

The Linguistic Construction of Political Identity: the Case of Catalonia

Isabel Negro Alousque

Universidad Complutense de Madrid ✉ 

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Abstract: In the last decades much research has been carried out on discourse as a form of social practice from the Critical Discourse Analysis perspective. The Vienna school of CDA led by Wodak and her associates has developed a discourse-historical approach to discourse which investigates the linguistic construction of national identities through a method of description and analysis which posits three categories –topics, strategies and linguistic devices– employed in the construction, perpetuation, transformation and dismantling of nations and national identities. Following the discourse-historical approach, the present paper aims to analyse the linguistic construction of Catalonia’s present and political future in a corpus of public discourse fragments produced by Catalan pro-independence leaders and activists during the so-called Catalan crisis. The analysis reveals that the linguistic construction of the Catalan present and political future relies on constructive, justification and dismantling strategies that seek to support self-determination and construe Catalonia as an independent Republic.

Key words: discourse analysis; Catalan independence movement; political discourse; politics.

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1. Introduction

In the last years, the Catalan nationalist movement, which has gradually moved from nationalism to independence, has received scholarly attention, the focus being on its ideological roots, the significant role of civil pro-independence associations and the media (Crameri 2013), the relationship between the autonomous government of Catalonia and the central government of Spain (Pomerleau 2022), and the way the Catalan political situation is dealt with in the media (Moragas-Fernández *et al.* 2018; Giugliano 2022; Iveson 2017) or in parliamentary debate (Rubio-Carbonero and Franco-Guillén 2020).

The aim of this paper is to explore the linguistic construction of Catalonia’s political present and future as an aspect of its political identity in a corpus of public discourse fragments produced by Catalan pro-independence leaders and activists during the so-called Catalan crisis.

More precisely, the present article addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Which argumentation strategies are used in the construction of Catalonia’s political present and future?

RQ2: How are these strategies linguistically expressed?

RQ3: How does the Catalan pro-independence discourse reflect the socio-historical context, thus providing evidence of the relationship between discourse and society?

The contribution of this article to research into the discourse construction of national identities is twofold. First, while the linguistic construction of Catalonia’s political status in different contexts has been examined in discourse research (e.g. Rubio-Carbonero and Franco-Guillén 2020; Iveson 2017), to the best of our knowledge the linguistic construction of its political present and imagined future in independence discourse at the height of the Catalan crisis (2018) has not yet been explored. Second, while the bulk of previous studies follow a CDA approach, we follow the discourse-historical approach developed by Wodak and her associates (Wodak *et al.* 2009).

Section 2 discusses the origins of the Catalan crisis. Section 3 outlines the theoretical background of this study. Section 4 is concerned with the corpus and the methodology employed. Section 5 seeks to provide an answer to the research questions through the corpus analysis. The last section presents some concluding remarks.

2. The Catalan crisis

Catalonia is a wealthy region in the north-east of Spain which has its own language and culture. After the collapse of the Visigothic monarchy in the eighth century most of the peninsula, including Catalonia, was left in Muslim hands. Internal instability among Muslims and the Christian victory at Poitiers (in 732) enabled the Carolingian Empire to create the *Marca Hispanica* in the following decades in territories close to the Pyrenees. These were organised politically into counties dependent on the Frankish king. However, as the central power of the Empire weakened, the Catalan counties broke away to form an entity of their own. During the rule of Count Ramon Berenguer IV the dynastic union between the Catalan Counties and the Kingdom of Aragon took place through his marriage to Petronila of Aragon. The Crown of Aragon allowed both entities to retain their own medieval institutions and laws. The Generalitat of Catalonia functioned as a tax collector on behalf of the Crown of Aragon.

