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Transitivity and evaluation in American and Spanish parliamentary discourse: the 2015 State of the Union Address in the US vs. the 2015 State of the Nation Address in Spain

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the interplay of evaluation and transitivity in an American and Spanish parliamentary debate by President Obama and PM Rajoy aiming at legitimizing their actions and at convincing candidates to vote for them in the upcoming elections. A further objective is to investigate whether the transitivity and appraisal analyses illustrate the politicians' ideological positions. Within the general framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), we use the results obtained for Appraisal following Martin and White's appraisal scheme [Cabrejas-Peñuelas, A. B. (2020). Metaphor, metonymy and evaluation as political devices in American and Spanish parliamentary political discourse. Ibérica, 40, 75–99] and add a study of the interplay with transitivity [Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). Halliday's introduction to functional grammar. Routledge]. The results reveal that both politicians used transitivity differently: Obama used mental desiderative processes for expressing desires and showed the active role of 'us' to bring about positive changes. In contrast, Rajoy preferred relational, verbal and existential processes. These contribute to his particular picture of reality, which is ideological in nature. Also, the results show that evaluation and transitivity were used as an ideological tool for persuasion and legitimization of the politicians' economic decisions.

1. Introduction

Previous studies (Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2013, 2014; Díez-Prados, 2016; Oktar, 2001) analyzing the lexicogrammar of political texts uncover a wide range of linguistic strategies used by politicians to legitimize their actions (e.g. political implicatures, rhetorical figures, lexical choice, among others). Transitivity and evaluation are two of such devices which, unlike lexically-based strategies such as rhetorical figures and lexical choice, can bring to light 'consistent patterns of grammatical relations that reflect the world-view of the producer(s) of the discourse' (Scott, 2003, p. 13). When used in combination, transitivity and evaluation have shown to bring about 'semantic amplification',

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while also 'the two systems, one lexicogrammatical and the other semantic, are jointly implicated in the construction of particular points of view' (Scott, 2008, pp. 87–88).

Parliamentary discourse is considered a 'specific genre of political discourse' (van Dijk, 2005, p. 67) aiming at seducing citizens, not the 'present addressee – a task impossible in practice'. At the same time, it 'harms the quality of his/her image before the final addressee, that is, the range of citizens' (our translation) (Izquierdo Labella, 2014, p. 19). However, 'the indisputable protagonist of the debate' (our translation) (2014, p. 41) is the President or Prime Minister, who can use all means available to him/her to persuade citizens for his/her own benefit (and that of the party s/he represents). It is precisely in 'politicians' language […] where most commonly we find such strategy' (our translation) (Sánchez García, 2009, p. 154). One way to do so is through transitivity and evaluation.

The language of politics is especially suited for the use of evaluation and transitivity, as politicians need to portray the opposing candidate and his/her party negatively, while they also show themselves in a positive light. Through evaluation, politicians establish an opposition between those who must be admired (that is, Us) and those who must be sanctioned and condemned (that is, Them). Also, they evaluate things (e.g. the healthcare system, budgetary limits, the housing bubble) 'to appeal not so much to reason but to the recipient's expectations and emotions' (Sornig, 1989, p. 109). In a similar vein, through different transitivity patterns, politicians of opposing political groups show the *Us* vs. *Them* ideological polarization in an attempt to persuade the electorate and ensure support for their political agendas. Also, through specific lexicogrammatical choices politicians overtly set out to legitimize their actions which, on occasions, involve harsh budget cuts that have dramatic consequences on citizens.

One type of political discourse where political language is implemented is in parliamentary debates. These are 'local manifestations of the global political acts of legislation, governing, and control of government' (van Dijk, 2005, p. 67). More specifically, MPs' and statemen's speeches are aimed to 'present and legitimize government decisions and policies, support the government, and engage in opposition' (2005, p. 67) and, thus, politicians need to use the positive presentation of *Us* and *Our* actions and negative Other-presentation (2005, p. 76). While evaluation has been the focus of attention in English and Spanish political speeches (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020) and in face-to-face political debates (Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2014; Díez-Prados, 2016), to our knowledge none has attempted to analyze the use of evaluation and transitivity in Spanish and American political speeches in order to check their role for positive self-presentation and other-deprecation (Oktar, 2001), for persuasion (Wang, 2010) and for ideological positioning (Lee, 2016). With the aim of providing a contrastive perspective, the present study draws on the results obtained for evaluation in the 2015 State of the Union Address in the US (henceforth, SOTU) and in the 2015 State of the Nation Address in Spain (henceforth, SONA) (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020) and adds a study of the interplay between evaluation and transitivity. In such political speeches, the politicians attempted to convince their audience of economic victory after a serious economic crisis striking both countries and the world. Furthermore, they attempted to portray a positive image of themselves, while they depicted the opposing parties in a bad light. Hence, in an attempt to unveil the politicians' lexicogrammatical choices aimed at legitimizing their actions, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Which type(s) of transitivity patterns as found in the Hallidayan Transitivity system (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014) are used in the American and Spanish political speeches?
2. How do the transitivity and appraisal analyses combine to illustrate their ideological stances?

To give an answer to the first research question, the Economy sections of the 2015 SOTU and 2015 SONA have been analyzed to account for the transitivity patterns employed in both political speeches, following the Hallidayan Transitivity system (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). In respect of the second research question, the transitivity patterns found have been examined to check whether they contain any evaluative devices so as to see the ideology defended by each candidate. For Bartley (2017, p. 5), a transitivity analysis is useful to 'gain some profound and valuable insights into how particular issues […] [are] represented discursively by those with a degree of authority as well as by those who are, in some shape or form, involved in the events'. This ultimately helps to 'uncover ideologies that reverberate throughout a piece of discourse' (2017, p. 3). Appraisal theory has also proved insightful in revealing the ideological stance of those in power (Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2014). When used in combination, Transitivity and Appraisal construe a certain version of reality through grammatical and evaluative choices to represent particular ideologies. For Dong (2009, p. 113), the link is characterized by 'the Appraisal system negotiating attitudes about reality, which are expressed through the system of Transitivity'. We believe that complimenting an analysis of transitivity with an analysis of appraisal may help to uncover the ideological loading of certain linguistic forms and their underlying relations of power (Oktar, 2001, p. 313).

Section 2 compares the State of the Union Address in the US and the State of the Nation Debate in Spain and gives a short account of the political background of Obama's and Rajoy's political speeches. Section 3 describes the interplay of Transitivity and Appraisal as complementary frameworks to uncover inherent ideologies in political texts. Section 4 deals with the methodology of the study. Section 5 attempts to shed some light on how Prime Minister Rajoy and President Obama express their ideological positioning in their discourse and, finally, section 6 provides the conclusions to the study.

