). In 2021, the president of Madrid and leader of the PP in Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, called for a snap election for May 4th of 2021 due to differences with the political parties that supported the PP in other Spanish regions to govern. As a result, the political party "Ciudadanos," a formation that supported the PP in the investiture in the region of Murcia, presented a motion of censure together with the PSOE. This situation was quickly replicated in other autonomous communities in which the right-wing coalition (PP, VOX, Ciudadanos) made it possible for the PP to govern. The results of the Madrilenian elections in 2021 not only maintained VOX in the Madrid Assembly, but also increased their number of votes (330,660). That is 9.13 percent of the total, a spike of about 50,000 votes that suggested the addition of another seat in the Madrid Assembly.[1] Although they did not win

2 Results retrieved from http://www.eleccionesparlamentoandalucia2018.es/resultados/.

3 Results retrieved from: http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/infoelectoral/min/busquedaAvanzadaAction.html.

the majority of the votes in Madrid, the number of sympathizers who believed that VOX could govern Madrid increased on a large scale.

According to Anduiza (2018), the reasons VOX has been associated with the radical right ideology are found in their conservative discourse: rejection of abortion, national unity, recentralization of the state, social conservatism, and the rejection of any cultural change in society (feminism, egalitarian marriage, immigration), economic neoliberalism, and the defense of the traditions such as hunting and bullfighting. In his studies, Casals (2000, 156) suggests that the Spanish radical right parties traditionally present an antidemocratic bias due to "the nostalgia" they had toward the past dictatorships. In the same line, Cervi (2020) posited that VOX constructed the definition of Spanish taking as a starting point for the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula. Cervi argues that VOX believes that there is a clear threat represented by the Muslims and Islam that could endanger Spanish traditions, culture, and identity.

Literature Review

There are plenty of studies that cover discourse in political contexts. Some focus on discourse and political ideology and the intentional divisive strategies employed to achieve a winning streak in the polls.

An example of how exclusion is purposely done was Stoegner and Wodak's (2015) investigation that analyzed the interrelationship between antisemitism and national unity in the United Kingdom based on an article about Ralph Miliband titled "The man who hated Britain", published in the tabloid *The Mirror* on September 27, 2013. Adopting a discourse-historical analysis approach (DHA), the main findings of the study can be found in the attempts to disparage not only Ralph Miliband, but also left-wing political parties and Jewish society. Their study suggests that this strategy was used to enhance nationalistic ideals and to exclude Ralph Miliband due to his ethnic background, Jewish religion, and leftist political ideals. The authors provided a strong analytical support in which topics such as anti-intellectualism, antisemitic background, and antinationalism were investigated to compare the relationship between antisemitism and nationalism.

Similarly, Assimakopoulos and Muskat (2017) explored the context of xenophobic and homophobic attitudes in Malta and the way these are manifested in online discourses concerning migrants and members of the LGBTQ community. Adopting Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (1995), the authors analyzed both focus group interviews conducted among Maltese citizens and online comments related to the two minorities in question.

Their corpus-based study demonstrated that while homophobia seems to be motivated by "deep-rooted religious beliefs and allegiance to heteronormative values," xenophobia thrives on the perceived threat posed by the migrants to the local culture. These findings correlate with a Spanish study conducted by Valdez-Apolo et al. (2019) that analyzed hate speeches against the immigrant communities and suggested that immigrants were categorized as a threat.

Likewise, Alcántara-Plá and Ruiz-Sánchez (2017) focused on analyzing the positive and negative labels to study the representation of Muslims on the Spanish Internet and adopted a theoretical framework developed by Fillmore (1982), Langacker (1991), and Huckin (2002). Using political tweets, Sketchengine Spanish corpus, and press articles as three separate corpora, the author intended to discover which are the most common collocations that appear in the data. Labels such as *islámico* (Islamic) and *musulmán* (Muslim) were identified as negative in most of the cases. One interesting finding was the use of the neutral connotations of the term *musulmán* when indicating the belonging to groups related to Spanish culture and history, although the labels related to the Muslim world are still grouped in "Them" instead of "Us."