The region became part of a unified Spain after the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon with Isabella of Castile (1469). In the 19th century a campaign for political autonomy was launched along with a movement to revive Catalan as a language of literature. Following a sweeping victory of Esquerra Republicana –a left-wing coalition party– in the local elections of 1931, the statute of autonomy for Catalonia became law a year later. But after the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), the Catalan government was dissolved, and Catalan language was banned in official spheres and public places as an offensive against everything subversive. In September 1977 limited autonomy was granted to the region. In 1978 Catalonia promulgated a Statute of Autonomy and was recognised as a «nationality.» Catalan became the joint official language of Catalonia with Spanish, and the region had its own parliament, government, flag and anthem. In September 2005 the Catalan Parliament passed a proposal for a new Statute of Autonomy that recognized Catalonia as a nation. The Spanish Conservative Party (Popular Party) lodged an unconstitutionality appeal against the new Statute. The Constitutional Court upheld most of the Statute, declared fifteen articles null and void and ruled that Catalans constituted a «nationality». In 2013 the Catalan regional parliament passed a measure calling for a referendum on independence, which was held on 9 November 2014. Another referendum was held on 1 October 2017. A great number of voters backed independence again. Catalonia's president, Puigdemont, signed a declaration of independence nine days later but proposed its effects be suspended for two months. Nevertheless, pro-independence Catalan MPs voted on 27 October 2017 to unilaterally declare Catalonia an independent republic. The Spanish senate approved the use of article 155 of the constitution, which allowed Prime Minister Rajoy's government to assume direct rule of Catalonia, dismiss Puigdemont and his cabinet, take control of Catalonia's police and call a regional election. Pro-independence leaders fled abroad or were arrested for a crime of sedition.

Three Catalan pro-independence parties won 47.7 per cent of the vote at the election on 21 December 2017.

The 2018-2020 period, which is the focus of our research, marked the height of the Catalan crisis and a new phase characterized by negotiation. In May 2018, Quim Torra was appointed president. Direct rule was lifted. On 16 October 2019 the Supreme Court convicted twelve Catalan independence politicians and activists of sedition and misuse of public funds. Nine were sentenced to jail terms, while three were fined. In February 2020 the Spanish government agreed to start talks with the Catalan government, and in June 2021 it approved the pardons of the nine Catalan independence leaders who had been jailed in October 2017. In September 2021, negotiations resumed after a hiatus of a year and a half due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the two sides are far apart. The Catalan government has two main demands: an amnesty for all the pro-independence politicians who are still facing legal action for their role in the events of 2017; and acknowledgment of Catalonia's right to self-determination, leading to a binding referendum on independence. Prime Minister Sánchez has ruled out both, but has pledged to make proposals to increase investment and financing in the region.

3. Theoretical framework

From a Critical Discourse Analysis (hence CDA) perspective, discourse is a form of social practice (see, e.g., Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard 1996; van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2003, 2012; 2013; Fairclough & Fairclough 2013; Fairclough and Wodak 1997). This means that CDA advocates reciprocal relationships between discourse and the situations, institutions and social contexts in which it takes place. CDA thus focuses on the social analysis of discourse (Wodak 2001; Wodak and Meyer 2001), i.e. «on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of power and dominance in society» (Van Dijk 2015, p. 2).

CDA subsumes different approaches which differ in the conceptual and theoretical framework, the methodology and research issues. The Vienna school of Discourse Analysis led by Wodak and her associates has put forward a discourse-historical paradigm which considers the historical dimension of discursive acts. Following the CDA view of discourse as social practice aiming to produce, maintain, legitimize, transform, dismantle, restore or destroy social conditions (Wodak *et al.* 2009), the Vienna scholars have developed a method of description and analysis which identifies three basic categories involved in the

discursive construction, perpetuation, transformation and dismantling of nations and national identities. These categories are topics/contents, strategies and linguistic devices (cf. Wodak *et al.* 2009).

The topics are the contents that define national identity, including a common political past, present and future, a common culture, and the national body – the national territory, geographical and architectural features. These topics are relevant to the construction of Catalan identity, as evidenced by the investigations on the role of culture in the creation of national identity in Catalonia (Llobera 2004) and the role of landscape in framing it (Nogué and Vicente 2004).

The strategies are grouped into four broad categories:

- a) Constructive strategies are used to build and establish a national identity. They include strategies of assimilation – emphasizing intra-national sameness or identity – and strategies of dissimilation – emphasizing difference.
- b) Perpetuation and justification strategies try to maintain, support and reproduce national identities. Perpetuation strategies serve to highlight the need to support continuity, to discursively construct an action/event as a threat to national identity. In contrast, justification strategies seek to defend controversial acts or events.
- c) Transformation strategies aim to transform the negative aspects of national identities into another.
- d) Dismantling strategies serve to demolish existing national identities or elements of them. A major dismantling strategy is other-negative presentation.

Finally, the linguistic devices are the grammatical (e.g. modality, passivization) and lexical means (e.g. specific lexis, metaphor) whereby the strategies are expressed.

