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Evaluation strategies in Italian political language.
A case study

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Historical background

The essential role played by discourse strategies in political communication has been constantly highlighted by the authors who have studied the problem in the linguistic perspective. A large number of studies devoted to the analysis of the typical features of spoken and written text produced in this area has emphasised the importance of linguistic choices for successful communication both at the macro- and micro-structural level. This means the effective transmission of information as well as the ability to create agreement and support (e.g. Ciseri Montemagno 1995, Corcoran 1990, Desideri 1980, 1984, 1998, 1999, Fairclough 1989, Leso 1993, Van Dijk 1995).

In Italy the interest in political discourse has traditionally concentrated on its sociological aspects. Studies based on more specific linguistic analysis have been focused on a few “public” characters whose communicative style was strongly “marked”, Mussolini in the first place (s. Desideri 1984, Golino 1994). In her synthetic presentation of the evolution of political communication in the course of the XX century, Desideri (1999:395 ff) resorts to a pun to point out that in the second half of the last century there was a crucial shift from an approach based on the construction of an emotional “contact” (It. contatto) with the receiver, with a view to obtaining absolute support, to an approach aimed at stipulating an “agreement” (It. contratto) with the addressees, whereby the speaker commits her/himself to the adoption of a certain policy. The politician who clearly represents the new course of action is, according to Desideri, the late socialist leader Bettino Craxi. As a matter of fact, in Italy there was a widespread feeling that Craxi was introducing new elements into political communication, first of all through his emphatic rhetoric and evidently accurate lexical choices. It is worth noting that Craxi was often identified - for instance in the press - with Mussolini, an identification, mainly obtained with iconic means, probably due to the perception of the attention for communicative strategies which the two of them shared, despite the differences in their actual discourse choices.

Moreover, in the 1980s it was possible to perceive the first hints of another crucial evolution, resulting from the growing importance of mass media in political communication. The ad-

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1 Desideri points out that, in this perspective, the new style implies the adoption of “commissive” speech acts to replace the “exercitives” typical of the previous approach (s. Austin 1976: 151ff).
vent of the so-called “Second Republic” in Italy was marked by the emergence of (apparently) new forces, which were determined to be different from the old parties (and therefore used words like “movement” or “league” for self-definition) and refused to adopt the usual political language (negatively called politichese, i.e. “politicaelese”) in favour of a more direct approach and of a simple, even blunt, style of communication (s. Desideri 1999, Forconi 1992, Maz-zoleni 1998). These new actors on the political stage were more prone to enter the “global show”; the new media - television in the first place - captured, magnified and distorted them, the electors lost their identity as citizens and became an audience. The image of both new and old leaders was (re-)created and filtered through the communicative rules imposed by the media, thus producing unprecedented and sometimes unexpected effects. But politicians soon started to learn how to exploit the possibilities offered by the media and consequently changed their way of building their own image and presenting it to their potential supporters.

**The audience**

Despite the importance of the visual component, language remained the crucial means to get in touch with the receivers. Not differently from their predecessors of our distant past, Italian politicians have used all the instruments offered by the art of rhetoric to reach their final goal, i.e. the ultimate function of all political discourse: in terms of Bühler’s model, *Appell*. The inherent objective of political communication is to convince, manipulate, seduce in order to aggregate a group, creating a common ground made of values and beliefs, feelings and needs shared by all members. A strong support of the electorate can be obtained only through this process: all politicians know they have to be credible and trustworthy for their voters, but they also realise that this effect can be obtained with different means, adjusting to the attitudes of the people they want as their supporters. In other words, the first objective of any form of political communication is “building” an audience by selecting its receivers. Theoretically, the target group of a politician includes all adult citizens in a country: it should be as large as possible and no-one should be neglected. However, in practice a shrewd politician knows which part of the population is more likely to give support to her/him and therefore tries to select a group. If his/her efforts have to be directed to establishing a contact with her/his audience, s/he must have a clear idea of the features s/he can play upon in order to emphasise shared values and beliefs. Thus, relying on such common values and beliefs s/he will be in the position to put forth new ideas, opinions and views being sure that the audience is prepared to accept them as true and unquestionable.