Another study conducted by Allen (2007) investigated how Australian politicians portrayed themselves to the public in their speeches. The author analyzed the ways in which personal pronouns were used in the campaign speeches to extol themselves as the best option for running the state entities or discredit their opponents by suggesting their negative aspects. Allen argued that in political speeches, pronouns are always used to eulogize themselves and their parties, suggesting to the citizens that they share the same ideals and that they are the best choice for the post. At the same time, politicians try to exclude other political parties from their group by diminishing their reputation and presenting negative aspects about them.

In like manner, Renaldo's (2016) investigation on the different ideological manifestations of the Democratic and Republican parties of the United States was centered on the analysis of the candidates' positive self-presentation and negative presentation of "the other" by adopting Van Djik's (1993) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Wodak's (2009) discursive practices. Results showed that the candidates mostly used negative other-presentation manifestations through predicational strategies.

Other studies investigated linguistic expressions of former presidents and how they manipulated the discourse when presenting highly contentious issues such as military occupation. An example is Reyes's (2011) study, which analyzed the language used by the former presidents of the United States, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Reyes described linguistic strategies in

legitimizing the military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Through the discursive strategies proposed by Wodak (2001), the author concludes that the presidents' choice of words and delivery can trigger emotions to incite expected reactions from the audience, i.e., fear, belief in a hypothetical future, rationality, and trust in their voice of expertise.

Although there have been studies on political discourse and on Spain's political context, this study will fill the gap in research concerning VOX's most recent monumental speech delivered in one of the biggest influential cities and a primary area for their constituents in Spain–Madrid.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided the analyses of this study is grounded on the "Us" vs. "Them" theory, which has been used in a wide number of studies tackling sociopolitical issues that break, isolate, and segregate societies into different groups. This has greatly influenced political discourses subscribing to the "Us" and "Them" ideology, which deepens the fault lines within the government. Politicians are elected by the citizens; they are chosen to represent those who voted for them; therefore, what they say, how they say it, and to whom they say it influences the ideologies of their followers. Discursive representations, if strategically used in political campaigns, can have dire consequences for a political party's chance of winning, the result of which could determine the political landscape of the country. As Van Dijk (1993) posits, there is a continuous fight for dominance and power in the political scene, and its effects can be felt in the society, since these kinds of verbal fights and arguments persist in the citizens' discourse of different ideological groups.

"Us" versus "Them"

Dialectical clashes between individuals and groups are recurrent in society. Investigations suggest that the contrast between "Us" and "Them" is enough to foment differences and biased judgments that can distort the social order of a group or a country (Anderson 2013; Brewer 1979; Wodak 2008). The use of the language is one of the most important tools to convey the perceptions and opinions that individuals possess toward other individuals or groups (Taylor 1981). Through the perceptions of "Us" vs. "Them," the ideologies of a group can be classified in different sections related to community affairs, power, control, or refusal (Yuval-Davis 2010). When the ideologies shared in a group are different, a dissolution of the group is expected, contributing to the creation of new partisan ideologies, also known as in-group and out-group

ideologies (Abrams and Hogg 1990; Budesheim, Houston, and DePaola 1996). Ideologies such as racism or nationalism are elements that assisted the creation and development of the perceptions of "Us" vs. "Them" (Van Djik 1995). A continuous fight for control and power increments the discourse of "Us" vs. "Them," leading to inequality and disadvantages between some groups and others (Van Dijk 1993). The use of "Us" vs "Them" as a tool to emphasize identity and identification is a powerful practice to achieve certain goals in terms of political discourse. Politicians introduce themselves, their goals, and critiques with an aim to persuade the voters that they are the right candidates (Hahn 2003). As Pearce (2001) posits, politicians manipulate their discourse to convey their identities in a positive light while defaming other politicians' identities to persuade the voters.