2. Context

2.1. Parliamentary discourse: the State of the Union Address vs. the State of the Nation Address. Socio-political background of the speeches

The SOTU in the US (formerly known as the 'Annual Message') comprises an annual speech delivered directly to Members of Congress and subsequently broadcast to American citizens. Used as a platform from which to rally the support for their personal agendas, acting Presidents explain the state of the union and make policy recommendations for the following year. Despite the variation among the SOTU's, Campbell and Jamieson (2008, p. 139) identified a three-part rhetorical sequence: public meditations on values, assessments of information and issues, and policy recommendations. There are also recurring thematic elements, such as past accomplishments and future goals, bipartisanship to build consensus and unfailing optimism (Shogan, 2015, pp. 6–8). In

addition to these, the 2015 1-hour-long SOTU dealt with a variety of topics, including economy, natural resources, social policy, medicine, the Internet, space exploration, terrorism, cybersecurity, foreign policy, and climate change. Economic issues were of special interest for Obama, who touted the nation's economic success, although it had not reached a significant percentage of Americans. He also offered some economic proposals for the middle-class, which he termed 'middle-class economics'.

The Spanish SONA, defined as 'a short compilation or general recapitulation' (our translation) (Izquierdo Labella, 2014, p. 33), is a free interpretation of the US SOTU, since it was designed to be a debate rather than a speech. It consists of the PM's intervention, the rebuttal of the opposing and other political parties and the PM's response. The 2015 SONA lasted for 1 h and 30 min and comprised the following main sections: economy, corruption, the Catalan independence movement, foreign policy and social policy. Determined to use the nation's economic recovery as his trump card, Rajoy spent a considerable amount of time on presenting the best economic data of his three years in power. He also promised financial relief for the middle-classes, more jobs and social spending, after the country had endured cutbacks in public services like education and healthcare. Also, he congratulated himself on taking Spain out of the crisis without the need for a bailout. In the meantime, the opposition parties accused him of ignoring a social crisis in the country and growing precariousness of jobs. The final aim was however to shed a negative light on the Conservative party leader, who had presented himself as a safe choice for re-election.

Parliamentary debates have a number of formal properties of their own: intervention turns and replies for the speakers according to whether they are a member of the Government or the opposing party; speaker or turn-taking control by the Speaker or President of Congress; ritualized forms of address (e.g. 'Su Señoría' in Spanish and 'Honorable Member' in English); and formal lexical and syntactic structures (van Dijk, 2005, p. 67) coupled with colloquial forms to appeal to the public and, thus, parliamentary debates are considered 'oral text[s] that ha [ve] the characteristics of a written text' (our translation) (Sánchez García, 2009, p. 130).

2.2. Transitivity and evaluation in political speeches

An ample body of literature (Bartley, 2017; Mitsikopoulou & Lykou, 2015; Oktar, 2001; Wang, 2010) taking a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective have examined the transitivity patterns and evaluation employed in different text types (e.g. political speeches, newspaper articles, television interviews, educational textbooks, courtroom talk, to name but a few) to unveil the ideology inherent in a given piece of discourse. The results indicate that both transitivity and evaluation help to unveil the lexicogrammatical choices reflecting the world-view of those in power and, thus, they offer invaluable insights into the ideologies that resonate in a piece of discourse. Among the linguistic strategies found, these include, systematically restricting *Their* actions through a choice of Processes and ascribing negative qualities to *Them* and positive qualities to *Us* (Scott, 2003, p. 97). This way, *Us* and *Our* actions are legitimized and *Them* and *Their* actions are demonized (Bartley, 2017; Scott, 2003, 2008). In SFL, Transitivity is central to the *experiential* metafunction, a subcomponent of the *ideational* metafunction of language. The *experiential* metafunction is concerned with the way in which humans linguistically encode and represent their experiences (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 30). It uses the grammatical system of Transitivity. However, Appraisal theory, which is

concerned with the expression of evaluation, corresponds to the *interpersonal* function (i.e. it deals with the grammatical choices for enacting social roles and speech roles that are available to the speaker on the basis of who s/he is addressing).

The studies applying the SFL Transitivity system in political newspaper discourse (Lee, 2016; Oktar, 2001), political magazines (Mitsikopoulou & Lykou, 2015) and political speeches (Abrafi-Adjei & Ewusi-Mensah, 2016; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014; Scott, 2003, 2008; Wang, 2010) conclude that politicians construe experiences through a selection of Transitivity patterns. These serve political groups to perpetuate themselves in power or to construe their own versions of reality. For example, through relational attributive clauses (i.e. clauses in which one entity has an attribute (e.g. they *are* intelligent)), political groups ascribe negative traits to the opposing group, while they leave implicit their own positive self-presentation (Oktar, 2001, p. 331). Also, through material clauses and 'them' as actor, a country may be constructed 'as a *target* of the actions of the enemy' (Scott, 2003, p. 46; emphasis in original). See (1) below, in which PM Howard declares Australia's involvement in the war against Saddam Hussein:

(1) If Iraq is allowed to keep [material clause] [judgement: propriety: negative] these weapons not only might she use [material clause] [judgement: propriety: negative] them again but moreover other rogue [judgement: propriety: negative] regimes will copy [material clause] [judgement: propriety: negative] Iraq knowing that the world will do [judgement: propriety: negative] nothing [to stop them] (Scott, 2003, p. 126).

In (1), through the use of material clauses (and other types) that have 'them' as actor as well as negative appraisal of the enemy, Howard 'demoniz[es] the enemy and generaliz [es] enemy status to all Iraqis' (2003, p. 46). In this way, he constructs his own version of Australia's involvement in the war with the aim of 'justify[ing] his government's decision to go to war against Iraq' (2003, p. 56).

Nominalization – the process whereby verbs and adjectives, for example, are transformed into nouns – can be used to obscure relevant transitivity patterns. It thus carries ideological weight (see Fairclough, 1992; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014) since, how agency is handled in discourse, reflects hidden power and manipulation (Fairclough, 1992, p. 124) (see (2)):

(2) to meet the **challenges** we can only solve together: **reducing** our deficit; **reforming** our tax code; **fixing** our immigration system; **freeing** ourselves from foreign oil (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014, p. 1179).

In (2), the nominalizations 'challenges', 'reducing', 'reforming', 'fixing', and 'freeing' can be transformed into their verbal equivalents (i.e. challenge, reduce, reform, fix and free) to uncover the relevant transitivity patterns in the clauses. In the clause above, nominalization serves the purpose of diverting the audience's attention from human agents: 'we don't know *who* or *what*; as a result there is no manifestation of the timing of the process or an agent' (2014, p. 1181, emphasis in original). The final aim is to persuade the audience of the importance of the challenge, (the reduction and so on), whilst at the same time eliminating the responsibility of those involved.