The Vienna scholars have followed this discursive-historical approach to explore issues such as antisemitic discourse in Austria against the Waldheim affair (see, e.g., Wodak 1991, 1996), the representation of immigrants from Romania (see, e.g., Wodak *et al.* 1999), and the construction of nationalism (Wodak 2017) and Austrian nation and identity (De Cillia *et al.* 1999; Wodak *et al.* 2009). The present article attempts to explore a particular aspect of Catalan identity, namely a collective political present and imagined future, as constructed in public discourse produced by Catalan independence supporters. We chose this topic because it has pervaded independence discourse in the last years inasmuch as Catalonia's political present and imagined future is built upon the thought of a Catalan independent Republic.

4. Corpus and Methodology

The analysis that follows is based on a small-scale corpus research. The data collection was gathered by means of an Internet search. We analysed a data set of public discourse accessed online. The sample is made up of public discourse fragments produced between May 2018, when Mr Torra was appointed president of Catalonia, and February 2020, when the Spanish government agreed to start talks with the Catalan government, thus starting a new phase in the so-called Catalan crisis characterized by negotiation.

We selected a variety of public discourse fragments from online national newspapers and videos. The press fragments were written in Spanish, while the videos were in Catalan – with Spanish subtitles available. They were produced by a variety of actors involved in the independence movement – Catalan political leaders, political groups and civil organizations, and they belong to the following genres:

1. Political communication: speeches, statements, interviews, banners.
2. Digital media – tweets.

Specifically, the corpus consists of:

- 35 speeches, statements and TV interviews available in Spanish and involving the most prominent independence leaders: Carles Puigdemont, former president of Catalonia and a member of Junts per Catalunya, the majority party in the region; Quim Torra, current president of Catalonia; and Oriol Junqueras, former vice president of Catalonia and leader of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, a left-wing coalition party.
- 10 banners of pro-independence CDR – Committee for the Defence of the Republic – groups shown during demonstrations. The images appeared in online videos about the protests following the 2019 Supreme Court ruling.
- 10 tweets issued by Tsunami Democràtic, a citizens' group which directed pro-independence demonstrators in Catalonia to protest sites. They were included in the corpus because they show independence support from the most influential civil group in the selected time frame and they appeared in the media.

We carried out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the sample, relying on a hand-searched survey of the realizations of the strategies employed in the pro-independence public discourse fragments. To do so, the public discourse fragments were transcribed. Then the strategies and lexical realizations employed by independence leaders and activists were ascribed to the categories posited in the discourse-historical approach – constructive, perpetuation/ justification, transformation, dismantling. Finally, a frequency count of the lexical realizations was carried out.

5. Corpus Analysis

The construction of Catalonia's political present and imagined future relies on three types of macrostrategies: constructive strategies, justification strategies and dismantling strategies. Table 1 displays the strategies, their lexical implementation and the number of realizations.

Table 1. Strategies used in the linguistic construction of Catalonia's political present and imagined future.

Strategies	Lexical means	Lexical realisations	Number of realizations
Constructive - Continuation - Unification Positive self-presentation Appeal to cooperation - Dissimilation	Specific lexis Metaphor Specific lexis National <i>we</i> Modality Specific lexis Contrastive parallelism	Verbs meaning 'continue', adverb <i>always</i> PATH metaphor Positive adjectives, nouns and adverbs Deontic-modal verbs Positive adjectives, totalization items <i>us/them</i>	60
Justification - Generalizing - Euphemizing	Specific lexis	<i>derecho universal, la gente</i>	5
Dismantling	Negative <i>other</i> -presentation Metaphor	Derogatory lexis WAR metaphor	49

5.1. Constructive Strategies

Independence supporters resort to three types of constructive strategies:

- Continuation strategies
- Unification strategies
- Dissimilation strategies

Continuation strategies emphasize positive political continuity. They are deployed by independence leaders and activists to support the defence of a Catalan republic. They are lexically expressed by verbs like *seguir* (1) / *continuar* (2) 'continue', *estar ahí* 'be here' (3), *persistir* 'persist' (4), and expressions indicating stability in the future (5):