Discursive Strategies

The term "discourse" is understood as a series of linguistic acts that are interconnected and can occur simultaneously (Wodak 2001). Discourse can also be defined as any practice by which the subject grants the reality with an understandable sense. It is found in various social practices (Fairclough 2010; Lincoln 2014), and it is often represented orally or in written forms due to its facility to register its content. Hence, it is socially conditioned and socially constitutive (Wodak and Meyer 2009). Discursive practices are ways of shaping and forming knowledge; they are what Bacchi and Bonham (2014) refer to as practices of discourse. Discursive strategies can be and are often used in the field of politics to analyze different functions such as "… legislation, self-presentation, the manufacturing of public opinion, developing party-internal consent, advertising, and vote-getting, governing as well as executing, and controlling as well as expressing (oppositional) dissent." (Wodak 2001, 66–67). In the following section, the five discourse analytical tools (Table 1) used in this research, their objectives, and the devices used to identify them will be presented and briefly explained.

As Wodak (2001) suggests, strategies can be defined as the plans or intentions that the actors adopt to accomplish certain tasks. The objectives of "referential/nomination" strategies are to construct and categorize in-groups and out-groups of a certain society. The aim of "predication" strategies is to label positively or negatively the actors that are included in the discourse as well as their behaviors. "Argumentation" strategies serve to justify the positive or negative labels of the predication strategies. "Perspectivation" strategies are the attempts of the actors to engage the public in the discourse message through a variety of techniques such as narration, quotation, or description.

Lastly, "intensification/mitigation" strategies are the ones used to modify their utterances, making them more explicit or implicit.

Table 1. *Wodak's (2001) Discursive Strategies*

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Referential/nomination	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	• membership categorization • biological, naturalizing and depersonalizing metaphors and metonymies • synecdoches (pars pro toto, totum pro pars)
Predication	Labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively	• stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits • implicit and explicit predicates
Argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	• topoi used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment
Perspectivation, framing or discourse representation	Expressing involvement Positioning speaker's point of view	• reporting, description, narration or quotation of (discriminatory) events and utterances
Intensification, mitigation	Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition	• intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of (discriminatory) utterances

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Perlocutionary Act

In looking at discourse strategies, understanding the meaning and effect of an utterance is necessary. Austin's (1962) speech acts theory lays the groundwork for interpreting speaker meaning. It is determined by breaking down the components of the language, i.e., lexical and semantic type of the sentence

uttered, and connecting it with the speaker's intention and the context of utterance (Sadock 2004). Austin argues that words can do something, and vice versa–there are things done with words. He explored the illocutionary force (performative function) in speech and perlocutionary force (perceived effect) effects that have the power to change people. The illocutionary force of an utterance lies in the speaker's implication and intention, whereas perlocutionary force depends on the listener's (addressee) inference or understanding of what was said (Fetzer 2011). Perlocutionary acts could be inspiring, irritating, persuading, embarrassing, frightening, etc. Whatever the effect, it certainly can evoke feelings in the listeners. In other words, if the discourse conveyed fear and hate in a heightened political context, it can have a trickle-down effect on social actions (Qiang 2013). The production and reaction to a perlocutionary act lies in the symbiotic relationship between the speaker and the hearer (for whom the message is intended). Hence, an active listener can react to what was being said. Searle (2002) refined Austin's speech act theory by emphasizing how language is situated on intentionality; expression and meaning are intentionally developed to affect the mind and social reality.

Methodology

This study analyzed the discourse of the Spanish political party representative of VOX, Santiago Abascal. The aim of this study was to find which discursive strategies they (the party) employ to convey their message, their objectives, and which devices they adopted to achieve their goal according to Wodak's discursive referential/nomination and predication strategies. The study also aimed to identify the perlocutionary acts expressed in the discursive strategies, and especially the acts that incited hate, insecurity, and fear to gain the most votes in the Madrilenian elections. The data collected were drawn from a video of the closing campaign of Madrid´s elections in May 2021. The video was transcribed, coded, and analyzed to find the discursive strategies adopted by the leader of VOX in his speech. The video recording of the closing campaign took place on May 4, 2021 in the Madrilenian Colón Square, which has been an emblematic spot since 2019. Using the slogan "A united Spain," the main political parties of the right-wing (VOX and PP) and the center (Ciudadanos) formed a joint front in this square to show rejection of the government led by the left-wing party PSOE in coalition with Unidas Podemos (UP), regional nationalist, and independent parties. The video has a duration of twenty-nine minutes and fifty-eight seconds, and the transcription contains a total of 4,157 words.

