DOCTORAL THESIS

ABSTRACT

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RIDICULING STRATEGIES IN PRESIDENTIAL DISCOURSE.
A case study of recent elections in the USA, France and Romania

Abstract

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Abstract This research proposes a systematic procedure for the analysis of ridiculing as action in presidential dialogues. Ridiculing, as probably the most effective way to disqualify the opponent and seduce the audience in pre-election debates, is examined in recent presidential elections from the USA, France and Romania. The association of the three countries in an analysis of ridiculing in presidential dialogues offers perspectives on cultural aspects of politics and democracy, revealing eloquent differences and implications. The data are organised into three corpora consisting of debate extracts selected by the pragmatic aspects of ridiculing, in longer dialogic sequences of actions and reactions.

Towards the configuration of a systematic procedure for the analysis of ridiculing as action in presidential dialogues, a thorough delimitation and classification of ridiculing strategies and types of ridiculing expressions was imperative.

Proceeding from a field literature review, I traced a personalised structure (internal configuration) to integrate ridiculing as revealed by the data. According to specific pragmatic, semantic and argumentative components of the utterances, ridiculing was discovered to be produced in four distinct strategies by the participants in the mentioned dialogues: irony, sarcasm, ridiculing connotation through rhetorical figures and exceptional occurrences, such as dialogic byplays or taunting/nicknaming. The first two strategies, irony and sarcasm, are well-known, free-standing and much theorised by researchers. The last two strategies were proposed for optimised service to the analysis of the data. The most popular and most theorised by researchers is irony, as such a strategy for ridiculing. Irony is produced to express a negative intended meaning through the formulation of literal positive words, implying the opposite, through a dissociative attitude. The concept was approached scientifically from three different perspectives, materialised in proper theories of irony, i.e. prototypical irony or irony *stricto sensu*, irony as pretence (the pretence theory) and irony as mention (relevance theory). The second most popular and theorised ridiculing strategy is sarcasm, ranked as such by field theoreticians. Sarcasm has not inspired proper theories, as it was largely associated to irony, as a peripheral manifestation, overlapping the two notions in a blurred amalgam. For scopes of clarity, I chose to approach irony and sarcasm as clearly distinct categories of ridiculing strategies, based on the formula proposed by Patrick Charaudeau. According to this author, in

irony there is a relation of opposition between the literal and the intended meaning, while in sarcasm there is a relation of hyperbolisation of the intended meaning, through the literal meaning. An important remark is that the truth condition is broken in irony, while it is fulfilled in sarcasm. Apart from these highly popular ways of producing ridiculing in presidential dialogues, two other categories were delimited, for the interesting manifestations from a qualitative point of view. A ridiculing connotation can be produced through the formulation of rhetorical figures, transmitting negative intended meaning through neutral words. Alternatively, ridiculing as a threat to the face of the opponent was identified to be produced through what I labelled dialogic byplays. Through this strategy, the speaker suddenly switches interlocutors and symbolically turns his back on the opponent to mock and marginalise them. Other exceptional occurrences are taunting/nicknaming, in which an implicit ad hominem attack is made through a rather mirthful, playful formulation, with nicknames reminding of funny or ridiculous characters, activating a certain affect through the cultural imaginary. All ridiculing strategies aim for a common goal: to produce positive self-representation and negative other-representation, but achieve this goal through different mechanisms of meaning. Each ridiculing strategy is a fundamental principle based on which multiple types of expressions can be formulated. Using the existent categories postulated by the theory and completing the missing links with new types of expressions adapted to serve the analysis of the data, a taxonomy of ridiculing strategies and types of expressions identified in the dataset was traced and proposed in the analytical framework. Ridiculing as a dialogic speech act is favoured by the communicative situation, which is dominated by the presence of the superaddressee, as the dialogue happens in front of an audience. Ridiculing, as an act to disqualify the opponent and seduce the audience, is double-voiced, i.e. addressed to two different recipients, producing both effects simultaneously through ad hominem attacks formulated as figures of negative humour. Diagrams of communication vectors have been elaborated, detailing both the speaker's view and a dialogic view. A concept map was delineated to synopsise the overall approach of ridiculing, as proposed by this study.

