

PERSUASIVE RHETORIC IN GEORGE RIDPATH'S POLITICAL WRITINGS

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Abstract

Following Fairclough's social-theoretical approach to discourse within the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis, the main concern of this paper is to gain an insight into the rhetorical strategies used by George Ridpath, a very influential Scottish journalist and pamphleteer during the Stuart period. To this end, we analyse a sample of Ridpath's political writings excerpted from one of the Whig leading journals at that time, *The Observer*, and draw attention to the different persuasive devices of verbal manipulation that Ridpath resorted to in an attempt to shape belief and defend his views in the first decades of the eighteenth century. The results obtained provide evidence for the fact that Ridpath used language as a political weapon: he attempted to influence public opinion through verbal persuasive devices like boosters, hedges, rhetorical questions and (metaphorical and non-metaphorical) dysphemistic terms, among other rhetorical devices of a lesser quantitative relevance in the corpus consulted.

Resumen

Siguiendo el enfoque socio-teórico del discurso propuesto por Fairclough dentro de la tradición del Análisis del Discurso, el objetivo de este artículo es analizar las estrategias retóricas utilizadas por George Ridpath, un influyente periodista político durante el periodo Estuardo. Con este propósito, analizamos una muestra de los escritos políticos de Ridpath extraídos de una de las más destacadas publicaciones whigs de aquella época, *The Observer*, y nos centraremos en los diferentes recursos de manipulación verbal que Ridpath utilizaba con el objeto de defender sus opiniones y manejar a los lectores durante las primeras décadas del siglo XVIII. Los resultados obtenidos demuestran que Ridpath utilizaba el lenguaje como arma política; no en vano, intentaba influir en la opinión pública por medio de recursos persuasivos como enfatizadores, atenuadores, preguntas retóricas y voces disfemísticas (tanto metafóricas como no metafóricas), entre otros mecanismos de una menor relevancia cuantitativa en el corpus consultado.

Key Words: persuasive discourse, *Palabras clave:* discurso persuasivo,

political language, press, George lenguaje político, prensa, George
 Ridpath, Discourse Analysis, Ridpath, Análisis del Discurso,
 conceptual metaphor, dysphemism. metáfora conceptual, disfemismo.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the press as a political weapon in different societies and historical time periods is well known.⁵ In current Western societies the press is considered the most reliable source of information and supposed to have a high capacity to reproduce ideologies, social conceptions and influence readers. Looking back into history, the importance of the press was even more obvious during the late Stuart period (1702-1714), when the spreading of ideas and information relied heavily on pamphlets, periodicals and newspapers, which both Whigs and Tories and the Ministry itself recognized as organs of political influence.⁶ Though it should be borne in mind that this literature was directed to a minority of the population (i.e. the governing and commercial classes), the fact remains that it greatly contributed to shaping public opinion and helped to determine, to a considerable extent, the political life of the nation. For this reason, journalists, politicians and pamphleteers made good use of printed materials to spread their ideas, move hearts and mind, achieve consensus or defend their values. To meet these ends, they resorted to a wide range of verbal persuasive devices.

Following Fairclough's social-theoretical approach to discourse within the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis, the main concern of this paper is to gain an insight into the rhetorical strategies used by George Ridpath, one of the most influential Whig journalists and pamphleteers during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. To this end, we will take a close look at a corpus of Ridpath's political writings excerpted from the political journal *The Observer* and analyze the different persuasive devices of verbal manipulation that he resorted to in an attempt to shape belief and defend his views. This seems to be a worthy enterprise, because while rhetoric has been studied for thousands of years and there is substantial body of literature on persuasive

⁵ This paper is included in the research project "George Ridpath y la Guerra de Sucesión Española" (HU20101576) financed by the University of Castilla-La Mancha in 2010.

⁶ For a detailed explanation of the role of printed materials like pamphlets, periodicals and newspapers as genres of political persuasion in late Stuart England, see López-Campillo (2009:189-195).

discourse in different fields (Schmidt and Kess 1986; Crespo-Fernández 2009, among others), including relatively recent studies devoted to manipulation in political language (Partington 2001; Charteris-Black 2006; Waddell and McKenna 2009), to the best of our knowledge, there are only two studies so far (Müllenbrock 1997 and McKim 2008) devoted to analyzing the persuasive nature of political writings in Stuart England.

This study is structured as follows. First, we analyze George Ridpath and his time. After briefly considering the implications of persuasive rhetoric in the field of political discourse, we move on to presenting the theoretical framework this study is embedded into, the methodology used and the corpus data on which it is based. Then, we analyze the different persuasive devices encountered in the corpus of Ridpath's political writings, which constitutes the main aim of this paper. A summary of the results obtained and some final remarks will bring this study to an end.