Following Kant, the distinction between persuasion and conviction has been often explained as an opposition between subjective and objective judgement, but it can also be interpreted in terms of communication strategies (as done by Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958), noting that
a persuasive argument is meant for a particular audience, while a convincing one is thought to be acceptable for any reasonable person. In this perspective, we could say that political discourse aims at persuading rather than convincing.

**Objects of agreement**

In the light of these observations, it can be stated that a crucial role in the “construction” of a selected audience is played by the accurate presentation of “objects of agreement”, a common basis of preliminary facts and beliefs which make it possible to draw a shared “view of the world” (Weltanschauung) and thus reinforce all arguments introduced in the discussion. The selection and the actual exploitation of these objects of agreement is by no means a neutral process: these elements are essential in laying the groundwork for the development of arguments and reasoning and contribute to their persuasive force. Yet objects of agreement are different from actual arguments in that they are not presented explicitly, but rather left in the realm of presuppositions. Therefore, they remain implicit or are conveyed through less perceptible textual strategies. Among these strategies, evaluation is certainly an effective means to express a “communal value-system” (Hunston & Thompson 2000), contributing at the same time to the building up of the value-system itself. In political communication this implies the de-valuation of the adversary, which helps the speaker in her/his effort to emphasise the positive values shared by her/his group.

Also facts can be used as objects of agreement. The selection of “historical” events and their presentation obviously implies some form of interpretation, but the adoption of accurate rhetorical strategies can transform a personal judgement into a shared assumption, so that a model of reality is presented as unquestionable and becomes a sort of “myth”.

Evaluation is thus incorporated into the global discourse plan and contributes to the various steps of argumentation: the creation of a shared set of beliefs (agreement on values), a judgement on reality (agreement on facts) and the commitment of the speaker to a certain course of action.

**The Italian situation**

Until a few years ago Italian politics was characterised by the presence of two main forces, which represented opposite ideologies and reflected the “East vs. West” division of the world. A politician, as a member of one of the two groups, could automatically rely on a well-known view of the world, underlying the ideology of her/his party and shared by her/his addressees and potential electors. The candidate and her/his arguments were legitimated by a long entrenched tradition both on a national and a global level. The fall of communism on the interna-
tional scene and the struggle against corruption at home (the so-called *Tangentopoli*, “Kickback City”) marked the end of a system based on the concept of “belonging” to an ideological group and opened up new perspectives for political action (s. Calise 1994, Mazzoleni 1998). The “end of ideologies” paved the way for the introduction of a concept of politics based on personal values (the *personalizzazione della politica*, Livolsi 2000), which transformed the candidate from a representative of an ideology or of a party into a charismatic leader (Volli 2000: 65). Against this background the selection of objects of agreement becomes an urgent priority, as it is no longer possible to establish a contact with the electorate in the mainstream of traditional ideas. The agreement cannot be based on a common heritage of facts and values, but is “constructed” by the (new) politician who wants to be invested with legitimate power by the people.

A typical example of this new political “character” (acting on what has been called *il pалкосценіко della politica*, or ‘the political stage’) is Silvio Berlusconi, who “scese in campo” (i.e. entered the political arena) only a few years ago and in a relatively short period succeeded in obtaining the support of the majority of the voters. He was able to present himself as a credible politician, though completely different from his predecessors, and won the elections despite the doubts about his past behaviour as an entrepreneur and the persisting conflict of interests deriving from the fact that he has the control of a large share of communications networks in Italy.

The style of communication adopted by Berlusconi shows typical traits, both in the choice of his arguments and in the way they are developed. In our opinion it is possible to single out a basic framework which has constantly been exploited in his speeches and contributed to the success in the selection a large audience of faithful supporters. In our research we have examined various interviews and speeches: some of them, though initially presented orally, were collected in a volume and are now available in written form, others were recorded and then transcribed by our students. All materials date back to the pre-election period, because we want to highlight the presence of discourse strategies with a specific (though covert) perlocutionary intention, aimed at committing the receiver to a precise form of behaviour, i.e. casting a vote in favour of the right-wing coalition.