For the analysis of the data, three levels of interpretation were proposed to respond to the study's research questions. Following the paradigm shifting direction of language as "a complex whole" (Weigand, 2010) evolving "towards a theory of everything" (Vasilescu, 2016) the methodological approach integrates (1) dialogic speech acts, i.e. ridiculing in a dialogic sequence of action and reaction, (2) lexis and proposition, and (3) the representation of agency, as part of a recontextualization chain. The research approach can be summed up as dialogic with insights from lexical semantics and CDA, encouraging an interdisciplinary view upon the

object of study. A number of tendencies are identified as main communication lines in ridiculing as action in dialogue, configuring ridiculing as a multi-faceted phenomenon in presidential dialogues and beyond.

Context and motivation

Language and politics have lived in symbiosis since ancient times. Politicians use language in a way crafted to seduce the others into ideological affiliation, through skilful formulations requiring interpretation. When competing for the highest position in a state, through what has become an extremely elaborate game of seduction, candidates make use of an entire arsenal to build the best possible representation for themselves, one that would persuade the people into offering them their support and, finally, their votes. One of the most powerful weapons in this arsenal of seduction and conquest is, undoubtedly, the *word* (as a sword), which, given the high stake of the entire election process, needs to be impeccable. But, how do candidates to presidency construct their speeches to serve their ultimate goal of winning the elections? What are the fine mechanisms underpinning their discourse and what shines through at a closer look between their 'lines'? What happens when the lines are over and candidates need to move onto free speech? Furthermore, and this is the question that preoccupies me the most, what pops up when finalists to presidency go, cheek by jowl, on stage in front of the nation in a live confrontational interaction with their opponent? How do they manage their adversarial discourse under the pressure of immediate reaction within the normative organisation framework of the debates? Considering the dynamics of the debate, as a genre of political "discourse-in-interaction" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005), more precisely a manifestation of presidential *dialogue* (Weigand, 2010), which offers generous space for improvisation, there certainly are interesting outcomes when the interventions minutely prepared in advance are all spoken out and the protagonists engage in *fresh talk* (Goffman, 1981, p. 171).

These are some of the questions that came to concern me in the five years I spent working as a journalist in the local and national press, right after I graduated from the Letters Faculty in Cluj and felt the need of a perspective shift, from the realm of French literature, down to exploring the context of our daily reality from a critical point of view. Despite my absolute apolitical nature, I became intrigued by the political phenomenon in general and came to see the vital importance of a thorough observation and understanding of the way in which politicians communicate. I noticed that unapparent, unexpected and revelatory meanings are revealed in political discourse when one keeps their ear to the ground. As a journalist, I tried my best to raise awareness on aspects like these, strongly feeling like the world needed to

understand things better so that we could be able to make better decisions and, finally, build better lives, on more solid foundations. It is this feeling that brought me to the point of undertaking research on this subject, humbly hoping to make a positive contribution and bring a little bit of light to the many still obscure areas of this field of language and communication.

Aims and objectives

As aims and objectives, proceeding from the premise that "language both determines and reflects our understanding of the world we live in" (Leech, 1985, p. 39), I launched an investigation of the linguistic manifestation of ridiculing, as it is a wide-spread, complex and interesting speech act in discourse in general. As a public, we are in regular contact with it in political discourse and it occupies a prominent position in live adversarial interaction. Furthermore, I chose to localise the investigation of ridiculing in presidential debates, as this is one of the most fervent contact points between the public and the candidates to the presidency of a democratic country. Also, I felt that not only could a study of the ridiculing act help better understand the presidential dialogue in the genre, but also that the dialogue in the genre itself could have an essential say in explaining ridiculing, as a macro speech act of discourse in general.