- (1) *A pesar de estar en la cárcel, seguimos defendiendo los valores republicanos.* (Mr Junqueras, 26/4/2019).
[«Despite being in prison, we continue to defend Republican values.»]
- (2) *Necesitamos un gobierno que exprese nuestra voluntad de continuar el mandato republicano.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018).
[«We need a government that expresses our will to continue the Republican mandate.»]
- (3) *Que sepan que no dejaremos de ser, de estar ahí y llegar hasta el final y poder respirar libertad.* (Mr Puigdemont, 14/10/2019).
[«They must know that we will not cease to be what we are, to be here, to reach the end and be able to breathe free.»]
- (4) *La independencia es inevitable. Tenemos que persistir, persistir.* (Mr Junqueras, 14/10/2019).
[«Independence is inevitable. We must persist, persist.»]
- (5) *Somos un proyecto de inclusión, un proyecto de diálogo, un proyecto de futuro.* (Mr Junqueras, 13/5/2019)
[«We are a project of inclusion, a project of dialogue, a project for the future.»]

In examples (6-7) emphasis on political continuity is achieved through the PATH metaphor. The PATH metaphor frames Catalonia's push for independence as movement along a path (Moragas-Fernández *et al.* 2018):

- (6) *Si aún no somos libres, es porque no hemos acabado el camino. Os pido que no nos paremos y que avancemos juntos para hacer realidad nuestros sueños y nuestros anhelos.* (Mr Torra, 11/9/2019).
[«If we are not yet free, it is because we have not finished our journey. I ask you not to stop and to move forward together to make our dreams true.»]
- (7) *En medio de esta represión debemos ser capaces de seguir caminando.* (Mr Torra, 22/6/2018).
[«In the midst of this repression we must be able to continue to walk.»]

Catalonia's present political situation is considered to be provisional. This element of instability suggests the need for a change, which involves the implementation of an independent Catalonia:

- (8) *He aceptado esta candidatura por la situación de provisionalidad que vive Cataluña, que sólo puede acabar con [...] la aceptación de la voluntad democrática de los catalanes.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«I have accepted this candidacy because of the provisional situation that Catalonia is experiencing, which can only end with the acceptance of the democratic will of the Catalans.»]

The strategy of emphasizing positive political continuity can also be used for perpetuation purposes. We then find linguistic realizations such as the adverb *siempre* 'always' and verbal forms with future time reference (*ir a* 'be going to'), as in (9):

- (9) *Siempre vamos a luchar contra la injusticia, el miedo y las amenazas.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«We will always fight injustice, fear and threats.»]

The Catalan political present and imagined future is also built through strategies of unification, such as positive self-presentation. Independence leaders highlight the peaceful nature of the independence movement (10-11), and the political virtues of the Catalan people: political maturity, tenacity and capacity for dialogue (12-14):

- (10) *El movimiento independentista catalán es un movimiento sin ira. Nosotros construimos, no destruimos.* (Mr Puigdemont, 3/10/2018).
[«The Catalan independence movement is a non-angry movement. We build, we do not destroy.»]
- (11) *El independentismo va a favor de todos. Serenidad, civismo, no-violencia.* (Mr Torra, 17/10/2019)
[«The independence movement is in everyone's interest. Serenity, civility, nonviolence.»]
- (12) *Un pueblo que ha vivido lo que ha vivido en estos últimos meses, es un pueblo adulto maduro, que puede tomar sus decisiones por sí mismo.* (Mr Torra, 5/6/2018)
[«A people that has lived through what it has experienced in these last months is a mature adult people that can make its own decisions.»]
- (13) *Estamos aquí en solidaridad fraterna con tantos y tantos catalanes que hoy han salido a las calles [...] en estas marchas por la libertad, que son un ejemplo magnífico de cómo este pueblo se propone alcanzar su libertad, pacíficamente, tenazmente.* (Mr Torra, 16/10/2019)
[«We are here in fraternal solidarity with so many Catalans who have taken to the streets today [...] in these marches for freedom, who are a magnificent example of how this people intends to achieve its freedom, peacefully, tenaciously.»]
- (14) *Diálogo: el pacto y la palabra son palabras de este país que siempre busca consensos.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«Dialogue: the pact and the word are words of this country that always seeks consensus.»]

The prospective Catalan state is described positively through an implicit comparison with the Spanish state:

- (15) *Nos proponemos construir un estado independiente más justo, más próspero, más democrático.* (Mr Puigdemont, 3/10/2018)
[«We aim to build an independent state that is fairer, more prosperous, more democratic.»]