The analysis was initially based on quantitative data, which revealed the occurrence of significant lexical items and some forms of hedging, but a qualitative study of some of the most important texts was necessary to identify the strategies and the macro- and micro-structures adopted and to comment on their functional use. In this presentation, we shall first illustrate the construction of objects of agreement based on facts and values and give examples of the discourse strategies used. We shall then examine a speech delivered at Gallipoli during the 2001

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campaign and compare it with a speech of the left-wing candidate, Francesco Rutelli, in order to shed light on the main differences in discourse planning and in strategic construction of agreement and support.

**Objects of agreement: facts**

The events most frequently used by Berlusconi as a common background for his political action belong to the recent Italian history. When he talks about characters and facts of the so-called *prima repubblica* he does not discuss them overtly, but just evokes them to form a blurred picture, characterised by a generally negative atmosphere. Politicians of the past were more interested in their own prestige and power than in the welfare of the nation. Under this perspective, the difference between the two contrasting ideologies mentioned above is made no longer visible and both Christian-Democrats and left-wing parties are presented as being under the influence of Communism. In Berlusconi’s speeches all the aspects of public life in a system based on these parties are seen to be negatively dominated by a strong and illiberal central power. The new course, significantly starting with Mr. Berlusconi’s decision to enter the arena, was not easy in its initial phases: *Forza Italia* went to power and Berlusconi became Prime Minister, but it was a short interlude because of what is negatively described as a *ribaltone*, i.e. the withdrawal of support to the right-wing government by the Northern League, which – after an interim government – eventually lead to a protracted period of political prevalence of the Centre-Left. In Berlusconi’s speeches these events are presented as the result of a lack of true democracy, as the plot of a small group of politicians who were still attached to ideas and systems typical of the past, and profited from the ingenuousness of the new political forces (not used to the subtleties of politics) in order to get into power. It is necessary to precise that the left actually won the 1996 elections, but this circumstance is only incidentally mentioned by Berlusconi, mainly to underline that Prodi, who had been the leader of the coalition and had won the premiership, thanks to skilful manoeuvring was soon replaced by D’Alema, who would have been unable to gather sufficient support (in Berlusconi’s words: “mai sarebbe riuscito a farsi eleggere”).

One needn’t analyse the situation in detail to understand that the presentation of Italy’s political history in the 1990s obviously implies an interpretation of facts. But such facts are felt and communicated as truths, and thus become part of that common view of the past which is the prerequisite for the analysis of present-day problems and the search for future solutions.

The historical perspective is not limited to public events. What is typical of Berlusconi’s approach is the reliance on his personal background. The more important events of his life, his actions and his success are often mentioned in his public speeches: his past achievements in the building industry as well as in the construction of a powerful TV network, the success obtained
with *his* football team, even the private self-fulfilment within the family, all these elements are skilfully exploited to create an attractive character. The new leader is loyal and sincere, talented and skilful, able to achieve success in anything he decides to undertake: building, TV, football, politics. Thanks to this presentation Berlusconi, can imply that a country governed by a man who has been able to contrast adverse fate and make the best use of his talent and opportunities can expect to become as thriving as the companies he founded and manages.

From the linguistic point of view there is an interesting trait that characterises the presentation of all facts: the recurrent use of *passato remoto*, in most cases in the first person, singular or plural. In our opinion this is a significant choice, above all if we consider it in the framework of Weinrich’s theory of tenses (as put forward in 1971\(^2\)). According to that model (recently applied to the analysis of communication strategies in editorial articles, Santulli 2000), the use of different tenses is linked to the adoption of a specific communicative strategy, as there are two basic possibilities in telling facts: *narration* and *comment*. The Italian *passato remoto* and *imperfetto* clearly belong to the realm of narration, whereas *passato prossimo* is typical of comment. The original interpretation of this opposition, centred on the speaker’s degree of involvement, can be expanded and it is possible to note that the strategy of relying on the “narrated” world can be particularly useful for the purposes of political discourse. Facts (as already suggested by Weinrich) are looked at with detachment, and the lack of involvement implied by the narrative choice makes it possible for the speaker to put them outside the realm of discussion and comment, so that they automatically become true. If we consider that, as mentioned above, the presentation of facts implies their interpretation, it is easy to understand that the “narrative” sections are functional to the establishment of a common reference framework among the participants in the communicative event. Thus the speaker can construct a sort of mythical presentation, unquestionable and therefore true, which can serve as a basis for “comment”, which on the contrary requires the speaker’s emotional and active participation and, in the specific case of pre-electoral speeches, aims at committing the listeners to a similarly active behaviour.