The main direction of this study is provided by "la primauté de l'oral" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005), i.e. the primacy of speech as a fundamental principle of linguistic research. The main focus point is the speech aspect of language, namely *the utterance and the immediacy of meaning* (i.e. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism as a development on Ferdinand de Saussure's *parole* aspect of language, via John Langshaw Austin and John Searle's *speech act theory*). The interpretation key is provided by Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, summarised to "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia [where] everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole, there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 426). Thus, considering the Bakhtinian principles according to which "dialogue is the most natural manifestation of language" (Charaudeau & Maingueneau, 2002, p. 175), meaning and understanding of 'objects' or 'events' and 'value judgements' between persons is relational (Dop, 2000, p. 27). Taking into account that "the real object of study is interaction" (Dop, 2000, p. 20), considering that "before any theory can be designed, the object should be addressed by goal-directed observation in order to find out how it works" (Weigand, 2010, p. 39), focusing on the objective of "trying to structure it according to regularities", as "routines of language and action" (Weigand, 2010, p. 71), I started this research journey with observing the ridiculing

phenomenon in a locus of natural occurrence, presidential dialogue, in the scope of obtaining knowledge of its fine workings and most popular characteristics.

For carrying out the investigation, I composed three corpora, consisting more than 200 extracts selected from a total of 11 debates which took place before recent presidential elections in the United States of America (2016, 2020), France (201, 2022) and Romania (2014, 2019).

From a broad perspective, I chose the presented configuration for the corpus, in the hope of achieving a primary objective with this study, which I explain in the remainder of this subsection. A mindful look at the enjeux of the political phenomenon of electing heads of state, and especially at the necessary steps candidates need to take in order to climb the conventional ladder to the top position of a state, in countries such as the United States of America and France, which, given their reputable historical and cultural background, can be considered gold-standards of contemporary civilisation and democracy, is resourceful and of high service for tracing an outline concerning the positioning of our country, Romania, related to this particular political phenomenon. Of course, considering the major differences in the historical evolution of the three countries (the half of century of communist regime and dictatorship in Romania's recent history, to name but one), it is unsurprising that our country has a saliently less developed culture related to the democratic phenomenon of electing leadership, public discourse, political discourse and is considered retrograde on many aspects of society in general (a remark which is acknowledged by Romanian researchers – Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, 2013; Rovența-Frumușani et al. 2017 etc. and is largely confirmed by this analysis). This is why a wide-ranging comparative interpretation of ridiculing in presidential dialogue in the genre of pre-election debates would serve the overall aim of bringing more detailed knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon to the general public, through the disambiguation of several intricacies underlying the ridiculing act, which is to be found in all debates and has an essential, constitutive role in the genre. Describing and explaining how ridiculing functions is a kind of work that I believe could contribute to the education and cultural advancement of our society.

From a narrow perspective, through the investigation of ridiculing as a macro speech act in the genre of presidential debates, this research aims at composing and delivering a relevant outline of the phenomenon of ridiculing in presidential dialogue, consisting of an inventory of formulae (functional structural pattern tendencies) which lie at the basis of ridiculing as a dialogic act occurring in verbal interaction, according to the particularities of the different categories of expressions identified in the corpora and the different contexts of the election events and protagonists. My narrow objective is to identify, classify, analyse and define the occurring ridiculing expressions, in the hope to bring clarifications where I consider

the existing definitions and theory may be insufficient or a bit blurry in the case of this specific discursive genre. This objective is furtherly detailed in the following sections.

Premises, hypotheses and research questions

I delimited the study's premises and two research hypotheses to proceed from and verify, in the accomplishment of the above-mentioned aims and objectives. As already briefly mentioned above, ridiculing is an omnipresent, indispensable phenomenon occurring in the genre of presidential debates. Ridiculing serves as probably the most effective tool for accomplishing the overall goal of disqualifying the opponent in an entertaining, "pleasant" way (Kerbrat-Orechhioni, 2013a, 2013b, 2019). Certainly, criticism occurs in many other, more straightforward ways, such as delegitimation, direct attacks, argumentation, but ridiculing is one very popular such way which provides the ridiculer with numerous advantages from a discursive point of view (displaying respect for political norms, exemption of responsibility for offence, avoiding labels of rudeness, aggressiveness etc), enabling politicians to increase their popularity.