Another strategy that focuses on national unity is the appeal to cooperation. This strategy is lexically implemented in three ways:

- a) by the use of personal pronoun 'we' and the corresponding possessives (*nuestro* ...) and object pronouns (*nos*). 'We' can be identified with a «national we», thus inviting identification and solidarity. It recurs across the corpus, as illustrated in (1-5), (6-7), (16-17), (19) and (50-51).
- b) through deontic-modal verbs (*tener que*, *deber* 'need, must'):

- (16) *Tenemos que dedicar todos los esfuerzos para que en Cataluña reconozcamos la vida libre de todos los hombres y mujeres.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«We must make every effort to ensure that in Catalonia we recognize the free life of all men and women.»]

- c) through adjectives that denote cohesion (*fuertes*, *unidos*, *solidarios*), verbs and nouns creating union (*acompañar* 'accompany', *compañeros* 'comrades'), totalization items (*todos* 'all') and adverbs like *juntos* 'together', as exemplified in (17-21):

- (17) *Necesitamos un país muy fuerte y unido para asumir los retos que se nos presentan.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«We need a very strong and united country to take up the challenges that are presented to us.»]
- (18) *Los demócratas tenemos que mostrarnos unidos y solidarios en la defensa de un bien común, los derechos sociales, civiles y políticos.* (Mr Torra, 31/12/2018)

- [«We democrats must show ourselves united and in solidarity in the defence of a common good, namely social, civil and political rights.»]
- (19) *Pero estamos. Y resistimos. Y ahora tenemos que hacer la República catalana y debemos trabajar todos, compañeros.* (Mr Torra, 19/9/2018)
[«But we are here. And we resist. And now we have to make the Catalan Republic and we must all work, comrades.»]
- (20) *Nos tenéis que acompañar. Y yo os pido que estéis. El 1 de octubre fue posible porque el Govern, el pueblo, las instituciones, la ciudadanía, todos fuimos a una.* (Mr Torra, 1/10/2018)
[«And I ask you to be there. On October 1st, it was possible because the government, the people, the institutions, the citizens, we all tried to achieve our aims together.»]

We encountered instances of the combined implementation of two strategies. In (21) Catalonia's political future is constructed by two constructive strategies: the PATH metaphor (*camino*) and the appeal to the nation-we (*seguimos, queremos*):

- (21) *En la construcción del futuro lo más importante es el camino que seguimos con todos nuestros ciudadanos. Queremos un país para todos. Y sólo será para todos si todos lo pueden sentir suyo y contribuyen a construirlo.* (Mr Junqueras, 21/12/2017)
[«In building the future, the most important thing is the path we follow with all our fellow citizens. We want a country for everyone. And it will only be for everyone if everyone can feel it is theirs and contribute to building it.»]

Dissimilation strategies rarely come into play in independence discourse, since the emphasis is on the construction of a common political present and future. Example (22) emphasizes the difference between *us* and *them* (the central government) through contrastive parallelism:

- (22) *Vuestra represión, nuestra solidaridad.* (CDR banner) «Your repression, our solidarity.»
- (23) *A más represión, más democracia. A más prisión, más anhelo de libertad. A más amenazas, más unidad de los demócratas. A más sentencias, más autodeterminación.* (Mr Torra, 17/10/2019)
[«More repression, more democracy. The more prison, the more I long for freedom. The more threats, the more unity of the democrats. The more sentences, the more self-determination.»]

The topic of citizenry is of great relevance to the construction of Catalonia's political future. Mr Torra appeals to citizenry as the pillar of the prospective Catalan Republic:

- (24) *La República catalana sólo podrá tener éxito si gira en torno a las personas. Haremos república con valores republicanos. Los ciudadanos son la razón de la República.* (12/5/2018)
[«The Catalan Republic can only be successful if it revolves around people. We will make a republic with republican values. The citizens are the basis of the Republic.»]

5.2. Justification Strategies

Two justification strategies are illustrated in the corpus: generalization and euphemization.

Generalizing strategies are exemplified in (25) by the use of the expression *derecho universal* 'universal right' to refer to self-determination, thus justifying Catalonia's political claims:

- (25) *Hoy en Cataluña el derecho universal de cualquier pueblo a la autodeterminación está criminalizado.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«Today in Catalonia the universal right of any people to self-determination is criminalised.»]