2. GEORGE RIDPATH AND HIS TIME

No previous stage in the history of Britain had proved to be as controversial as the reign of Anne Stuart (1702-1714), where matters of utmost national and international importance such as the monarchy, the Church and foreign policy were at stake and therefore party activity was unusually intense.⁷ There were many substantial issues for Whigs and Tories to feed on: the problem of the British succession, the growing power of the executive, the explosive issue of religious toleration, the question of Britain's place in the world and the conduct of her foreign policy during the War of the Spanish Succession; and these parliamentary parties appealed to the electorate for

⁷ It was in England in the early Eighteenth century where there existed the most favourable conditions for the emergence of public opinion. On the one hand, censorship and political control of the press were less severe in Great Britain compared to other European nations, with the exception of Holland. With the expiry of the *Licensing Act* in 1695, state censorship of the press ceased and an astonishing volume of political propaganda managed to come out. On the other, the emergence and expansion from mid seventeenth century of new social centres such as coffee and chocolate houses and clubs where ideas were discussed and spread was a second factor that favoured the development of a public political culture. A new type of man was emerging: the middling sort who was acquainted with and enjoyed discussing public matters without coming to blows.

support. Although the majority of the electors were firmly committed to the Tory or Whig side, a significant minority shifted sides as they were variously persuaded by the press and other agents to look favourably on one party and unfavourably on the other. In general these voters seem to have shared Tory attitudes to the Church and Continent, only siding with the Whigs when the succession appeared to be in danger (Speck 1970:114). Thus, during the reign of Queen Anne, the Tories dominated the first administrations, but in 1708 they gave way to the Whigs, till they were replaced by the Tories in 1710, when the public debate experienced another boost.

The expansion of all types of polemical literature after 1702 became a measure of the growing intensity of public political controversy and the concomitant increasing polarisation of the political parties. The controversy over the War of Spanish Succession was one of the first examples in England of a public debate of a great national issue where a wide range of polemical literary genres were represented and almost all the well-known authors such as Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift contributed to the public dispute (López-Campillo 2008).

Other less-known writers such as George Ridpath would also make undeniably influential contributions at the time to the public debate generated over different national and international issues. As McLeod pointed out about thirty years ago, “while Ridpath is mentioned in almost every recent work on the reign of Anne, he has never received the attention which he deserves” (1979:94). The situation has changed little since then, even in the field of literature and public opinion, which is quite surprising because of the influential role Ridpath fulfilled as a political propagandist in his time. For his political adversary Jonathan Swift, *The Observer* was the best country periodical, as he claimed in *The Examiner* (n° 42, 17 March 1711), but when the political debate over the peace negotiations was at its climax, Ridpath would also feel the sting of Swift’s virulent propagandistic attacks:

These devils of Grub Street rogues, that write the *Flying Post* and *Medley* in one paper, will not be quiet. They are always mauling Lord Treasurer, Lord Bolingbroke, and me. We have the dog under prosecution, but Bolingbroke is not active enough; but I hope to swinge him. He is a Scotch rogue, one Ridpath. (*The Journal to Stella*, Letter 54, October 28, 1712)

Nor will Ridpath manage to escape the lash of Pope and the members of his elite literary circle, who –as typically occurred during this time– regarded writers who produced political propaganda as nothing more than literary prostitutes:

Earless on high, stood unabash’d Defoe,
And Tutchin flagrant from the scourge below.

There Ridpath, Roper, cudgell'd might ye view,
The very worsted still look'd black and blue. (The Dunciad, Book II)

Being included within the “gallery of Dunces” presided by Defoe, although originally intended as a sign of obvious contempt, can only constitute an indisputable honor nowadays. But who was George Ridpath?

George Ridpath (1660?-1726) was a radical Whig journalist and pamphleteer who held strong anti-Catholic and Presbyterian views. Born in Berwickshire and educated in Edinburgh, he was obliged to flee to London in 1681 after five weeks' imprisonment for actively participating in the burning of an effigy of the Pope. By 1687 he was in the household of Lord Wharton, the great Whig manager in the reign of Anne. Having little money of his own, Ridpath was rumoured to be in the pay of the government and to be a spy. In 1712 he was committed to Newgate prison for libeling the government and in 1713 he fled to the continent to escape from the authorities who sought him but returned to England after 1714 when George I ascended the throne (McLeod 1979:193-194). He contributed to the great political debates of the reign of Queen Anne from 1688 to 1714, but from this year up to his death in 1726 his works can be said to have decreased both in quality and quantity. Ridpath showed his versatility writing on the most important issues of his time such as the Darien scheme, the Scottish succession, the Union of Scotland and England, the oath of abjuration, the toleration of Episcopatism in Scotland and the War of the Spanish Succession, among others.