Results and Discussion

Referential/nomination strategies

The analysis of referential strategies may highlight that, although the discourse seems to be related to "Them," in this case, the political party Más Madrid, the focus of the party's message lies in "Us." As an illustration, Excerpt 1 shows how Abascal criticizes the political party Más Madrid because they are going to run for the Spanish elections as "Más País" (more country) instead of "Más España" (more Spain). Abascal argues that the name choice of this political party is due to their shame and the hate they profess toward Spain, which VOX represents, and supports as shown in line 82, when he says, "*the best inheritance of our parents and our mothers... is our homeland*." This strategy highlights the position of VOX representing the national identity against the ones who deprecate Spain as a unified nation. This type of discourse tried to categorize the ones who stand for a unified Spain (in-group) and the ones who want to *destroy* Spain (out-group) (Wodak 2005). This type of discourse is also in line with (Van Djik 1995) ideas of the nationalist parties' employment of "Us" vs. "Them." Based on this excerpt (lines 80 to 81), Santiago Abascal described the political party Más Madrid with words such as *vergüenza* (shame) or *auto odio* (self-hatred) since, according to him, this political party does not want to call themselves Más España (more Spain). He suggested that Más Madrid disapproves of Spain and its citizens' values and identity.

Therefore, the excerpt suggests that Santiago Abascal's perlocutionary force aimed to incite hate toward this political party and persuade the voters to avoid voting for them in the elections. The perlocutionary effect was felt and seen in the aftermath of the elections with VOX's voter turnout with the party earning 9.13 percent of the total votes and getting one additional seat (12+1) at the Assembly of Madrid (Cue 2021).

Excerpt 1

78 Luego están los que van a sustituir a podemos en la política española, "Más Madrid". Que

79 cuando se han presentado a nivel nacional, dicen "Más País". Si no se atreven a decir más

80 España, cómo van a representar a los españoles, si tienen la misma vergüenza y el mismo auto

81 odio respecto a nuestra patria, respecto a nuestra conciencia colectiva, nuestra identidad, respecto

82 a la mejor herencia de nuestros padres y de nuestras madres, que es nuestra patria.

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78 Then, there are those who are going to replace Podemos in Spanish politics, "Más Madrid." When

79 they have been presented at the national level; they say, "More Country." If they do not dare to

80 say "more Spain", how are they going to represent the Spanish, if they have the same shame and

81 the same self-hatred regarding our homeland, regarding our collective conscience, our identity,

82 regarding the best inheritance of our parents and of our mothers, which is our homeland.

In Excerpt 2, Santiago Abascal suggests that there is a state of *insecurity* (danger) for their children in Spain due to the delinquency instigated by immigration problems, and he particularly focused on underage immigrants. Line 174 shows the word *"niños"* (kids), which is a reference to underage immigrants, positing that they should be with their parents, or in their countries' penitentiary. VOX is a political party that emphasizes the deportation of undocumented immigrants and those who committed any misdeed, and rejects any possible governmental measure employed to propel the immigration in Spain.[4] In line with VOX's ideologies about immigration, the two options proposed by Santiago Abascal showed a clear rejection of immigration in Spain due to the treatment of underage immigrants as *"delincuentes"* (criminals, shown in line 175). This type of discourse that moves between security and fear is a common discourse of the extreme-right wing political parties, supporting previous studies of Assimakopoulos and Muskat (2017), and which suggests that xenophobia arises due to the hypothetical harm or threat that migrants, and particularly Muslim immigrants, could bring to the citizens of a country (Cervi 2020).