Strategies of justification also serve to defend controversial actions or events. They are used in reference to the representation of negative actions or events. Two controversial political events in Catalonia were the October 2017 referendum and the unilateral declaration of independence. Both events are euphemistically referred to. In (26) the parliament's vote on the referendum is shown as an instance of democratic action, thus concealing the fact that it was held in contravention of Spain's constitution. Euphemizing is reinforced by vague personal reference (*la gente*):

- (26) *Nada será normal en Cataluña hasta que recuperemos la democracia. Nada será normal en Cataluña hasta que la gente que ejerció la democracia para que nosotros pudiéramos votar en el referéndum del 1 de octubre sea libre.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«Nothing will be normal in Catalonia until we recover democracy. Nothing will be normal in Catalonia until the people who exercised democracy so that we could vote in the referendum on October 1 are free.»]

In example (27) the Catalan's government responsibility is minimized by allusion to the referendum call as the act of placing ballot boxes in the poll stations:

- (27) *Si por poner las urnas para la autodeterminación, nos condenan a 100 años de prisión, la respuesta es clara: Habrá que volver a poner urnas para la autodeterminación.* (Mr Torra, 17/10/2019)
 [«If we are convicted to 100 years' imprisonment for putting the ballot boxes for self-determination, the answer is clear: we will have to put the ballot boxes for self-determination back in.»]

Legitimization of the independence bid is grounded on the legitimacy of the October 2017 referendum (28) and the Catalan people's right to self-determination (29-30):

- (28) *No hay ningún delito en proponer a los ciudadanos que decidan su futuro.* (Mr Puigdemont, 14/10/2019)
 [«There is no crime in proposing to citizens to decide their future.»]
 (29) [...] *ejerciendo el derecho de autodeterminación, un derecho que pertenece única y exclusivamente a los pueblos.* (Mr Torra, 11/9/2019)
 [«by exercising the right to self-determination, a right that belongs solely and exclusively to peoples.»]

Allusion to a political past is a strategy that supports Catalonia's independence bid. In a talk with Catalan people in the Generalitat Palace – the Catalan's government site – Mr Torra remarks that Catalonia was independent for many centuries:

- (30) *Esto ha sido una casa de gobierno siempre que los catalanes hemos podido gobernarnos desde el año 1400.* (Mr Torra, 19/9/2018)
 [«This has been a house of government whenever we Catalans have been able to govern ourselves since 1400.»]

Mr Torra then refers to later stages in Spain's history and comments on the removal of Catalan artists' paintings. He mentions the dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Franco and metonymically refers to the central government's direct rule through the reference to Article 155. By juxtaposing Primo de Rivera, Franco and Article 55 paratactically, he creates an analogy, thus levelling the dictators with the Spanish government.

- (31) *Cuando llega la dictadura de Primo de Rivera, como suele pasarnos a nosotros, el 155, Primo de Rivera, Franco, etc., pues decían que eran unas pinturas demasiado catalanistas.* (Mr Torra, 19/9/2018)
 [«When the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera arrived, as it usually happens to us, 155, Primo de Rivera, Franco, etc., they said that the paintings were too Catalanist.»]

5.3. Dismantling Strategies

As shown in Table 1, dismantling strategies are widely deployed in independence discourse. The most prevalent one is negative presentation of others. Independence leaders frequently discredit Spain's status as a democratic nation. Derogatory terms include verbs (*atentar* 'attack', *estar en entredicho* 'be in question', *robar* 'rob', *secuestrar* 'kidnap') and nouns (*golpe de estado* 'coup d'etat', *venganza* 'revenge', *barbaridades judiciales* 'judicial outrages'):

- (32) *No quiero, ni puedo vivir en un Estado que nos quiere robar la dignidad, que nos quiere robar los derechos.* (Mr Junqueras, 14/10/2019)
 [«I do not want to, and I cannot live in a state that wants to rob us of our dignity, that wants to rob us of our rights.»]
 (33) *El 155 fue un golpe de estado moderno perpetrado por jueces y fiscales.* (Mr Puigdemont, 4/2/2020)
 [«Direct rule was a modern-day coup d'etat perpetrated by judges and prosecutors.»]
 (34) *En un estado que condena disidentes pacíficos, la democracia está encarcelada.* (Mr Puigdemont, 14/10/2019)
 [«In a state that condemns peaceful dissidents, democracy is imprisoned.»]
 (35) *Hoy en Cataluña la democracia está en entredicho. Han sido detenidas personas inocentes, hay políticos honorables en el exilio.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
 [«Today in Catalonia democracy is in question. Innocent people have been arrested, there are honourable politicians in exile.»]
 (36) *Esto no es justicia, es venganza.* (Junqueras 14/10/2019)
 [«This is not justice, it is revenge.»]