The premise of this study is that *ridiculing plays a central, constitutive and necessary role* in the political event of presidential debates, as situated dialogic performance. Ridiculing is used as a strategy for the delegitimation, disqualification and overall negative representation of the opponent, through the production of what scholars (of which Henri Bergson would be one of the first in launching this tradition in the twentieth century) like to call *derisive [bitter, cruel] laughter* (Bergson, 1924). In adversarial front-staged interactions, ridiculing is an effective instrument for combat due to an intrinsic "pleasant component" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2013a, p. 52) which is part of its general formula, and which has the quality of producing positive self-representation for the speaker and affiliation with the audience, in the detriment of the opponent, who invariably ends up as *homo risibilis* (Amir, 2019)*,* being the target of negative other-representation through derisive laughter.

The primary hypothesis of this study is that *ridiculing is realised through different types of strategies*, which manifest as distinct tendencies or patterns of language-in-use, configurable according to a specific set of coordinates. Despite its invariable function, which is constantly and specifically designed to achieve the negative other-representation mentioned, ridiculing (and consequently the expressions it is materialised through) as a dialogic act, can be explicated in a clear, orderly taxonomy of tendencies, presenting the general principles of its inherent, variable linguistic manifestations and relationships.

Regardless of its invariable aim and function, ridiculing occurs in ways that are constructed differently and produce more or less different effects in the perception of the ultimate recipient of the discourse, the audience. As already briefly mentioned above, what I am expecting, starting from this hypothesis and following the investigation of ridiculing in presidential dialogue, is the exhibition of different types of ridiculing expressions in clearly distinguishable patterns of distribution, the observation of recurrent samples of talk, as dynamic and variable means of expressing the invariably derogatory intended meaning of ridiculing.

As I formulate this primary research hypothesis, I am aware that we are currently undergoing a significant paradigm shift in linguistics (Weigand, 2011; 2021) in which a structuralist or formal-functional approach on meaning and language is superseded by the infinite potential of "the complex whole" and that research in the field evolves "towards a theory of everything" (Vasilescu, 2016). As true reality does certainly not recognise individual, separate units of language or speech, I approach the data selected for this study in context, from a broad perspective, understanding that "form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.259), as "from the standpoint of the extralinguistic purposes of the utterance, everything linguistic is only a means to an end" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 109).

Starting from this hypothesis, this research proposes to answer the following particular question, which I will consider this work's Main Research Question (MRQ): **What is the linguistic architecture of ridiculing in presidential discourse in pre-election dialogue?**

In an attempt to explain the formulation of this MRQ, I will clarify that I chose to address the linguistic "architecture" of ridiculing (and not, for example, "structure", "mechanisms", "design" or simply "language" etc) because I wish to include broader rather than merely formal or functional aspects of ridiculing in my purview. More precisely, through the analysis of the linguistic "architecture" of ridiculing, I will refer to aspects which I named the *building techniques, building structures* and *design strategies* used to produce ridiculing, as social practice with a constitutive role in presidential debates. The term "architecture" allows the examination of these aspects and is used to include them all from a wider range of perspectives, but basically grounded in linguistics, as ways of understanding language. The analysis focuses on *what is done (dialogic speech acts as building techniques)*, *what [it is done] with (lexis and proposition as building structures),* as well as *how it is done (representation as design strategy),* through ridiculing in the dialogic interaction mentioned. My approach can be primarily described as dialogic, with insights from lexical semantics and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Further explanation and details concerning the treatment of this MRQ and the

emerging subsequent research questions are provided in the analytical framework of the present research.

Also starting from the above-mentioned hypothesis, the scope of the thesis is pin-pointed in the dialogic construction of ridiculing in presidential discourse in pre-election debates. As dialogic construction, ridiculing is always purposeful, tendentiously oriented towards the specific goal of delegitimation and disqualification of the opponent while promoting the speaker and creating alliance with the audience, which is the indirect and ultimate recipient of discourse, being composed of potential voters, the decisive, legitimising or delegitimising factor in the overall stake of the entire election event.