The expression of evaluation has also been examined in political texts to discover politicians' ideological stances (Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2014; Scott, 2003, 2008) or the evaluative potential of metaphors and metonymies in political discourse (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020; Díez-Prados, 2016). The results indicate that politicians use the general strategy of positive self-evaluation and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 2005) to construct their own version of reality that would help them reach power, remain there once again or justify controversial decisions involving death and suffering. And yet, when metaphors and metonymies are loaded with a positive and negative evaluation, they are markedly ideological, as they are an attempt to impose the politicians' own vision of reality on the audience, even when their words are inaccurate and far from citizens' reality (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020; Díez-Prados, 2016).

When the systems of Transitivity and Appraisal are used simultaneously as complementary frameworks to uncover particular ideologies (see Abrafi-Adjei & Ewusi-Mensah, 2016; Bartley, 2017; Caffarel & Rechniewski, 2009; Scott, 2003, 2008), the results indicate that 'the ideology of a text is construed not by one linguistic feature alone but by what we might term its density – in other words, it is the layering and interaction of the linguistic resources mobilized that combine to create higher order meaning' (Caffarel & Rechniewski, 2009, p. 33). Indeed, in US President George Bush's and Australian PM John Howard's declarations of war speeches, Transitivity and negative appraisal work cooperatively in a bid to marginalize the enemy (see (3) below):

(3) The attacks on the 11th of September and in Bali showed [relational attributive clause] that international terrorists have no regard for human life [judgment: propriety: negative] no matter what the nationality of their victims may be (Scott, 2003, p. 52).

In (3), Howard uses a relational attributive clause as a tool for negative appraisal of the enemy, which serves him to legitimize Australia's involvement in the war by demonizing the enemy. In former President of Ghana Kufour's farewell speech in Parliament material clauses and positive appraisal of Kufour's actions and those of his Government are used simultaneously to provide a positive self-image (see (4)):

(4) Government has worked [material clause] extensively [judgement: positive] on this integrated project and much progress [appreciation: positive] has been made [material clause] (Abrafi-Adjei & Ewusi-Mensah, 2016, p. 42).

In (4), the actor 'Government' is ideologically motivated, since it is identified as the main doer of a material action (together with other actors in the speech). Other clauses are agentless for positive actions Kufour's Government had initiated, but from which he still wanted to distance himself. In this way, he avoids referring to the bodies that would be accountable for their continuance (2016, pp. 42–43). It seems, therefore, that the Transitivity and Appraisal systems 'work together towards common semantic goals' (Scott, 2008, p. 103).

3. Methodology

The 2015 SOTU in the US and the 2015 SONA in Spain were first examined to find out the evaluative devices employed in the Economy section, which is the only coinciding topic across

speeches (see Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020). The objective then was to find out which evaluative devices were used by politicians of different ideological positions and whether there were any differences depending on their ideological makeup. With that aim in mind, we identified the evaluative devices used by President Obama and PM Rajoy in their speeches intended to convince their audience of economic victory. Then, we manually assigned labels corresponding to the appraisal schemes, following Martin & White's (2005) Appraisal theory (see Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020 for a complete account of the analysis and Figure 1 for the Attitude network):

Martin & White's (2005) Appraisal theory was selected, because it is the most well-known framework for the analysis of evaluation (see Bartley, 2017; Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2014; Scott, 2003, 2008 to name but a few). The objective remaining is now to check whether Halliday's Transitivity system (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014) also proves insightful in showing how politicians of different ideologies represent events discursively and whether the Transitivity and Appraisal analyses combine to illustrate the politicians' ideological positions.

For the study of evaluation, the 2015 SOTU was taken from the American Presidency Project webpage[1] (6,718 words) and the 2015 SONA was obtained from La Moncloa webpage[2] (10,719 words), the site of the Presidency of the Spanish Government. The transcriptions were first divided into sections corresponding to the different topics. Those dealing with economic issues were selected (i.e. special attention was paid to economy terms, such as 'economic/financial crisis', '(un)employment', 'recession', 'recovery', 'deficits', 'economic growth', among others). The Economy sections in both speeches were copied and pasted in text format to be uploaded to a freeware program called the UAM corpus tool, developed by Mick O'Donnell.[3] This software is, in fact, a set of tools to annotate the text(s), do searches in the corpus and run descriptive and inferential statistics. The
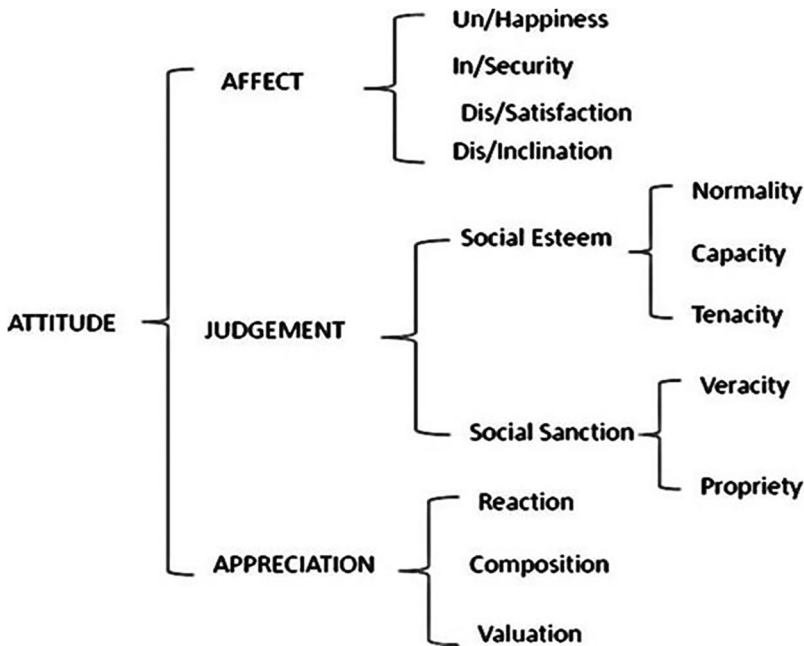
Figure 1. The Attitude network.

Economy section had been analyzed in terms of the evaluative devices used (3,214 words in Obama's SOTU and 6,310 words in Rajoy's SONA; these correspond to 47.84% and 58.87%, respectively, of the overall speeches. The percentages corresponding to the Economy sections prove to be important, since it is only one of a variety of different topics that both speeches are composed of; these account for the roughly 50% remaining).