As an illustration, during the Madrilenian electoral campaign, VOX distributed billboards all over Madrid, in which appeared a Spanish elder and an underage immigrant from Africa, negatively labeled by VOX as MENA

4 Information retrieved from: https://www.voxespana.es/biblioteca/espana/2018m/gal_c2d72e181103013447.pdf

*(*Menor Extranjero No Acompañado) or "unaccompanied" foreign minor. The slogan of the billboard was "*Un MENA 4.700 euros al mes. Tu abuela 426 euros de pensión/mes,*" translated as, "*One unaccompanied foreign minor 4.700 euros each month. Your grandmother 426 euros of pension/month*." The billboard caused a big stir during the electoral campaign, and when other political parties asked VOX about the reliability and validity of this data, they always avoided answering the question. This is also a clear example of a discursive practice of "Us" vs. "Them" tied with racist ideologies (Van Djik 1995). The excerpt in line 172 shows the word "*manada"* (heard) to trigger in the public a sense of insecurity and fear. The label *manada* was used by the media and politics for the first time when a Spanish girl was raped by five Spanish boys during a festival. In this context, the label *manada* was linked with other two words: *"hija"* (daughter) and *"seguridad"* (security). Santiago Abascal used a perlocutionary act to suggest that Spain is an insecure country and needs more security, generating a sense of fear in the public. Interestingly, Abascal connected the label *manada* with *niños*, referring to the underage immigrants that live in Spain without their parents. In this context, including both labels in the speech, he seems to imply that only underage immigrants are a danger for the society, and specifically for the girls who are unprotected against them. By labeling them as *manada*, he implies that only underage immigrants are the ones who usually violate in-groups, and Spanish people do not. Abascal goes further by labeling minors and describing immigrants in two ways: in line 174 he says that "*if they are kids, with their parents in their countries*". In lines 175–176 he says, "*If they are criminals, in the prison of their countries."* These choices suggest first that he does not want underage immigrants in Spain, and second, those underage immigrants are usually criminals.

As can be seen, Santiago Abascal employed perlocutionary force strategies to incite fear by stirring a scenario that would inflict harm on their loved ones, i.e., daughters. He also provoked hate toward the underage immigrants living in Spain, framing them as the transgressors. VOX's aggressive campaigning style was no doubt controversial, as Abascal's racist narrative was aimed at criminalizing young unaccompanied migrants.

Excerpt 2

171 Libertad es que tu hija salga a la calle, vaya al parque del oeste y que no se
172 encuentre con una manada. Eso es libertad. Libertad es que en todas las calles de Madrid, en

173 todos los barrios y en todos los pueblos haya seguridad. Pero no, el PP ha dicho que tenemos el

174 deber de integrar a los niños y darles un futuro. Si son niños, con sus padres en sus países. Si son

175 delincuentes en las cárceles de sus países. Nosotros tenemos un deber con nuestros niños…

171 Freedom is that your

172 daughter goes out to the street, goes to the west park and does not meet a herd. That is freedom.

173 Freedom is that in all the streets of Madrid, in all the neighborhoods and in all the towns there is

174 security. But no, the PP has said that we have a duty to integrate children and give them a future.

175 If they are kids, with their parents in their countries. If they are criminals in the prisons of

176 their countries. We have a duty to our children…

A surprising finding can be seen in Excerpt 3, in which Santiago Abascal welcomes the arrival of immigrants from Latin America. This shift in their immigration stance could be explained by two factors. The first factor is that, as an extreme right-wing party, VOX is against all left-wing politics, including communism. During the past years, VOX sustained most of its discourse affirming and criticizing that the Spanish government, governed by the left wing, had relationships and similarities with the communist governments (Alcázar and Betancourt 2021). They are biased regarding the tolerance of the Latin-American immigration against the African immigration may relate to their anticommunist discourse, which served as an important weapon to criticize the measures adopted by the Spanish government. This finding is in line with Ferreira's (2019) study in which a common feature of the right-wing extremist parties describe communism as a "guarantee of misery."

Excerpt 3

242 Y hoy recibimos aquí a muchos de esos compatriotas de

243 hispanoamérica que huyen de las tiranías comunistas y chavistas y les damos la bienvenida. Y les

244 damos las gracias por pelear codo con codo con nosotros en defensa de la libertad, de la

245 democracia y de la madre patria.