Additionally, aligning with Robin Lakoff's claim that "linguistic imbalances are worthy of study because they bring into sharper focus real-world imbalances" (Lakoff, 1975, p. 43), I believe that an analysis of the construction of ridiculing expressions (dialogic speech act formulation, lexical and topic choices, representational choices, as well as narrower aspects such as word order, morpho-syntax etc) can reflect and spread what speakers believe to be true, which is important to understand about people who could be our leaders. In other words, these expressions can be windows through which we can see into characters and ideologies, as language acts as a mirror of the society we are part of.

From here, I engage in the formulation of a secondary hypothesis, which is constructed on the idea that the ridiculing expressions used by finalists to presidency in pre-election dialogues are rooted deeply in the cultural background of the speaker and vary from culture to culture, as utterances "fluctuate their meanings from user to user and from context to context" (Popescu, forthcoming). Therefore, a comparative interpretation based on the analysis results of the ridiculing expressions identified in the candidates' discourses, also looking into questions of cultural imaginary, cultural representations and stereotypes (related to social issues such as gender, politeness, as well as ethnicity or race in some cases etc) in each of the three countries, could also be insightful for a thorough understanding of the dialogues, from a cross-cultural point of view. Also, according to Robin Lakoff, "stereotypes are not to be ignored" in discourse "first because, for a stereotype to exist, it must be an exaggeration of something that is in fact in existence and able to be recognized and second because one measures oneself, for better or worse, according to how well or poorly one conforms to the stereotype one is supposed to conform to" (Lakoff, 1975, p. 73). This secondary hypothesis was alternatively inspired by the words of Foucault: "je suppose [...] qu'il n'y a guère de société

où n'existent des récits majeurs qu'on raconte, qu'on répète et qu'on fait varier[1]" (Foucault, 1971, p. 23), in perfect alignment with Bakhtin's argument for the existence of a "specific nature of thought" and "the subjects of language styles" belonging to different societies (Bakhtin, 1986). The dialogic interpretation of ridiculing as a macro speech act in the mentioned genre can be resourceful for the exploration of such narratives.

Operational concepts and terminology

The analysis of ridiculing in presidential dialogue is based on the theoretical, analytical and methodological frameworks selected to serve the cause of the thesis and works with several key operational concepts, as principal instruments, scaffolded by several major and related theoretical concepts.

The most popular operational concept, which is also part of the thesis title, is *ridiculing*, approached as a type of face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) produced through figures of negative humour (Bergson, 1924; Billig, 2005). As I shall explain in section 3.2., ridiculing can be produced through different strategies and can take the form of various types of expressions. Although not literally posted in the title, a concept of major importance grounding all the concepts of this work is *dialogue*, which is approached in the sense of "overt interaction through language, i.e. exchanges of sequentialised utterances or contributions by two or more participants who are co-present in particular situated encounters" (Linell, 2017) and "the actions that participants do in order to negotiate understanding" (Weigand, 2010, 2021), as a manifestation of *discourse*, understood as connected language used for a purpose (Lakoff, 2001), in *interaction* (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005; Goffman, 1981). *Presidential dialogue* is taken as a particularised category of *political discourse* (among other categories such as parliamentary debates, the discourse of local officials, political activists etc), which is understood as political action involving the politicians, the audience and the at-issue political events (following the approaches proposed by van Dijk 1998, Chilton 2004, Charaudeau 2005, Fairclough & Fairclough 2012), occurring in *presidential debates* as a genre of discourse in interaction (Goffman, 1981; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2013a, 2013b, 2019). The interpretation framework is *language as dialogue*, or the Mixed Game Model elaborated by Edda Weigand (2010)

Subsidiary theoretical concepts which relate in different ways with the aforementioned ones and provide support in the analysis are *humour* and the complex question of its categories,

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[1] [I suppose there is no society where there are no major stories that are told, repeated and subjected to variation] – translation mine.

narrowing perspective onto the most popular strategies used in the discursive genre subjected to analysis, which theory delimits as *irony* and *sarcasm*, the notion of *face* and *face-work, politeness (and FTAs)*, as well as theories of *gender and language* enabling an additional level of interpretation of the interactions between different-gender vs. same-gender.