In our opinion, this interpretation is corroborated by at least two facts: firstly, the combination of “narrative” tenses and the first person, very frequent in Berlusconi’s use, is a marked choice. Benveniste (1959) – who opposed *history* to *discourse* – noted that rigorously historical narration only uses the third person, although the first person can be used in novels. In the perspective we are proposing here, the speaker chooses to “narrate” facts in which he is personally involved in order to remove them from the uncertainties of the present and turn them into a part of a (mythical) history. This attitude is revealed also by the high frequency of the expression *mi ricordo che*, ‘I remember that’.
Secondly, in modern Italian prose, the use of passato remoto is definitely rare, above all among Northern speakers (as Mr. Berlusconi is). This is even more significant, if we consider that Berlusconi has not tried to eliminate a Northern accent in his pronunciation, which on the contrary can be functional to his self-presentation as an industrious and hard-working Northern entrepreneur. Forms like presentai, annunciai, credemmo, etc (‘I presented/announced, we believed’, all first persons) have a very low frequency in spoken Italian and their presence is evidently the result of a marked choice. This unusual tense is also used with lexemes that introduce a presupposition: e.g. mi accorsi, percepii (‘I realised that…’), so that the propositional value of the subordinate clause is assumed as unquestionable and cannot be denied.3

**Objects of agreement: values.**

It is generally admitted that values as objects of agreement are not meant for universal acceptance. Differently from facts, they presuppose the choice of a certain point of view and the adoption of a consequent behaviour: they are not unquestionable truths, rather, they belong to the realm of opinions (s. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958). They are however essential to justify choices that are not based on universal principles, but stem from the adhesion to a certain view of the world, which thus becomes the common background of the group and allows the speaker to put forward more specific requests of agreement, in order to overcome the difficulties that could derive from particular beliefs and interests.

This traditional distinction between facts and values is much more blurred. First of all, the choice of values that tend to have universal recognition makes it possible to utilise them as if they were facts. More specific values can be linked to “absolute” values (like Truth, Beauty, etc), so that the difference between a limited group and the “universal audience” tends to disappear. On the other hand, facts can be presented as the specific heritage of a certain group, which in recognising and accepting them develops a more profound feeling of belonging to a community.

In political discourse values are also used in their negative implications: as casting a vote is choosing between alternatives, it is necessary to delineate opposing systems of values, with the obvious aim of emphasising the attractions of one of them, both from the “abstract- moral” and from the practical point of view. In this respect, the strategies adopted by Berlusconi are varied and effective.

On the one hand, he chooses values that can potentially obtain universal acceptance, but then transforms them into the banners of his group. Typical example of this process is the way he exploits concepts like freedom, democracy, justice, etc. Rarely do the corresponding words

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3 For the use of presupposition in political languages s. Antelmi 2000.
appear without modification: the adjectives have strongly negative implications (giustizia delegata, giustizia ritardata, inverno della democrazia, etc, ‘justice by proxy/delayed justice/the winter of democracy’) when Berlusconi refers to the acts and beliefs of his adversaries; conversely, giustizia giusta, libertà/democrazia vera are typical expressions of his ideas concerning the practical application of these concept. From the quantitative point of view it is interesting to note the frequent use of vero (‘actual, true’) as a modifier of terms which in common language have positive implications and designate “universal” values (e.g. democracy, freedom, justice, wisdom, wealth, autonomy, etc). In this way Berlusconi implies an opposition between the authentic values (which he pursues) and the false values (which belong to the adversary). Against this background, the negative connotations actually neutralise the referential meaning of the words used to describe values: an “unjust justice” is not justice at all. But Berlusconi uses these words anyway, thus putting into question the truthfulness of his opponents’ claims.