For the analysis, following Scott (2008, p. 33) we manually divided each text into ranked clauses and rank-shifted clauses, although only attention was paid to clause rank.[4] Letters were used for the clause complex and numbers for the individual clauses in the texts. Once both texts had been divided into clauses, they were uploaded to the UAM corpus tool for analysis using a modified version of the in-built Transitivity network that did not include circumstance. We used Halliday's Transitivity network (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014), which distinguishes process, participant and circumstance (see Figure 2 with examples taken from Obama's and Rajoy's speeches):

Due to space restrictions, the system of circumstance did not fall within the scope of this study. Nominalizations, which may be used to obscure the participant that is responsible for the process (Fairclough, 1992), were also left out of the study. Then, we carried out a manual annotation (see (5) for an excerpt of the analysis), due to the complexity in distinguishing the process of verbs in ambiguous cases (see Bartley, 2017 for some difficulties):

(5) Z 36 So tonight, I [mental cognition: senser] want [mental cognition: process]
    37 to focus [mental cognition: process] less on a checklist of proposals [mental cognition: phenomenon]
    38 and focus [mental cognition: process] more on the values at stake in the choices before us [mental cognition: phenomenon].
    39 It [material: actor] begins [material: process] with our economy.

<div align="right">(Obama, 2015 SOTU)</div>

In order to guarantee consistency in the analysis, the whole debate was analyzed by one researcher and to ensure inter-rater reliability, another researcher analyzed 30% of the debate. The two researchers coincided in 83.41% of the cases of the Transitivity analysis. In those cases where there were discrepancies, these were discussed until a consensus was reached. The division of the 2015 SOTU and 2015 SONA entailed some difficulties, such as how to deal with a succession of clauses of verbiage in verbal clauses or those cases that did not appear to fit neatly into the Transitivity network. Thus, some methodological decisions were made. The first methodological decision referred to clause divisions of verbal clauses. In (6), we decided the clauses of verbiage should be embedded (see 97.1 and 97.2 below), 'as it could all be interpreted as the 'something'' that the speaker says and 'should remain attached at the same level as the Receiver' (Scott, 2008, p. 36), which is 'we', referring to President Obama, his party and, possibly, part of the audience:

(6) BL 97. At every step we were told [97.1 our goals were misguided or too ambitious;] [97.2 that we would crash jobs and explode deficits] (Obama).

The second methodological decision was related to analyzing phrasal verbs or set phrases and selecting the most appropriate process type, taking into account their meaning (e.g. 'take out student loans' (material process; 'to obtain from the proper

TRANSITIVITY TYPES				
Material Clauses of "doing & happening" (H & M, 2014, p. 224). They express concrete actions. Ex: "*But tonight, we turn* [material] *the page*" (Obama).		Participant: Actor Other participants Process	goal scope beneficiary	
Mental Clauses of internal processes	*Mental cognition process*: The clause brings ideas into existence, but the idea may or may not be true. The ideas (i.e. the content of one's thoughts or beliefs) are projected in clauses. Verbs: think, believe. Ex: "*But tonight, I want* [mental cognition] *to focus* [mental cognition] *less [on a checklist of proposals]*" (Obama).			
	Mental desiderative process: The clause brings ideas into existence. The ideas denote action that is yet to be carried out (H & M, 2014, p. 140). Verbs: want, hope for. Ex: "*We wanted* [mental desiderative] *to take the country out of the trap it was in*" (Rajoy).			
	Mental emotive process: The clause can only project pre-existing facts. The clauses can be graded: "Do you love me?" Verbs: like, fear. Ex: "*Every organism matters* [mental emotive]" (Obama).			
	Mental perceptive process: The clause can only project pre-existing facts. The clauses cannot be graded: "Can you see me?" Verbs: see, hear. Ex: "*No country in difficulties has seen* [mental perceptive] *something similar*" (Rajoy).			
	Participant: Senser Process Participant: Phenomenon			
Relational Clauses of being. They serve to "characterize and to identify" (H & M, 2014, p. 259).		*Relational attributive process*: There is a relationship between two entities. One of them is assigned an attribute. Ex: "*We are* [relational attributive] *a strong, tight-knit family*" (Obama).	Participants: Carrier Attribute Process	Relational intensive
				Relational possessive
				Relational circumstantial
		Relational identifying process: One of the entities is given an identity. Unlike in relational attributive classes, a unique identity is inferred. Ex: "*It was* [relational identifying] *our duty*" (Rajoy).	Participants: Token Value Process	Relational intensive
				Relational possessive
				Relational circumstantial
Verbal Clauses of "saying" (H & M, 2014, p. 302). Ex: "*I ask* [verbal] *you to join me [in the task at hand]*" (Obama).			Participant: Sayer Participant: Target/recipient Participant: Verbiage Process	
Behavioral Clauses of "physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, coughing, smiling and staring" (H & M, 2014, p. 301)			Participant: Behaver Process	
Existential Clauses of existence. They take the form "there is/was". Ex: "*There are* [existential] *still many things to improve in Spain*" (Rajoy)			Participant: Existent Process	

Figure 2. Transitivity network (Bartley, 2017; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

authority')). The third methodological decision referred to calculations of each clause type (i.e. material, mental, verbal, behavioral, existential, and relational) relative to the total number of words in the text to calculate relative frequencies (i.e. transitivity processes/total number of words). This is the ratio used to draw comparisons

between participants, since the speeches have different lengths (see Table 1). It was felt that calculating proportions of transitivity processes per number of clauses would not make much sense, since the clauses had different lengths. The final methodological decision was related to the use of the chi-square test to check whether the differences between the political candidates were significant or were due to chance.[5]

4. Results and discussion

This section has been divided into two parts: we first present the quantitative results for the study of Transitivity in Obama's SOTU and Rajoy's SONA; then, we analyze the interplay of Transitivity and Appraisal.

4.1. Results from the study of Transitivity

In this subsection, we present and discuss the main findings regarding both politicians' frequency of Transitivity processes so as to answer our first research question (i.e. *Which type(s) of transitivity patterns as found in the Hallidayan Transitivity system (*Halliday,

Table 1. Transitivity processes in the economy section of Obama's SONA and Rajoy's SOTU.