242 And today we receive here many of those compatriots from Latin America who are fleeing from

243 the communist and Chavista tyrannies and we welcome them. And we thank you for fighting side

244 by side with us in the defense of freedom,

245 democracy and the mother country.

In this case, VOX is not dividing the Spanish society, whom they see as the ones they should protect, and therefore they see as one of them, i.e., "Us." They are, however, casting the immigrants as the ones who bring fear and threat to Spanish society, hence, to be excluded as "Them.". The second factor suggests that VOX still considers Latin America as part of the Spanish nation, evoking a feeling of nostalgia for past colonial times, in which Spain was an empire. An example of this ideology can be examined through predication strategies such as the one identified in Excerpt 4, *que es el del único imperio penta continental que ha habido en el mundo (…*continental empire that has existed in the world. A legacy that is the greatest contribution…).

Looking at perlocutionary acts, Santiago Abascal described communism and Chavista as *tiranías* (tyrannies) in line 243. During past years, the right-wing parties used the media to link the political party UP as an ally of communism and the Chavism occurring in Venezuela. UP oversees the government in coalition with the PSOE. The political and economic crisis in Venezuela is the result of many years of the government's negligent management, which was led by Hugo Chávez until 2013, and since then by Nicolás Maduro (Alcázar and Betancourt 2021). The label *tiranías* is defined as a state under a cruel and oppressive government. Thus, Santiago Abascal attempts to categorize the current Spanish government as oppressive, leading Spain to bankruptcy and a state of dictatorship, inciting a sense of fear among Spanish citizens.

Predication Strategies

Predication strategies are usually used to describe oneself positively and others negatively. In Excerpt 4, which is related to Excerpt 3, it can be appreciated how VOX describes the positive behaviors of Spain as a nation during the colonization of Latin America.

In this excerpt, Santiago Abascal pointed out how Spain as a unified nation became unique in the world. This excerpt suggests that only a common front of Spain against social communism can make the country powerful again. The use of positive descriptions in predication strategies could lead the readers to believe that if VOX takes control of the government, Spain could become a top nation again. By extolling Spanish culture, language, and the way they see the world (lines 241–242), Santiago Abascal attempted to make the reader/viewer realize that they are the key to becoming a powerful country again if they vote for VOX; this highly resonates with what Pearce (2001) suggested about eulogizing what is best for the majority at the expense of the those denigrated. This type of national self-glorification is a common way to represent oneself positively, and is in line with studies of Van der Valk (2003) and Van Dijk (2000).

In this excerpt, a perlocutionary strategy was based on the description of what Spain had achieved in the past. In line 239 the statement "*el del único Imperio penta continental"* (the only penta continental empire) attempts to emphasize that Spain was a powerful country in the past. The description of Spain's previous achievements was an attempt to trigger the listeners and instill a sense of nostalgia and persuade them that the past was better for Spain than what is happening at the present. This also insinuates that the current administration by the left-wing coalition was not handling the immigration dilemma effectively. This finding supports Casals's (2000) suggestions, in which the ideologies of the radical parties possess an effect of nostalgia anchored in past dictatorial regimes.

Excerpt 4

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238 Un legado, el de nuestros abuelos, el de nuestros mayores

239 que es el del único imperio penta continental que ha habido en el mundo. Un legado que

240 es el de la mayor aportación de la historia universal a la hermandad entre los hombres con la gran

241 obra de la hispanidad. Esa obra que ha llevado nuestra lengua, nuestra cultura, nuestra manera de

242 ver el mundo por todo el orbe.

---

238 A legacy of our grandparents, of our elders, which is the only penta

239 continental empires that have existed in the world.

240 A legacy that is the greatest contribution in the universal history to the brotherhood between men

241 with the great work of Hispanity. That work that has brought our language, our culture, our way

242 to see the world throughout the world.