On the other hand, we could say that Berlusconi transforms facts (or objects) into values. This mechanism can be illustrated through the idea of state. In common language, state refers to the people that occupy a territory and are politically organised under a government as well as to the political organisation that has the authority and the political power: a state can be considered an “object” rather than a “value”. But Berlusconi offers contrasting interpretations of the concept: in the negative scenario dominated by the left-wing parties, a state is inefficient and pervasive (e.g. autoritario, invasivo, padrone, burocratico, stato-partito/padrone, etc), while red tape and a huge number of useless rules suffocate the free development of society. Under the rule of his party the state becomes modern and efficient, supportive but ready to leave room for private initiative. In this perspective, state can be considered a vox media, a potentially neutral word which acquires its full connotative meaning through its modifiers. These, in turn, can function as linguistic presuppositions (e.g. lo strapotere della burocrazia), thus implicitly contributing to the establishment of shared assumptions and, ultimately, of a common view of the world.

Another interesting example is the concept of freedom. Berlusconi uses the common Italian word libertà, which can create agreement on a universal value, but gradually builds his own image of freedom, through limitation and specification of its meaning. As a matter of fact, in most occurrences Berlusconi talks about “freedom of” (e.g. freedom of cult/of thought/of expression): a quantitative analysis of the collocations shows that a high percentage of the complements introduces concepts belonging to the business area (e.g. libertà di lavoro, di mercato, di impresa, ‘freedom of work/market/entreprise’), so that the value he actually emphasises is that of economic liberty (which evidently is the counterpart of liberal economy).
In this system made of different objects of agreement, two facts have strategic importance: self-presentation and the role played by the adversary. As far as the former is concerned, we have already noted that Berlusconi uses his personal history: facts aim at demonstrating that he is the right person. Values, on the contrary, allow him the exploitation of another possibility offered by the art of rhetoric, identification with the passions of the receiver. Berlusconi shares the point of view of his listeners, he has found common objects of agreement, he is like them. For what concerns the adversary, Berlusconi sketches a complete picture, were both his party and the left-wing opponents are present; the narration of facts belonging to the recent past as well as the introduction of contrasting interpretations of universal values are functional to this objective. The relevance of this strategy can be fully appreciated if we consider that he consistently talks about his political opponents without engaging in a polemical dispute or open criticism and even with no need of opening up a true dialogic perspective. These considerations will be further developed in the course of the analysis of the Gallipoli speech.

An exemplary speech

During the campaign for the 2001 General Elections Berlusconi had an important meeting in a small town of Apulia, Gallipoli. The significance of the speech he delivered there stems from the fact that Gallipoli is the home town of D’Alema, who had been Prime Minister and former leader of the largest left-wing party, the Partito Democratico della Sinistra. Berlusconi was convinced that D’Alema was his actual adversary and considered Rutelli, the left-wing candidate for premiership, a man of straw, who had been chosen in order to attract more moderate voters.

In that town, the audience could have been hostile to the right-wing coalition, so it was particularly important for Berlusconi to outline a framework of agreement as a common basis for future projects. The speech is centred on a key concept and image, i.e. the idea of a turning point which is depicted as a revolution. The introductory remarks emphasise a widespread need for change: Berlusconi uses the plural form (noi pensiamo ‘we think’) to affirm that it is high time for the Italians to get rid of the old politicians and their way of governing, and start a new and innovative course. The word rivoluzione is introduced in connection to unemployment (new jobs can be created only through a revolution), a problem which is particularly acute in Southern Italy. The strong image is only partially mitigated by modifiers (una rivoluzione pacifica, liberale ‘a peaceful/liberal revolution’) or transforming the noun into an adjective (un cambiamento rivoluzionario ‘a revolutionary change’). A rich choice of lexical items is exploited to convey the idea of urgent change and the emotional involvement of Berlusconi in this planned revolution: programma, progetto, piano, which are rather neutral, but also visione, sogno, sfida, missione, impegno, preoccupazione (‘vision, dream, challenge, mission, commit-
ment, worry’), which emphasise the speaker’s personal commitment from various points of view.