Below I will provide a brief explanation of the approach to the key-terms composing the thesis title, ***Ridiculing Strategies in Presidential Discourse***, for the purpose of clearly delimiting the object, scope and span of this study (notions detailed in sections 2 and 3):

- *Ridiculing* is understood as any form of face-threatening act (FTA) which is formulated through figures of negative humour and is operationalised as the use of negative / offensive humour, as opposed to positive / entertaining humour, against somebody to produce derisive laughter (mockery) as a token of dissociative attitude. Here, it is taken to refer to the activity described by dictionaries as "to make fun of [the opponent]" and is defined by a pragmatic component of amusement, with an intentional, targeted, tendentious character and attitudinal load. This kind of "fun" is understood instrumentally as an integrative, necessary part of the adversarial interaction and is justified by the front-staged nature of the debate event, as discursive genre;

- *Strategy*, as "an indispensable concept for political action and analysis" (Martin, 2014), is understood here as a method of employing different types of mechanisms of language and rhetoric to produce negative other-representation through derision (developed in section 3.2.) and does not point to the social impact of ridiculing, as various potential interpretations of the speech situation such that "audiences are moved to respond in certain ways rather than others" (Martin, 2014, pp. 94-95).

- *Presidential discourse* (in interaction) or *presidential dialogue* is a subcategory of political discourse or socio-political discourse as "discourse fused with the image of a Leader" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 347) and it is understood as political action done by finalists to presidency in interaction ahead of the elections to increase their chances of winning office, in accordance with the norms of discursive genre and the presidential ethos (Charaudeau 2005). It is characterised by multifold directionality (beside the interlocutors, discourse always addresses - and merely makes sense in the presence of - a mass audience, as well as a moderator), polarisation (positive self-representation and negative other-representation), a goal-oriented selection of propositional and lexical items, preferred structures, seeking to achieve particular effects, all with an ideally high moral standard.

- *The presidential debate* is understood as a sub-genre of political discourse (Ilie, 2018), produced by the media ahead of presidential elections, with clear-cut organisational and conversational regulations. The communicative situation is defined by a specific participation framework (as discussed in section 3.3.) involved in an adversarial interaction in which the alternation of speaker roles between protagonists does not ensure continuity of ideas, cooperativeness for reaching consensus i.e. constructive communication, but is characterised by disruptiveness.

Thesis structure

The thesis is structured into eight sections and studies ridiculing strategies used by candidates to presidency in final pre-election dialogues, in recent elections in the USA (2016, 2020), France (2017, 2022) and Romania (2014, 2019). The participation framework of the debates selected for analysis (see section 2.3.2., 3.3. and 3.4.) presents dialogic interactions between a female and a male candidate, (Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, Viorica Dăncilă and Klaus Iohannis) followed (or preceded) by interactions between the same male candidate and another male candidate (Donald Trump and Joe Biden, Klaus Iohannis and Victor Ponta). Preparing the analysis of the data, theoretical, analytical and methodological frameworks have been developed (sections 2., 3. and 5.), along with an outline of the contextual information and background shaping the nature of the dialogues (section 4.).

The theoretical framework (section 2.) presents the key-concepts this analysis is based on, namely ridiculing as an act of negative humour and its relation to Goffman's concept of "face" and "face-work" and Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and FTAs. Categories of negative humour are described as ridiculing strategies and detailed according to the information found in the literature (section 2.1.3., furtherly adapted to serve the data of the present research, into an analytical framework presented in section 3). Political discourse (2.2.) is approached in relation to characteristic aspects of rhetoric (2.2.1.) and the concept of presidential ethos (2.2.2.). Next, the genre of the presidential debate is presented and explained in 2.3., expanding on the aspects of the discursive particularities and limitations of the genre and the nature of speech as "reciting" or "fresh talk" (Goffman, 1981) (2.3.1.), as well as the participation framework (2.3.2.), with a particular emphasis on the importance of the audience, as a ratified participant. Finally, a theory of gender and language is outlined in the final subsection (2.4.).