As an essayist, he contributed to the public debate mainly through *The Flying Post* and from 1707 through *The Observer*. According to Holmes (1987:31), George Ridpath's *Flying Post* was a tower of strength to the Whigs throughout Anne's reign and mostly during the closing years when its editor was fearless in attacking the Tory peace and upholding the Hanoverian cause; but, as Müllenbrock (1997) claims, *The Observer* was the most important strictly political organ of the Whigs. On 1 April, 1702 the latter was begun by the poet and journalist John Tutchin (1660-1707), but the extreme partisanship of his writings led to his death in 1707, moment from which Ridpath took charge of the periodical.

As a champion of Whig views he awoke both philia and phobia. He provoked the rage and resentment not only of literary opponents but also of powerful politicians, militaries and the government itself, which earned him prosecution, fines and even imprisonment for what were considered to be seditious libels. What made him such a successful controversialist? We will try to answer this question by analyzing his discourse.

3. PERSUASION AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Following Schmidt and Kess (1986:2), we understand by persuasion “the process of inducing a voluntary change in someone’s attitudes, beliefs or behaviour through the transmission of a message”. Needless to say, persuasion is closely related to rhetoric, which, following Aristotle, can be defined as “the arts of persuasive discourse”, that is, the use of words to shape belief and move hearts and minds. Following the well-known theory of communicative functions introduced by Jakobson (1960), persuasive discourse implies the activation of the *directive* function of language insofar as it seeks to affect the behaviour of the addressee. In terms of the *Speech Act Theory* (Grice 1975), the discourse of persuasion performs a perlocutionary function, that is, it is oriented towards causing a particular effect on the audience.

Persuasion is an all-embracing phenomenon: it arises in a wide range of discourse forms (advertising, media discourse, religious sermons, academese, literary and translation studies, etc.) and can be approached from nearly all social sciences, including communication, sociology or history. It is, however, in the field of politics and ideology that persuasive discourse becomes more prominent: one can hardly think of any political action which does not involve using language with a persuasive purpose. As Partington notes, persuasion through language is obviously an integral part of politics: “Politics is persuasion, and persuasion is conducted predominantly through language” (2001:116).

Though command of the techniques of persuasion has been traditionally considered as a way in which the powerful members of society reinforce their power over the powerless, this has not always happened. Indeed, in some periods of history, rhetoric has been subversive of authority (Partington 2003:214). This has been the case of some of the leading journalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries like Tutchin or Ridpath, significant examples of how rhetoric can be used against power and the problems one may have to face for doing so, as commented earlier.

The process of persuasion in the political field is carried out via a wide range of rhetorical resources that politicians, journalists or commentators resort to in an attempt to persuade the audience of the importance of their views and, occasionally, downplay those of others. The resources of verbal manipulation employed in political discourse to attain persuasion are different and varied in nature. We can include indicators of overt authorial presence in the text, such as personal pronouns or self-presentation strategies; lexical choices indicative of stance, including boosters or hedges; devices intended to engage the reader,

such as direct address, appeals to shared knowledge, directives or rhetorical questions; figurative and hyperbolic language; and euphemisms and dysphemisms, among others.

George Ridpath, as a journalist and pamphleteer, was well aware of the power of words to exert political power and influence public opinion. In this respect, he claimed that Scots “should defend with their pens what their ancestors maintained so gallantly with their swords” (cited in McKim 2008:33). In accordance with this view, he resorted to emotionally loaded language which could fit his purpose to make his voice heard and shape belief. Ridpath's language of patriotism and national identity constituted a loaded weapon in his propaganda campaign. From this viewpoint, his writings can be considered to take part in the “war of words”⁸ in which other writers, like Defoe, for many years a bitter opponent of Ridpath, were also involved (McKim 2008). In this vein, one should expect a proliferation of the rhetorical devices mentioned in the preceding paragraph in Ridpath's political writings. Prior to analyzing the different persuasive devices encountered in the pages of *The Observer*, we think it is worth referring to the theoretical framework, the data and methodology used in the present piece of research.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, DATA AND METHODS

The theoretical framework which the present paper relies on is derived from Critical Discourse Analysis. More specifically, we find especially useful for our purpose here the “social-theoretical” sense of discourse initially developed by Fairclough. This scholar offers a three-dimensional concept of discourse, i.e., discourse as a piece of text, discourse as an instance of discursive practice and discourse as an instance of social practice. This scholar puts the point in the following way: “My three-dimensional approach enables relationships between discursive and social change to be assessed, and detailed properties of texts to be related systematically to social properties of discursive events as instances of social practice” (Fairclough 1992:8). We shall follow this social-theoretical approach to discourse for a particular class of discourse type like that of the political periodical. Fairclough's socially –and linguistically–

⁸ The expression *war of words* is journalese for “a sustained conflict conducted by means of the spoken or printed word; a propaganda war” (OED2).

oriented view of discourse allows us to go beyond the language analysis of texts and relate the linguistic elements and patterns found in Ridpath's writings to the social, political and historical events of Britain during the Stuart period.