In Excerpt 5, Santiago Abascal praised Rocío Monasterio (VOX representative for Madrid), arguing that she brought hope, decency, and freedom as an alternative to the other parties, who brought resentment, hatred, violence, censorship, and traps. This excerpt shows how the use of predication strategies were used to present the politics of VOX positively, while at the same time, they impugned all the practices of other parties. The positive description of VOX's own values is a kind of self-positivism which is in line with Elias's (1994) definition of social prejudice, described as having a sense of superiority with respect to other social groups. Elias (1994, xxiii) posited: it is "the feeling of their own superior virtue.". Through negative predication of "Them," the left-wing political parties, Santiago Abascal seeks to vilify their actions. This discursive practice supports Delanty (1995) in the construction of VOX's identity through negativizing the "Others," pointing out that "The purity and stability of the 'We' is guaranteed first in the naming, then in the demonization" (p. 5) of "Them." Based on this excerpt, Santiago Abascal tried to persuade the audience to think that voting for them is a chance to be/feel safe in Spain. He describes the sympathizers of VOX with labels such as "*ilusión"* (illusion), "*esperanza"* (hope), "*decencia"* (decency), and "*libertad"* (freedom). On the contrary, he described the sympathizers of other parties with labels such as "*resentimiento*" (resentment), "*odio*" (hate), "*violencia*" (violence), "*censura"* (censorship), and "*trampas"* (traps). Using perlocutionary acts of inspiring their sympathizers and embarrassing the sympathizers of other parties suggests that Santiago Abascal attempted to widen the gap of hate between their voters, "Us," and other parties' voters, "Them," even more.

Excerpt 5

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38 Porque junto a Rocío, vosotros habéis hecho lo más difícil

39 y es protagonizar la campaña de la ilusión, de

40 la esperanza, de la decencia y de la libertad frente a los que sólo han traído resentimiento, odio,

41 violencia, censura y trampas.

38 Because together with Rocío, you have done the most difficult thing, and

39 that is to start the campaign of illusion,

40 hope, decency, and freedom against those who have only brought resentment, hatred,

41 violence, censorship, and traps.

In Excerpt 6, Santiago Abascal used predication strategies to smear the Spanish government, arguing that the attacks and the violence suffered yet again by VOX supporters were caused and incited by the government. In line 43, Abascal posits that, in many cases, violent acts occurred because people were wearing Spanish flags, implying that the Spanish government is against the citizens who are proud to be Spanish. The division made by Santiago Abascal between VOX and its sympathizers framed in the "Us," and the Spanish government and its supporters, included in the category of "Them," also implies that violence is always perpetrated by the ones who do not support the unity of Spain, and therefore, if the actual government is administering Spain, insecurity will be always present in the nation. In this excerpt, perlocutionary acts were used to describe how the government was the one *against* Spain as a nation. Santiago Abascal attempted to persuade the audience by describing the government as a violent entity (line 42) that acts against the people *who love* Spain. This excerpt suggests that perlocutionary acts of inciting hate were used to turn the audience against the government.

Excerpt 6

41 Y hay que detenerse en qué significa y qué representa este

42 gobierno respecto a la violencia, porque la violencia perpetrada contra todos vosotros, muchas

43 veces por llevar una bandera de España durante esta campaña electoral, ha sido una violencia

44 incitada desde el consejo de ministros.

41 And we must stop at what this government means and what it represents

42 with respect to violence, because the violence perpetrated against all of you

43 many times for carrying a Spanish flag during this electoral campaigns have been violently

44 incited by the Council of Ministers.

