

Politicians between person(s) and people: the importance of personal vs. depersonalizing strategies in Spanish parliamentary debate

Political discourse often displays a tension between group identities (e.g. of national or political groups) and a more individual profiling (e.g. a party leader or charismatic figure). This tension is most clearly present in switches between singular and plural deictics. Yet, not every utterance in political discourse is formulated in a deictic way, also depersonalizing constructions (impersonals, generic strategies, passive constructions) are widely used. In this paper, we will look into the tension between personal and depersonalizing constructions, and its effect on the expression of (inter)subjective meanings (Benveniste 1966, Lyons 1982, Traugott 2003).

Our research is based on a corpus of the 2001 and 2005 *Debate sobre el estado de la Nación* in the Spanish parliament and involves a quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative analysis offers an overview of the presence of deictics and depersonalizing strategies, more concretely *uno* 'one', generic 2nd person singular readings, *se*-constructions, periphrastic passives and indefinite *la gente* 'the people', and contrasts these frequencies with data concerning TV-debate and informal conversation (De Cock 2010). The qualitative analysis focuses on the communicative functions of these depersonalizing strategies and on their subjective and/or intersubjective effect.

Through this method, we address the following issues:

In the first place, how do we interpret these depersonalizing strategies? We will show that the vagueness of the construction due to the indefinite or defocussed nature of the agent is sometimes compensated by other strategies at utterance- or text-level, which delimit and guide the interpretation, e.g. adjacent speaker/hearer reference, spacebuilders such as *en el Gobierno* (1),....

1) *Cuando se esta en el Gobierno se agradece el apoyo.*

In the second place, what is the discursive functioning of depersonalization in parliamentary debate? More concretely, we establish an overview of the types of contents that are being conveyed by means of a depersonalized strategy vs. a personal strategy, such as indirect causation, deonticity,...

In the third place, we look into the different (inter)subjective effects, comparing on the one hand the different depersonalizing strategies, and on the other hand depersonalizing vs. personalizing strategies. It is our hypothesis that the choices made by the speaker as to intersubjective effect crucially contribute to the specific nature of parliamentary debate. In order to pin down this genre specificity, we will compare these findings with data on subjectivity and intersubjectivity of depersonalizing strategies in other interaction genres, such as informal conversation and TV-debate.

In conclusion, we will show in this paper that depersonalizing strategies are not as much a sign of vagueness or lack of information, but rather strategies holding a special place in the conceptualization of interaction participants.

Corpus

Congreso de los Diputados. 2001. *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Pleno y diputación permanente. Sesiones plenarias del 26 y 27 de junio del 2001*, 4619-4721. <http://www.congreso.es>

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