

“Puerto Rico represents the persistence of what Spain has wanted to bring to the world”: the conceptualization of responsibility in monarchs’ discourses during visits to former colonies

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Postcolonial studies have shown that many national and international aspects of our current societies are shaped by an internalized hierarchy between, on the one hand, former colonial powers and, on the other hand, former colonies (Rivera Pichardo, Jost & Benet-Martínez 2022). This hierarchy relies on a range of traits that have been associated to colonial and colonized countries by the time of and after colonization processes (Botero Camacho 2011). This double-sided representation can be studied from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, which bases itself on the idea that linguistic productions would both reflect and transmit specific ways of representing reality (De Cock, Michaud Maturana & Ruiz Zúñiga 2019). In this perspective, and particularly when the conceptualization of responsibility is addressed, the concept of agentivity plays an important role. De Cock & Michaud (2014: 126) define it as the “causal relation between an agent entity, an intentional action and the state of who is affected by the effects of the action”. In the discourse, agentivity is built through a large variety of lexical and syntactic means, among which the expressions employed to refer to the agent or the patient, their syntactic (De Cock & Michaud 2014) and semantic (Ariño Bizarro 2023) role in the oration and the voice in which the verb is expressed (Frazer & Miller 2009).

This study focuses on discourses pronounced during official visits of monarchs from former colonial powers to former colonies. Indeed, given the important role played by monarchs during colonization processes, we believe such discourses could provide an interesting insight of the current state of postcolonial ideas. Through an analysis of the above-mentioned aspects of agentivity, we aim to define (i) who is represented as responsible through agentivity and (ii) for what aspect(s) of the colonial and post-colonial history this entity is presented as responsible. On the one hand, we expect the colonial power to be represented in a highly agentive way in most parts of the discourses, although this agentivity could be moderated when it comes to more violent aspects of colonization. On the other hand, we presume that colonized countries will be represented in an agentive, empowering way for actions related to the present time, in which the official visit takes place, but that this agentivity may be reduced when talking about past events.

Our corpus is made of discourses of current monarchs from Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom during recent visits to former colonies. We selected five of those visits, one by Filip I to the Democratic Republic of Congo (2022), two by Felipe VI to Colombia (2022) and Puerto Rico (2022) and two by Charles III to Barbados (2023) and Kenya (2023).

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