VOX's stance on immigration clearly displays negative attitudes towards immigration in general; however, the findings also point to an interesting case of selective inclusion from the outcast, in this case, the immigrants. The sifting of classifications for the immigrants results in grouping them into two categories: the desirable immigrants and the undesirable ones. Spain has been a crucial point of entry for migrants (International Organization for Migration 2012). Hence, it is not surprising that the increasing number of immigrants in the past decades has taken a toll on its economy and social infrastructure. The desirable immigrants are those who come into the country legally and who can positively contribute to the development and strengthening of the country by building its workforce. The undesirable ones are the illegal migrants, the majority of whom are Muslim African refugees who braved the Morocco mountains and the dangerous seas of Spain's enclave, Ceuta. As Deutche Well (2021, para 1) reports, "The Spanish enclave has become an increasingly popular destination for migrants headed to Europe." These immigrants obviously are negatively perceived to be a nuisance to society and the country. The immigration dilemma seethes with controversies and diplomatic warfare with Morocco over the highly contentious Western Saharan claim. Torreblanca (2021, para 5) argues that Morocco is weaponizing migration in Ceuta to inflict damage and "to exert as much coercive force on the Spanish government as possible." The recent influx of about 8,000 illegal migrants coming into Ceuta in one day has driven the Spanish government to send military troops to help Ceuta's border police, who were overwhelmed with young migrants; many were clinging for their lives in inflatable rings and rubber dinghies (BBC 2021). The commotion led to the cancellation of classes and vaccination drives suspended (Torreblanca 2021). This catastrophic incident, broadcast on the news, is yet another argument that solidifies VOX's expostulation about having urgent stricter measures to curb immigration for the sake of the Spanish people.

In summary, this ideological rhetoric from VOX's political campaign sends a very strong message yet dangerous tenet of "Us" vs. "Them." The perlocutionary impact of such a creed results in mounting polarization in Spain, thus strengthening anti-immigration sentiments (Pardo 2021). And those political parties which VOX suggests are soft on issues that should matter for Spain have a questionable sense of loyalty. This dogma suggests

that the other parties do not have Spain's interest at heart as much as VOX does.

Conclusion

This study first analyzed Wodak's (2001) discursive strategies drawn from the ideology of "Us" vs. "Them" (Van Dijk 1993, 1997) used by VOX during the closing campaign of the Madrilenian elections. Second, we also analyzed the perlocutionary acts found in the discourse, i.e., those that incited hate, insecurity, and fear to gain more votes in the Madrilenian elections. The *hateful* language used was in reference to immigrants, specifically underaged Muslim immigrants. Abascal has clearly drawn a demarcation line between the in-group and out-group. He used predication practices to represent the party positively while diminishing the groups that do not share their principles. The findings also suggest that Abascal used referential/nomination strategies to label the ones who feel a sense of love and pride for Spain and labels for the ones who, according to him, *hate* Spain. The out-group description was in reference to the immigrants who live in Spain. Interestingly, there is a bias in the type of immigrants that VOX considers as an out-group. The findings imply that there was a selective rejection of immigrants. Predication strategies were also used in the speech to negatively label the Spanish government and the candidates of the Madrilenian elections and promote their own agenda. These speech acts and discursive strategies allowed VOX to not only reinforce the (in)stability in the Spanish political scene but also to steadily increase the number of their sympathizers and voters.

There are some limitations of this study that should be noted. This research focused only on the speech given at the closing campaign of the Madrilenian elections. A longitudinal study is recommended for future studies in this area to analyze the patterns of discursive strategies VOX used to influence followers in other regional elections. Nonetheless, this paper provided valuable contributions to the field of political discourse, as we provided new insights about the major development in VOX's political ambitions to gain more clout and influence. The Madrilenian elections and the speech Abascal gave was momentous. As mentioned in the background section, although VOX did not win, their discursive speech (presented in the study) set a narrative that people heard and believed. VOX won the hearts of many, influencing them to switch party affiliation. The change in the number of followers would suggest a change in people's sentiments toward immigration and other issues VOX stands for. Whether they will be able to hold on to their growing popularity remains to be seen.

In conclusion, language and linguistic representations are powerful discursive strategies that also emblematize democratic processes and freedom of speech. And as such, the "Us" vs. "Them" political message can be explicit or implicit, but the "vs." always remains the same––it focuses on the differences, and the comparisons are always pitted against each other. This study presented interesting, if not, compelling arguments that encourage debates and discussion, a testament that there will always be a disparity in opinions concerning (im)migration and political rifts. We believe that our study augments the body of knowledge on the polarization and fragmentation of the Spanish government, which consequently affects political outcomes and Spanish society as a whole.

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