In (34-35) negative presentation of *others* contrasts with positive presentation of the convicted politicians (*pacíficos* 'peaceful', *inocentes* 'innocent', *honorables* 'honourable').

Discrediting is sometimes reinforced through the use of evidence verbs (*constatar* 'check') which assert the truth of facts:

- (37) *Hemos podido constatar cómo cada día el Estado español atenta contra los derechos cívicos y civiles de nuestros ciudadanos y representantes.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
 [«We have seen how every day the Spanish state violates the civil and civic rights of our citizens and representatives.»]

All the examples in (33-37) articulate a political context in which human rights are violated and court rulings are issued out of revenge. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the Spanish government is degraded by associating it with oppression and threat:

- (38) *La sentencia confirma la estrategia de la opresión y la venganza contra todos aquellos ciudadanos que han buscado la vía de la democracia para expresar su voluntad.* (Mr Puigdemont, 14/10/2019).
[«The sentence confirms the strategy of oppression and revenge against all those citizens who have sought the path of democracy to express their will.»]
- (39) *Ninguna concesión a nuestros opresores.* (CDR banner) «No concessions to our oppressors.»
- (40) *Se han acostumbrado a amenazar al pueblo de Cataluña de forma impune con el 155 y otras vías de intervención de nuestro gobierno.* (Mr Puigdemont, 14/10/2019)
[«They have become accustomed to threatening the people of Catalonia with impunity in 155 and other ways of intervention by our government.»]
- (41) *El año que empieza tiene que servir para [...] rebelarse contra la injusticia y hacer caer los muros de la opresión* (Mr Torra, 31/12/2018)
[«The new year must serve to rebel against injustice and to bring down the walls of oppression.»]

The element of oppression naturally leads to framing the case against pro-independence politicians and activists as an instance of political persecution:

- (42) *La lista de restricciones y vulneraciones en un país normal provocaría el archivo de la causa. La causa es una persecución política, una causa contra la democracia.* (Mr Torra, 17/10/2019)
[«The list of restrictions and violations in a normal country would lead to the case being shelved. The case is one of political persecution, a case against democracy.»]

Mr Torra continues his argumentation by identifying freedom with life in order to delegitimize the government's direct rule over Catalonia. The metaphor has a strong argumentative value:

- (43) *Esto no es aceptable en la Europa en que vivimos. Lo que se debe reparar es la vida robada a todos los catalanes.* (Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«This is not acceptable in the Europe in which we live. What must be repaired is the life stolen from all Catalans.»]

The link between freedom and life exemplified in (43) leads to the assimilation of the Catalan crisis to a humanitarian crisis. The Catalans are portrayed as victims of major human rights abuses and is used to appeal to action, metaphorically understood as saving one's life:

- (44) *La crisis política catalana es una crisis humanitaria también. Por eso hay que hacer todo lo posible para pasar del exilio y la prisión a la vida, pasar de la represión y el autoritarismo a que todos juntos rescatemos la vida.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«The Catalan political crisis is also a humanitarian crisis. This is why we must do everything possible to move from exile and prison to life, to move from repression and authoritarianism to the rescue of life by all of us together.»]

Another dismantling strategy consists in describing Catalonia's political situation under the central government's direct rule as abnormal (*anormal, excepcional, inimaginable*).

In example (45) deviation is reinforced through comparison with other European countries:

- (45) *Hoy en Cataluña [...] los derechos cívicos de expresión, de manifestación y de pensamiento están siendo pisoteados y amenazados. Estos hechos sitúan a Cataluña en una situación excepcional, inimaginable en cualquier país europeo de nuestro entorno.* (Mr Torra, 12/5/2018)
[«Today in Catalonia [...] the civic rights of expression, demonstration and thought are being trampled on and threatened. These facts place Catalonia in an exceptional situation, unimaginable in any European country.»]
- (46) *Quiero vivir en un estado democrático en que votar no sea delito. Ellos han convertido esto en un mundo al revés.* (Mr Junqueras, 14/10/2019)
[«I want to live in a democratic state where taking a vote is not a crime. They have turned this into a world turned upside down.»]