To lead his audience to acceptance of, and participation to, this radical change Berlusconi immediately starts the construction of the “common ground”, following the usual scheme and using the rhetoric strategies we illustrated above. Firstly, he tells his personal history (the building of residential districts, the football team, the TV network, and, finally, his engagement in politics), secondly, the political events of the last decade, which naturally lead to the present situation. At this point Berlusconi with a skillful metadiscoursal comment (Vedete, mi sono lasciato andare a una fotografia della situazione che viviamo, della situazione del nostro recentissimo passato, ma ancora del nostro presente, mentre avevo cominciato a parlarvi più positivamente del nostro futuro ‘You see, I have indulged in the description of the situation we are living in, of our very recent past and still of our present, whereas I had started to talk about our future in more positive terms’) introduces his view of the future which can now count on a more solid basis.

The transition from past events to future prospects is marked by a shift from a prevailing use of the first person singular (io) to the corresponding plural form (noi/nostro: il nostro stato, il nostro progetto, etc) which includes the listeners into the project of change.

The five main points of his programme are illustrated against a common background of facts and values, as well as their negative counterparts attributed to the adversary. The approach adopted for this presentation is definitely “monoglossic” (Martin 200, 2001): the speaker does not negotiate his statements and does not even imply the existence of different positions. In other words, the very assumption of the intertextual, or “heteroglossic” (Bakhtin 1973, 1986, 2000), nature of texts is denied. Alternatives are not taken into consideration, nor does Berlusconi express uncertainty, lack of commitment or confidence. Linguistic evidence of this semiotic choice can be found in the frequent use of presuppositions, which present opinions and questionable facts as truth (typical structures are: il fatto che..., dato che ‘the fact that, since…’), as well as in the structures containing the verb form credo (‘I believe’). When used to express a personal opinion (similar to ‘I think’) this verb normally requires a subjunctive (e.g. Credo che tu debba fare così), but Berlusconi prefers the indicative. A good example of this choice is the structure credo che dovete (lit. ‘I believe you shall have to’), where Berlusconi uses a future form in the second person plural: the absence of subjunctive eliminates uncertainty so that the expression actually means ‘you must’. The use of the subjunctive in conjunction with credo is generally limited to past forms (as in Credevamo che bastasse ‘We thought it was enough’), which occur in the narrative part of the speech and imply that the past convictions proved to be false.
The attitude towards the audience revealed in previous examples is coherent with a didactic approach (Desideri 1999). In his speech Berlusconi does not explicitly consider the opinions of his adversary, he does not leave room for a dialogic perspective. Rather, he wants to educate his listeners, illustrating and explaining his project as the only viable option. Linguistic strategies typically aimed at this objective rely on forms like voi sapete che... ‘you know that...’, pensate a... ‘think of...’. The former mainly introduces past events (e.g sapete come è andata ‘you know what happened’) and implicitly conveys their interpretation: knowledge becomes a form of judgement. In the latter, the use of the imperative form in combination with the lexical choice (‘just think of...’) is certainly marked and effectively shows the didactic intentions of the speaker. In this perspective we could say that his rhetorical approach falls within the realm of the epideictic genre, which exploited the art of demonstration for pure ceremonial purposes (praise or blame), without engaging in a forensic or political battle. No real adversary contradicts the speaker, who is free to develop his arguments without the limits imposed by contradictory statements.

The “didactic-monoglossic” approach is reflected in language choices which are functional to direct expression of thought: this is particularly evident in the preference for epistemic modality and in the rare occurrence of hedging strategies. A good example of this is the way Berlusconi uses verbs of thought. Apart from the imperatives and the past forms already mentioned above, only in few occasions does the verb pensare (‘to think’) occur for the expression of personal convictions. Moreover, in four of them the speaker anticipates future events and looks forward to the radical changes he intends to make, so that his “thought” is actually a certainty (e.g. penso che sia giunto il momento, penso che questa volta ci siamo, ‘I think the moment has come...’). As for credere (‘to believe’), in two out of its eight occurrences the word is used in its absolute meaning (crediamo in te, ‘we believe in you’, as if he were God), while on other occasions it is not used to express an opinion concerning facts, but to introduce a presupposition or a general statement, as in credo che sia logico attribuire la responsabilità, ‘I believe it is logic to put the blame on...’. This scheme has a high frequency in the whole corpus of his speeches and reveals a typical effort to present certainties rather than opinions, emotionally attracting the audience to share the same beliefs and to be persuaded of their positive value.