The analytical framework (section 3.) sets the parameters within which the present thesis operates, also trying to anchor the key-concepts used as basis for the analysis, adapting the information found in the literature to the requirements of the data for the analysis, proposing alternative completions for the missing links. The specific interest of the thesis is to describe and explain, by goal-oriented observation, the language of ridiculing, in the aim of elaborating a functional set of linguistic tendencies/formulae for the analysis of ridiculing in presidential dialogue. I did not pursue any critical ideological goals in this phase of my evolution as an apprentice researcher, I did not approach any social normative aspects, such as devoting research to denaturalising social structures and correcting social wrongs. This direction was one selection criterion for the delimitation of the analytical framework. The model of the research will be summarised through the following formula: Description-Comparison-Explanation (White, 2009). In the light of this preliminary setting, I formulated the thesis Main Research Question (MRQ), which I detailed and explained in 3.1. as: **what is the linguistic architecture of ridiculing in presidential discourse in pre-election dialogue?**

It is also necessary to mention that, as this thesis is focused on researching the role of (spoken) language as a constitutive element of ridiculing, grounding the study in the field of linguistics, I only provide basic insight into other types of constitutive elements, such as the social function, impact/effect on the public, cultural variations or other elements that may affect the dialogue.

The methodological framework (section 5.) has been composed and adapted to be of service to the scopes of this study. In order to elaborate and present a systematic inventory of tendencies composing the linguistic architecture of ridiculing, detailing ridiculing strategies and their emerging formal variations in presidential dialogue, an approach that, in my opinion, best fits the specified main research question is a dialogic approach with insights from lexical semantics and CDA. This is an integrative approach for providing insight into ridiculing by looking at what is done through language in dialogue (dialogic speech acts), what it is done with (lexis and proposition), as well as how it is realised discursively (representation of agency). I shall therefore "go down [three] main avenues", to use the words of Paul Chilton (2004, p. 50), and adopt the model of language as dialogic interaction, developed by Edda Weigand (2010), to study ridiculing done through dialogic speech acts, with particular application of Weigand's dialogic speech act taxonomy i.e. sequences of initiative + reactive speech acts, and the model of "discourse as recontextualisation of social practice", proposed by Theo van Leeuwen (2008), with a particular focus on the choices made by speakers for the representation of agency, as design strategy for ridiculing. Both aspects will be analysed in

direct connection with the lexical semantic level of interpretation of the ridiculing expressions, presented as the building structures of ridiculing in presidential dialogues and analysed as integrated part of the approach. An examination of the data with the help of these inquiry tools provides insight into the linguistic realisation of the dynamics of power through ridiculing, in pre-election debates, as a sub-genre of presidential discourse, and is resourceful in the identification and presentation of some relevant main communication lines used by participants in ridiculing as a dialogic speech act. Technical information about data collection and the selection criteria of the corpus, with qualitative and quantitative specifications, as well as details about the unit of analysis are also provided in section 5.

The background and contextual information shaping the dialogues considered in the present analysis is presented in some detail in section 4, where I also discuss the particularities of the voting systems in each of the three countries, the context of each debate event held ahead of the elections in question, as well as the profiles of the finalist candidates, with some border notes on several aspects which influence the talks in various ways.

The data is analysed in section 6. from a quantitative (6.1.) and qualitative perspectives (6.2.), providing insights into the particularities of ridiculing, through an examination of ridiculing expressions in local context, on the mentioned levels of interpretation, illustrating the manifestation of each ridiculing strategy, through all the representative types of ridiculing expressions, in each of the three corpora. A section is dedicated to exceptional occurrences identified in the data, which come to confirm, contradict or complete the perspectives provided by theory.

In the General discussions and comparative interpretation section (7.), I present a set of distinct tendencies and main communication lines which summarise and particularise the findings brought about by the analysis of the selected data, following up on the study's research questions (3.1.). Summing up these findings, I propose what I hope will be a valid systematic procedure for the analysis of ridiculing as a macro speech act in, and beyond, presidential dialogue.

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