Feature Transitivity-type	American N N=796	American Percent	Spanish N N=1200	Spanish Percent	Statistics Chi square	Statistics Signif.	Relative freq. [Transitivity processes/total number of words] × 100 American	Relative freq. Spanish
Material	365	45.85%	512	42.67%	1.974	Not sign.	5.43	4.78
Mental	144	18.09%	111	9.25%	33.563	+++	**2.14**	1.04
Relational	249	31.28%	447	37.25%	7.507	+++	3.71	**4.17**
Verbal	36	4.52%	108	9.00%	14.332	+++	0.54	**1.01**
Behavioral	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.000	Not sign.	0.00	0.00
Existential	2	0.25%	22	1.83%	10.083	+++	0.03	**0.21**
				Material-type				
Actor	109	13.69%	89	7.42%	21.100	+++	**1.62**	0.83
Other participants	108	13.57%	163	13.58%	0.000	Not sign.	1.61	1.52
Process	148	18.59%	260	21.54%	2.780	+	2.20	2.43
				Mental-Type				
Mental cognition	27	3.39%	25	2.08%	3.230	+	0.40	0.23
Mental desiderative	28	3.52%	16	1.33%	10.591	+++	**0.42**	0.15
Mental emotive	5	0.63%	3	0.25%	1.714	Not sign.	0.07	0.03
Mental perceptive	1	0.13%	14	1.17%	6.954	+++	0.01	**0.13**
Senser	46	5.78%	15	1.25%	33.133	+++	**0.68**	0.14
Phenomenon	37	4.65%	38	3.17%	2.905	+	0.55	0.35
				Relational-type				
Relational attributive	143	17.96%	268	22.33%	5.585	+++	2.13	**2.50**
Relational identifying	106	13.32%	179	14.92%	1.001	Not sign.	1.58	1.67
				Relational attributive				
Attribute	60	7.54%	108	9.00%	1.328	Not sign.	0.89	1.01
Process	37	4.52%	97	8.08%	9.017	+++	0.55	**0.90**
				Verbal-type				
Verbiage	14	1.76%	46	3.83%	7.064	+++	0.21	**0.43**
Process	11	1.38%	44	3.67%	9.323	+++	0.16	**0.41**
				Existential-Type				
Existent	1	0.13%	11	0.92%	5.011	++	0.01	**0.10**
Process	1	0.13%	10	0.82%	4.373	++	0.01	**0.09**

+ Weak significance (90%) ++ Medium significance (95%) +++ High significance (100%)

1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014) *are used in the American and Spanish political speeches?*). The results are those obtained after analyzing the 2015 Obama's SOTU and 2015 Rajoy's SONA, following Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) framework. We only mention the results that proved statistically significant (see Table 1).[6]

When contrasting the six Transitivity types, material (i.e. clauses representing actions and events) is the most frequently used by both politicians, which accounts for almost 50% of all clauses; followed in order of occurrence by relational (i.e. clauses used to establish a relationship between two entities (Halliday, 1994, p. 119)); mental (i.e. clauses of sensing (Halliday, 1994, p. 106)); verbal (i.e. clauses of communicating meaning); existential (i.e. clauses of existence); and behavioral clauses (i.e. clauses that express 'the acting out of processes of consciousness and physiological states' (Halliday, 1994, p. 107)) (see Table 1). While both politicians show similar rates of material clauses, Obama prefers mental clauses, while Rajoy favors relational, verbal and existential clauses. Behavioral clauses are non-existent in both speeches. As in previous research (Bartley, 2017; Scott, 2003, p. 2008), material clauses prevail over the rest, as they are concerned with actions and events undertaken by politicians and citizens (e.g. *protect, work, write*).

Closer examination of the results reveals that the Democrat and Conservative politicians rely on different uses of Transitivity to legitimate their actions in times of crisis by making particular choices in the language they use. Obama uses more mental clauses (2.14% for Obama *versus* 1.04% for Rajoy) ($\chi^2 = 33.563$, $p < .00$), especially expressing desires (0.42% *versus* 0.15%) ($\chi^2 = 10.591$, $p < .00$), to show that, despite having America bounced back, there is still room for improvement (see (7) and Table 1):

(7) I want [mental desiderative] to spread that idea across America so that two years of college becomes as free and universal in America as high school is today (Obama).

In (7), President Obama calls on Republicans to allow two free years of college, even when consensus with the Republican-led party is unlikely due to their control of Congress. But it was also an opportunity for the Democrat to brand himself and the Democratic party ahead of the 2016 elections. Indeed, 'he wants [his legacy] seen that HIS policies have led America to a far better place than it was when he came to power at the height of the financial crisis' (Sopel, 2015 (online); capitals in original).

The Transitivity results further reveal that Obama emphasizes the active role of *Us* (i.e. the President, the Democratic party and, at least, part of the audience), who bring about changes in material clauses (1.62% *versus* 0.83% for Rajoy) ($\chi^2 = 21.100$, $p < .00$) and who think, feel, perceive or desire (0.68% *versus* 0.14% for Rajoy) ($\chi^2 = 33.133$, $p < .00$). Indeed, 'we/I' were labeled as actor in 36.7% of the cases and as senser in 76% of the cases (see (8) and (9)):

(8) But tonight, we [material: actor] turn the page (Obama).
(9) We [mental: senser] believed we could prepare our kids for a more competitive world (Obama).

In (8), Obama proclaims economic victory, which has *Us* as the actor, while in (9) he is certain of a better future for American kids; the sentence has *Us* as the senser. In both, the Democrat feels *Us* is key in his slew of economic proposals benefitting the middle-class.

Analysis of Rajoy's transitivity patterns in his 2015 SONA reveals that he uses more relational clauses than his Democrat counterpart (3.71% for Obama *versus* 4.17% for Rajoy) ($x^2 = 7.507$, $p < .00$), especially to describe the attributes of particular entities (2.13% for the former *versus* 2.50% for the latter) ($x^2 = 5.585$, $p < .00$). The process rather than the attribute proves statistically significant for Rajoy (0.90%) ($x^2 = 9.017$, $p < .00$). Indeed, Rajoy resorts to relational attributive clauses that construe the experience of being and becoming (Halliday, 1994, p. 212), since he 'faced the debate as his own presentation of his political maneuver' (our translation) (Garea, 2015 (online) (see (10))). When doing so, he uses attributive processes, such as *is*, *were*, *seem*, *would have been*:

(10) It hasn't been necessary [relational attributive: process] to explain to them […] that, however thankless it might seem [relational attributive: process], it was necessary [relational attributive: process] to temporarily reduce spending, except for the bare necessities (Rajoy).

In (10), through relational attributive clauses Rajoy justifies his economic decisions that involved severe cuts in state services. The Conservative politician further uses more verbal (0.54% *versus* 1.01%) ($x^2 = 14.332$, $p < .00$) and existential clauses than Obama (0.03% *versus* 0.21%) ($x^2 = 10.083$, $p < .00$) when explaining data in detail and refers to the existence or non-existence of verifiable data (see (11)):

(11) With the figures from January 2015, we can now say [verbal clause] that there are 74,000 fewer recorded unemployed than in January 2012 [verbal clause: verbiage] (Rajoy).

