

Empires of the Mind. Metaphors and strategic discourse in Italian politics

keywords

Framing, metaphor, conceptual metaphor, politics, Italy

The aim of this study is to analyze the strategic use of metaphors in political discourse during the Italian 2008 electoral campaign that led to a major victory of centre-right candidate Silvio Berlusconi.

The corpus includes the discourses of the two main parties' leaders, pronounced during television talk shows in the forty days before the elections. Talk shows have been chosen as they are considered representative of the supraindividual level of the discourse (Cienki 2008).

We applied a two-steps analysis. We used a Textual Statistical approach, in order to access the *repetition level*, composed by the most repeated words and phrases, that we assumed to be indicative of the strategic level of the campaign. We analysed this level with a qualitative approach, paying special attention to metaphor analysis following the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

In this work we will focus on the description of the main characters of the campaign story (Van Zoonen 2004): the hero and the opponent.

Berlusconi describes his opponent, Walter Veltroni, using metaphors pertaining to the domain of FICTIONAL SHOWS. In this way he gives his listeners the impression that the new leader and Democratic party are only a theatrical representation, that they are not genuine. In describing the *hero* of his story - his political program - Berlusconi uses and frequently repeats expressions belonging to the domain of MATHEMATICS. Berlusconi attempts in this way to underline the scientific, certain, secure nature of his political offer. The strategic construction of the campaign is consistent with the logic of the *Message Box*, an instrument of strategic marketing that recommends the candidate to construct his strengths in those dimensions where he builds his opponent's weakness.

The leader of the Democratic Party, **Walter Veltroni**, shows a different communicative pattern. He avoids to attack his political opponent (Berlusconi) and concentrates his efforts in describing another opponent. The antagonist of his story is the *political and institutional system*, a political system that is *grown old, blocked, crashed*. Veltroni also avoids to frame the *hero* of the story, himself and his political proposal, and prefers to list a series of proposals that shows low repetition levels. This is a crucial characteristic of his discourse: in both the hero and the opponent description, the Democratic leader shows low levels of repetition and a moderate use of metaphors, preferring to use a more abstract and conceptual language.

A comparison will show that a different approach towards the use of metaphors reveals a different attitude towards political communication. The results will be discussed in light of the debate about effectiveness in political discourse taking into special account Lakoff's and Westen's approach.

Works cited

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