The adversary

The direct forms of judgement and expression of thought as well as the almost total lack of hedges are all the more typical of Berlusconi’s communicative approach, if we confront his style with that of his electoral adversary, Francesco Rutelli. To highlight the most important differences in the discourse strategies of the two leaders we have examined a speech delivered at Cernobbio by the left-wing candidate during the 2001 campaign. At a macroscopic level it is
immediately evident that Rutelli does not base his presentation on a rigid structure: there is no progression from past through present to future. The personal experience as mayor of Rome is repeatedly mentioned, but it not organised to become a full-fledged historical background and is not coherently “narrated” (as a matter of fact the most frequent tense is passato prossimo). There is no systematic “building up” of objects of agreement.

Rutelli tends to mention explicitly the position of his adversary, and chooses a ‘heteroglossic’ approach. Not only does he oppose the beliefs and values of the Right, but he also casts doubts on their ability to keep their electoral promises (as, for example, that of reducing the tax burden). In this ideal and often polemical dialogue with his counterpart, Rutelli continually negociates his opinions, which are generally presented in subordinate clauses (e.g. penso che..., credo che..., ‘I think/believe’), in some cases with the use of further forms of modulation (e.g. penso che dobbiamo ammettere che..., ‘I think we must admit that…’). As for the verb credere he clearly chooses the word for its dubitative implications: he believes in a possibility. This is reflected in the almost constant use of the subjunctive in the subordinate clause.

Another recurring feature of Rutelli’s communicative style is the frequent use of hedges. He expresses limitation or modulation of illocutionary force with different adverbs (like effettivamente ‘actually’, sicuramente, largamente, etc) or with meta-discoursal remarks (ci tengo a / voglio dirvi, ‘I want to tell you’, lo dico con chiarezza, ‘I affirm it’, non faccio polemiche, se posso riassumere, etc). Incidentally, the use of the verb dire emphasises the dialogic approach, in particular when it is combined with a modal expression (vi debo dire ‘I must tell you’, fatemi dire ‘let me tell you’, non voglio dire ‘I don’t want to tell you’, etc) which implicitly recalls the position of the adversary (implying that he does not tell the truth).

Another typical feature is the introduction of statements in a subordinate clause dependent on phrases like non c’è dubbio che, è evidente che (‘no doubt that, it is evident that’). The use of this form of hedging has been highlighted in scientific prose (Markkanen & Schröder 1997, Garzone 2001): the fact that something is self-evident or unquestionable results in a lack of commitment of the speaker, not differently from the use of deontic modals. This is what Meyer defines “necessity as excuse” (1997:31). Thanks to the use of these structures Rutelli, though avoiding attribution of the statements to someone else, can strongly mitigate the force of his averral (see Hunston 2000).

The attempt to modulate the expression of thought is also evident in the use of sapere (‘to know’): differently from Berlusconi (who uses the second plural person, ‘you know that…’) Rutelli prefers the first person plural (‘we know that…’). So he introduces the object of knowledge as a presupposition, but creates a sort of complicity with his audience and shows no clear
didactic intention. There are also some occurrences of the first person singular, which in most cases is modulated by a modal (so di dovere, so di potere 'I know I must/I can’) or an adverb (so bene/benissimo) which emphasises its dialogic function.

All the linguistic features we have taken into consideration reveal different strategies of self-presentation: while Berlusconi creates a wide choice of strong and successful characters (the loving father and husband, the successful entrepreneur, the winning football-team president, the shrewd investor) which finally converge to form the ideal politician, Rutelli does not even try to delineate a strong personality, running the risk of appearing dubious and insecure. But these traits can also be the expression of the intention of “building” an audience that is more prone to consider critical arguments than to accept emotional declarations. Rutelli is evidently addressing educated listeners, used to reasoning and even suspicious in front of clear-cut distinctions. Only in this context can his lack of certainties become a positive value. In other words he appeals to reason rather than feelings, and therefore pursues conviction instead of persuasion. If his theoretically universal audience shrank to a group smaller than his adversary’s (and he lost the elections) this may be the consequence of a circumstance that is effectively synthesised in Steinthal’s motto: “Denken is schwer!”.
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