In (11), by giving numbers and dates, Rajoy appeals to reason with a view to sounding sincere before the audience. However, there is evidence that he distorted the data, since his comparison of the figures of the unemployed did not include December 2011, when they were lower (Martin, 2015, (online)). In his speech, he also focuses on mental perceptive clauses (0.01% for Obama *versus* 0.13% for Rajoy) ($x^2 = 6.954$, $p < .00$) mostly to stress Spaniards' perception of near bankruptcy in Spain and the current situation, in which 'Spain […] has emerged from the nightmare' (see (12)):

(12) Spanish households are now perceptibly seeing an increase in their budgets [mental perceptive clause] (Rajoy).

The Conservative politician also relies on processes indicating existence (0.01% for Obama *versus* 0.09% for Rajoy) ($x^2 = 4.373$, $p < .05$) and saying (0.16% *versus* 0.41%) ($x^2 = 9.323$, $p < .00$) (see 'process' in the existential and verbal types in Table 1) and refers to the existent (0.01% *versus* 0.10%) ($x^2 = 5.011$, $p < .05$) and to what is said (0.21% *versus* 0.43%) ($x^2 = 7.064$, $p < .00$).[7] The final aim is to discuss the past economic crisis and to congratulate himself on the good economic results (see (13) and (14)):

(13) There was [existential: process] a certain risk of bankruptcy [existential: existent] (Rajoy).
(14) Today we can now say [verbal: process] with satisfaction that we have achieved this [verbal: verbiage] (Rajoy).

Both Obama and Rajoy attempt to differentiate themselves from the opposing party, but their different approaches point to ideological differences. Indeed, the Democrat takes sides with middle-class Americans through his economic proposals, all of which are of a social nature and help preserve the social welfare safety net (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020, p. 93). In contrast, Rajoy shows himself to be an honest politician by referring to the good results of his policies through verifiable data, which he managed to be in line with his interests. Which strategy was more persuasive could be partly explained by the results of the polls, but what is true is that both intend to paint a positive picture of themselves before the audience especially in the run-up to the next elections (Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2014, p. 180).

4.2. Transitivity patterns and evaluation

A previous study (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020) has analyzed evaluation in the economy section of Rajoy's 2015 SOTU and Obama's 2015 SONA (see Table 2 for the statistically significant results). The results indicate that both political candidates use different rates of Attitude devices to build rather different images that would help them to persuade the electorate of their decisions and to ultimately gain electoral votes. Rajoy uses more appreciation (i.e. the evaluation of things, processes or states of affairs aesthetically or with the social value the object is accorded) to announce new welfare measures that 'alleviate the situation of the middle-classes'. This is done to attract disgruntled voters, who are increasingly turning to upstart parties for the upcoming general elections. However, Obama shows higher rates of judgment (i.e. the evaluation of human behavior from an ethical standpoint) in an attempt to make middle-class Americans' lives better through economic policies that benefit all Americans: 'We can use that money to help more families to pay for childcare and send their kids to college [judgement: social valuation: positive attitude]' (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020, p. 93). At the same time, he paints Republicans in a negative light, since the Republican-led Congress would most likely block his economic proposals. Affect shows the lowest rates for both candidates (also, it is not statistically significant), since political speeches 'are used to assess things, processes and human behavior and less to express emotions' (Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2014, p. 168). The results further show that the Democrat and Conservative politicians focus on their positive policies, although Rajoy uses higher rates of negative attitude when referring to the Spanish economic downturn.

To answer our second research question (i.e. *How do the transitivity and appraisal analyses combine to illustrate the politicians' ideological stances?*), we examine which transitivity patterns are used by both politicians to positively appraise *Us* and *Our* actions or negatively appraise *Them* or *Their* actions (also, Scott, 2003, 2008). For that purpose, we present some examples of the interplay of transitivity and evaluation (see (15)):

Table 2. Evaluative devices in the economy section of Obama's SONA and Rajoy's SOTU.

OBAMA	Judgment	Appreciation	Positive attitude	Negative attitude
Total	114	125	208	38
[# attitude type/ total number of words] x 100	3.55	3.89	6.47	1.18
RAJOY	**Judgment**	**Appreciation**	**Positive attitude**	**Negative attitude**
Total	199	358	418	159
[# attitude type/ total number of words] x 100	3.15	5.67	6.62	2.52

(15)

	America,	for	all that	we	have	endured
Transitivity						Material: Process
Appraisal						Judgment: Tenacity: Positive Attitude: Explicit

	for	all the	grit	and	hard	work	required [to come back]
Transitivity		Rel. Attrib.: Subj					Rel. Attrib.: Attribute
Appraisal		Judg. Tenacity: Positive: Explicit			Appr. Quality: Positive: Explicit		

	for all the tasks	that	lie ahead
Transitivity			Relational: Process

	know	this:
Transitivity	Mental cogn.: Process	

	the shadow of crisis	has passed
Transitivity	Material: Actor	
Appraisal	Apprec.: Social valuation: Negative: Explicit	

	and the State of the Union	is	strong
Transitivity			Rel. Attr.: Attribute
Appraisal			Appr.: Quality: Positive: Explicit

(Obama)

In (15), the Democrat paints a rosy picture of the American economy when he declares economic resurgence, which is partly helped by his policies. By making the process or actor of material clauses or the subject or attribute of relational attributive clauses coincide with the evaluative item, he reinforces the positive characteristics of Americans (i.e. 'endur [ance]', 'grit' and 'hard work'), while at the same time he presents himself and the Democratic party positively for contributing to a fast job-growth in the country. However, Obama's words do not fully comply with reality, since recovery has been slow and has not reached most Americans (Casselman, 2015 (online)). Thus, Obama's words are markedly ideological, since he seeks to impose his own vision of reality. Obama's speech is also brimming with defiance by combining transitivity and evaluation (see (16)):

(16)

	We	can't	put (at risk)	the security [of families]
Transitivity			Material: Process	
Appraisal			Judg.: Propriety: Negative: Explicit	

	by taking away	their health insurance
Transitivity	Material: Process	
Appraisal	Judg.: Propriety: Negative: Explicit	

	or unraveling	the new rules [on Wall Street]
Transitivity	Material: Process	
Appraisal	Judg.: Propriety: Negative: Explicit	

	or refighting	past battles [on immigration]
Transitivity	Material: Process	
Appraisal	Judg.: Propriety: Negative: Implicit	

	when	we	've got to	fix	a broken	system
Transitivity				Material: Goal		
Appraisal				Appr.: Composition Negative: Explicit		

(Obama)

In (16), Obama makes a robust defense of his administration's actions – an economic recovery, a fiscal reform and his immigration policies – before a Congress in which both chambers are controlled by Republicans and, thus, his economic proposals stand little chance of becoming reality. By tinging material processes and a goal with negative evaluation, he stresses those actions that would endanger the middle-class and the goal to be accomplished; namely, fixing a broken financial system. This way, he portrays the Republican party in a bad light, since 'if the Republicans vote down proposals that would have only affected the wealthiest 1% of Americans, then that allows Democrats to say – "well we are the party of the 99%"' (Sopel, 2015 (online)).