As shown in example (45-46), when the strategy of negative *other*-presentation is implemented, the political opponent is vaguely evoked (the state, 'they') or deleted through passivization and adverbialization of the region (*en Cataluña*). In contrast, when constructive strategies are employed, the *we*-group is profusely used as a unification device.

The WAR metaphor proves to be a very useful device in discrediting the Spanish government. The national government is depicted as the enemy which is sieging democratic Catalonia (47) or as the invading troops (48):

- (47) *La democracia, hoy en nuestro país sometido a un asedio largo y penoso, es y será siempre la respuesta de los catalanes.* (Mr Torra, 11/9/2019)
[«Democracy, today in our country under a long and painful siege, is and will always be the response of the Catalans.»]
- (48) *Fuera las fuerzas de ocupación.* (CDR banner) «Out with the occupying forces»

In this war scenario where the repressive state is a threat, independence leaders call for action in terms of mobilization:

- (49) *Hay que reaccionar. No nos podemos resignar a aceptar un estado opresivo que amenace el futuro de nuestros hijos e hijas. Tenemos que mobilizarnos y tenemos que hacer sentir nuestro voto.* (Mr Puigdemont, 14/10/2019)
[«We must react. We cannot resign ourselves to accepting an oppressive state that threatens the future of our sons and daughters. We have to mobilize ourselves and we have to make our vote felt.»]

CDR activists take up a more radical position. After the Supreme Court ruling, they called for civil disobedience and regarded the push for independence as a battle:

- (50) *Quien no comparte la batalla, compartirá la derrota.*
[«He who does not share the battle will share the defeat.»]

Successful protest actions following the constitutional court ruling such as the blocking of railway and metro stations are represented as victories:

- (51) *Haremos de cada movilización una victoria.*
[«We will make every mobilization a victory.»]

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The corpus analysis paper unveils the role of argumentation strategies in building up Catalonia's present as a nation in the process towards achieving independence and Catalonia's future as an independent Republic. Following a discourse-historical approach, we have shown that Catalonia's present and imagined future are discursively constructed and sustained by constructive and dismantling strategies.

Two types of constructive strategies prevail: (1) continuation strategies which posit Catalan independence as a process in progress (verbs meaning 'to continue', references to the political future, *PATH* metaphor); and (2) unification strategies that appeal to Catalan's solidarity (national *we*, deontic-modal verbs, specific lexis) and present the independence movement as a legitimate and peaceful process.

Dismantling strategies are also relevant. Negative presentation of the others (the central government) is achieved through strongly negative lexis and the *WAR* metaphor, which qualifies the Spanish state as repressive, direct rule of Catalonia under Article 155 as a coup which has deprived Catalans of their rights, and the Supreme Court sentence as a «revenge.» The use of these strategies is supplemented by the occasional use of dissimulation strategies that emphasize positive self-presentation and negative *other*-presentation, and justification strategies – euphemization – to defend the 2017 referendum.

The corpus analysis yields two further findings:

- (1) The linguistic construction of Catalan present and political future is determined by the socio-political context. In this sense, two events influence pro-independence discourse: the imposition of direct rule in 2017 and the 2019 Supreme Court ruling. These events were a severe blow to Catalonia's push for independence and explain the frequent use of continuation and dismantling strategies.
- (2) The relevance of particular strategies in pro-independence discourse depends on the time when it was produced. Thus, after the Supreme Court ruling, pro-independence leaders first put the emphasis on the strongly negative role of the Spanish state, and the representation of Catalans as passive victims of oppression through the analogy between the Catalan political crisis and a humanitarian crisis. This dismantling strategy interplays with positive presentation of the independence process, the convicted leaders and the Catalan people. However, when the ruling prompted social unrest and weeks of protests and street violence, there was a discourse shift marked by the prevalence of unification strategies, on the one hand, and a very powerful dismantling strategy, namely the *WAR* metaphor, on the other, both devices aiming to call for collective fight for independence.

To conclude, while much of the research into the Catalan political situation has focused on the ideological foundations of the independence movement and its linguistic construction in the media, or the linguistic construction of Catalan identity in social media before 2017, the present article provides an insight into a key component of Catalonia's political identity, namely its present and imagined future, through a critical study of fragments of public discourse produced by Catalan political leaders and activists between 2017 and 2019.

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