And yet, apart from self-indulging in economic recovery, Obama needs to roll out some specific proposals for the audience while offering a contrast with Republicans. See (17) below, in which President Obama makes a proposal for a new economy:

(17)

	It	's now up	to us	to choose	who we want to be	over the next 15 years and for decades [to come]
Transitivity		Rel. Attrib.: Process				
	Will	we		accept	an economy	[where only a few of us do spectacularly well?]
Transitivity Appraisal				Mental cogn.: Process Judg.: Propriety: Negative: Implicit		
	Or	will we		commit	ourselves	to an economy [that generates rising incomes […]]
Transitivity Appraisal				Mental cogn.: Process Judg.: Propriety: Positive: Implicit		

(Obama)

In (17), the Democrat politician uses mental clauses as tools for Appraisal, all in an attempt to shed a negative light on Republicans, who will not embrace his economic proposals. Indeed, he negatively evaluates 'accept', as he wants to move away from the economic inequality of Republicans. Then, he gives a positive assessment to 'commit' to a new economy, which includes an array of new proposals helping low- and medium- income families. For Republicans voting against Obama's policies could be detrimental to their chances of winning the 2016 elections. All this suggests that Obama's proposal for a new economy has ideological purposes.

In his triumphalist speech, Rajoy touts his economic record in a bid to woo back dissatisfied voters, while he also offers a contrast with the Socialist party, who is blamed for the ills of the crisis. See (18) and (19), in which the attribute is effective as appraisal of Spain's economic downturn and of the Conservative party's success:

(18)

	Your Honors,	what we have achieved	is	very	important
Transitivity			Relat. Attrib.: Attribute		
Appraisal			Apprec.: Valuation: Positive: Explicit		

(Rajoy)

(19)

	It	hasn't been		necessary		to explain	to them (Spaniards)
Transitivity				Relat. Attrib.: Attribute			
Appraisal				Judg.: Propriety: Positive: Explicit			

	that	you		cannot live		[from what you don't have]
Transitivity				Material: Process		
Appraisal				Judg.: Propriety: Negative: Explicit		

	that […]	it	was		necessary	[temporarily]	to reduce spending	[…]
Transitivity					Relat. Attrib.: Attribute			
Appraisal					Judg.: Propriety: Positive: Explicit			

	however		thankless		it	might seem
Transitivity			Relat. Attrib.: Attribute			
Appraisal			Apprec.: Valuation: Negative: Explicit			

(Rajoy)

In (18), the Conservative politician trumpets his economic achievements, including bringing down Spain's borrowing costs, avoiding a bailout and reviving the economy, while in (19) he legitimizes his tough budget cuts by painting Spaniards positively for their understanding. He also criticizes the situation of near bankruptcy he found when he reached power ('you cannot live from what you don't have'). In the clauses, the attribute coincides with the evaluative item providing a moral assessment with a view to stressing the need for cutbacks in healthcare, education and jobless benefits to cut a gaping public deficit. However, Rajoy does not mention the dramatic consequences they had on citizens. By not mentioning them, these go unnoticed and, thus, his purpose is ideological.

The Conservative politician further refers to how he had resisted pressure to request a bailout for Spain (see (20)):

(20)

	The	easiest	thing	would have been to	accept the pressure
Transitivity		Relat. Attrib.: Attribute		Relat. Attrib.: Process	Relat. Attrib.: Carrier
Appraisal		Apprec. Valuation: Negative: Implicit			Judg.: Tenacity: Negative: Implicit

	but	this	was	highly	unfair
Transitivity					Relat. Attrib.: Attribute
Appraisal					Judg.: Propriety: Negative: Explicit

	For that reason,	we		didn't do	it
Transitivity				Material: Process	
Appraisal				Judg.: Propriety: Positive: Implicit	

	We	refused	to exit the crisis	at the cost of Social Security or pensions coffers
Transitivity		Mental: Process		
Appraisal		Judg.: Propriety: Positive: Explicit		

(Rajoy)

In (20), the relational attributive clauses and the material clauses are tinged with a moral assessment when Rajoy explains how he had avoided the bailout, which would have had serious consequences on citizens. Indeed, 'accept the pressure' is negatively evaluated as 'highly unfair', while at the same time he paints a positive image of himself (and the party he represents): 'we didn't do it'. This makes him a prospective good candidate for the upcoming elections. And yet, the Conservative politician does not mention the 2012 bank bailout, which helped to avoid the failure of Bankia and other banks. Indeed, the Spanish government requested some help from the European Union, which Rajoy considered a 'loan'. However, the German finance minister pointed instead to a rescue: 'It is not the banks, but rather Spain, that is receiving the money […]' (Martin, 2015, (online)).

Rajoy also takes swipes at those promising 'magic wands' in direct reference to the upstart party Podemos ('We can'), which together with Ciudadanos ('Citizens'), surged after voters felt frustrated with political corruption and angered by cuts in basic services (see (21)):

(21)

	We	're recovering'	our	well-being
Transitivity				Material: Goal
Appraisal				Apprec.: Social valuation: Positive: Explicit
	because we	have applied	an economic policy	[that has found a way to create the right conditions]
Transitivity		Material: Process		
	for us	to enjoy	an enormous amount	[of breathing space] [in servicing our debt]
Transitivity		Mental emotive: Phenomenon		
Appraisal		Apprec.: Reaction: Positive: Explicit		
	and	thus	attend	to our social spending
Transitivity				Material: Goal
Appraisal				Apprec.: Social valuation: Positive: Explicit
	It	is	good	[for this to be known]
Transitivity			Relat. Attrib.: Attribute	
Appraisal			Apprec.: Reaction: Positive: Explicit	
	so that others	don't come up with	magic	wands to wave
Transitivity			Material: Goal	
Appraisal			Apprec. Social valuation: Negative: Implicit	
	and so that	no attention	is paid	[to those who want to sell these magic wands]
Transitivity		Mental Perceptive: Process		

(Rajoy)

In (21), transitivity material clauses and evaluation overlap in 'well-being' and 'social spending'. This is so as to positively stress the welfare state in Spain, which is considered a basic asset in Spanish society, and social spending, which contributes to the general welfare state of the country through pensions, healthcare and unemployment benefits. But Rajoy also warns the audience that there is no quick fix for the economy and, thus, they should not listen to those who wave 'magic wands', directly referring to Podemos,

who are assessed negatively. Finally, Rajoy also 'sought to portray himself as a safe pair of hands steering Spain to economic recovery' (White & Sanz, 2015 (online)). Indeed, by tinging 'enormous' in 'an enormous amount of breathing space' with evaluation, he stresses the positive effects of his economic policies in Spanish society, which resulted in social spending, while he also reminds the audience ('It is good we all know this') not to turn to populist ideas. These include boosting public spending, cutting the working week and raising the minimum salary and pensions. He thus resorts to fear of the unknown, an argument which is ideological in purpose.

Closer examination of the Transitivity and Appraisal findings suggest that Obama's and Rajoy's representation of the world through their lexicogrammatical choices is aligned with how they appraise the world, 'as the different resources work together towards common semantic goals' (Scott, 2008, p. 103) (also, Scott, 2008). Indeed, Obama's positive evaluation of his behavior and his government's from an ethical point of view (i.e. judgment) correlates with his construction as a desirous person for a better future for the American middle-class. For Rajoy, his positive appreciation of his new welfare measures to help the middle-class correlates with his ability to ascribe them positive attributes, while his negative appreciation of the ills of the crisis is aligned with his use of negative attributes in relational clauses. Also, his positive appraisal on the grounds of social valuation is consistent with his comments about the social salience of hard-fought assets for Spanish society (e.g. healthcare and education) in the verbiage of verbal clauses.

5. Conclusion

The present study has attempted to ascertain the role of Transitivity in political speeches aiming at convincing the electorate of the decisions made, even when these had negative consequences on citizens, and its interplay with evaluation. We now recall the research questions guiding this paper in order to provide an answer:

1. *Which type(s) of transitivity patterns as found in the Hallidayan Transitivity system (*Halliday, 1994*; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014) are used in the American and Spanish political speeches?*

The Transitivity analysis of the economy sections of the 2015 SOTU and the 2015 SONA indicate that the two political candidates used Transitivity differently. Obama relied on mental clauses, especially of the desiderative type to express desires for the middle-class (e.g. 'I want [mental desiderative] to work with this Congress'), although he knew they would be vigorously opposed by Republicans. The Democrats' intention was however 'to get the working-family vote in their favor' (Elving, 2015 (online)). The results further reveal an emphasis on the part of the Democrat on the active role of *Us* to bring about changes that make a better life for the American middle-class (e.g. 'we could reverse [...]', 'we could reduce [...]') and on the role of *Us* as sensers of mental states (e.g. 'We believed [...]' in several consecutive paragraphs). Both contribute to the overall optimistic tone of the speech. Indeed, Obama reminded every one of his successful policies to rebuild a sputtering economy. Also, through the repetition 'we believed', he stressed his strong past conviction in economic recovery, which was followed by his good results (e.g. 'And today, our younger kids have earned ... ', 'Today, we have new

rules […]'). However, Republicans are in stark contrast for blocking his economic proposals and, thus, siding with wealthy Americans and corporations.

In contrast, Rajoy relied on relational clauses, especially of the attributive type, with a statistically significant result for the process (e.g. 'We were [relational attributive: process] clear candidates to abandon the Euro'). These were followed by verbal and existential clauses, although he used them to manage data to suit his interests (e.g. 'the spending has increased, because today there are [existential: process] more pensioners than in 2011 [existential: existent]'); however, in the example he avoids comparing the data with 2014, when the number of pensioners was higher (Martin, 2015 (online)). By giving details, including the characterization and identification of people and things, the attribution of information to himself and to other sources and the recognition of the existence of verifiable phenomena, Rajoy presented himself as a sincere and honest politician and, thus, a prospectively good candidate for the upcoming elections. And yet, this all contributes to giving his particular picture of reality, which is ideological in nature.

1. *How do the transitivity and appraisal analyses combine to illustrate the politicians' ideological stances?*

The analysis of Obama's 2015 SOTU and Rajoy's 2015 SONA uncovers the fact that both politicians made conscious lexicogrammatical choices in the language they used when trying to persuade the electorate of the decisions made which, on occasions, overlap with evaluation; the effect is that of stressing and, thus, intensifying the meaning expressed (Scott, 2008, p. 87). Also, the interplay of evaluation and transitivity can account for both political candidates' visions of reality. Indeed, through specific selections of the lexicogrammatical system of Transitivity and the semantic system of evaluation both politicians declared economic resurgence due to their economic decisions after years of recession, while they also painted the opposing party in a negative light. More specifically, Rajoy made systematic choices in his language to construe a particular version of the crisis and the country's economic recovery after steering the nation around from a bailout, while he stressed particular words that painted him and his actions in a favorable light. Moreover, he legitimized his economic decisions, imposing harsh austerity measures upon citizens. He had ideological purposes, since his final objective was to win back crisis-worn voters and to portray himself as a safe choice for re-election. As for Obama, through selections in Transitivity, he claimed economic success as a result of his economic policies and made tax cuts and other progressive proposals for middle-class Americans the centerpiece of his speech. Also, he ascribed positive or negative evaluation to particular words that shed a positive light upon him (and, by extension, the Democratic party), while the Republican party was left to stand on shaky ground before the electorate. The final objective was to influence the audience's point of view and, thus, to obtain their votes in the up-and-coming elections.

Notes

1. The 2015 State of the Union Address can be consulted on the American Presidency Project webpage: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sou.php>.

2. The 2015 State of the Nation Debate can be downloaded from La Moncloa webpage <http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/intervenciones/Documents/2015/240215DebateEstado Nacion.pdf>

3. The program can be downloaded for free from the webpage <http://www.corpustool.com/>.

4. According to SFG, there is a scale of rank in the grammar of all languages, which in English includes clause, phrase/group, word and morpheme. Each contains one or more units of the rank below, while rank shifting is also possible; that is, 'a unit of one rank may be downranked (downgraded) to function in the structure of a unit of its own rank or of a rank below' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 9–10). 'Clause complex' is used instead of 'sentence' and contains 'a number of clauses linked together grammatically' (2014, p. 8).

5. Following the statistician advice (p.c), we used the chi-square test to assess if two categorical variables are related. In this study, there are more than one nominal variable, they are independent, their relationship is linear and are normally distributed. The Fisher's exact test would not be appropriate since it is used for very small sizes.

6. In this study, we take $p<0.05$; that is, a significance level of 95%, which is considered significant in social sciences (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 210).

7. In Table 1, the number of 'existent' participants do not correspond to the number of existential processes for Rajoy (n = 11 vs. n = 10, respectively). This is due to the fact that the verbal group indicating existence is implied in one existential clause: '[There is] Nothing else' (Rajoy).

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