As discourse is manifested in the linguistic form of a 'text' in the conception postulated by Fairclough (1992:71 and 2005),⁹ we shall consider the political periodical as a text with a social and political purpose. From this perspective, the periodical can be viewed as an instance of functional language, i.e., language that is doing some job in some context (Halliday 1985:10), insofar as the verbal devices detected in these texts perform a particular function in their context; to be more precise, they can be said to be socially oriented, and their social purpose is likely to be deciphered by exploring their observable elements and patterns. In the present piece of research, the political journal will be considered both as a "socially-oriented" practice and a discursive text type whose function as an instance of functional language is carried out via different persuasive devices, as will be explained in the next section.

The corpus is based on a sample of texts excerpted from *The Observer*, a twice-weekly political journal primarily devoted to denouncing fraud and abuse within the government founded in London in 1702 (cf. Auchter 2001:253-255). It was edited by John Tutchin, a lifelong Whig known for his vehement opinions against Tories. When he died, in 1707, it was his widow who continued to publish it until 1712, when it went out of business because of the stamp tax. Our corpus samples articles excerpted from the eighth volume of this journal, which covers from February 2, 1709, to January 14, 1710. In the present study we have specially concentrated on the issues published from February 9 up to June 18, 1709,¹⁰ because it allows the study of the author's standpoint on one of the most important issues for Great Britain, which was severely exhausted by a war which seemed impossible to bring to a conclusion: the peace negotiations between France and the allies taking place at the moment. As expected, Ridpath would act as a spokesman for the Whig faction, who defended the prosecution of the war at all costs until the Spanish Monarchy was retrieved in its integrity.¹¹ The choice for political texts excerpted from *The*

⁹ Following Fairclough's multidimensional perspective of discourse, we understand by *text* the discursive element of social events subject to a double contextualization: first, in their relation to other elements of social events; second, in their relation to social practices (Fairclough 2005).

¹⁰ Between these two dates, 35 issues would be published, about two thirds of them being devoted to the negotiations between the Bourbon powers and the allies (in particular, numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39 and 40), which gives us an idea of the significance of the question debated.

¹¹ As a result of the allies' insistence on the "No peace without Spain" policy, they will be accused of being warmongers, deliberately prolonging hostilities by making unrealistic,

Observer as the source of empirical data for this article is not at random: on the one hand, political texts are undoubtedly a breeding ground for different communicative resources and strategies to construe and attain persuasion; on the other hand, *The Observer* was one of the leading journals in the Stuart period, when, as already mentioned, it was mainly through political periodicals that journalists tried to shape belief.

As for the linguistic methods employed to analyse the sample, we searched the texts selected in their entirety for linguistic resources of persuasion and verbal manipulation. As the components of persuasion can differ considerably from one text to another, in order to organize the wide variety of verbal mechanisms that Ridpath employed to persuade the readers, we classified them according to their linguistic nature. The texts taken as examples from *The Observer* were purposefully selected as examples of persuasion in an attempt to cover a wide range of the different types of persuasive devices and techniques used by Ridpath.

5. PERSUASIVE RESOURCES IN RIDPATH'S WRITINGS

In the pages of *The Observer*, Ridpath touched on different topics in which he tried hard to defend his views and shape public opinion. As stated in the preface of the eighth volume, Ridpath deals with the problem of France and the risks of agreeing on a treaty of peace with Louis XIV, matters of public concern relating to a wide range of topics (trade, commerce and social order) and he also presents a series of critical reflections on the sermons of preachers who were meddling in political issues, like the fiery high church Henry Sacheverell.

The structure of the different issues of the volume considerably contributes to Ridpath's persuasive purpose. Throughout the volume, he employs a particular structural device which had been formerly employed by Tutchin: he presents the different topics in the form of a dialogue between two interlocutors: an anonymous countryman, Roger, an ordinary man though wise and critical, and his master, the observer, a cultivated gentleman who clearly represents Ridpath's opinions. The latter represents reason, common sense, and is in

unacceptable and even unnatural demands (Speck 1994:160). Ridpath would have to resort to his propagandistic talent to counteract this feeling that was spreading over the whole nation.

charge of interpreting and explaining the political, social, religious, economic and warlike events taking place at the time, which his interlocutor, the countryman, who represents the honest common people of Britain, informs him of. We thus find a dialogic form of discourse¹² with the presence of two active participants who engage in alternate speech and exchange ideas on the different topics Ridpath wants to deal with. This dialogic frame should by no means be underestimated. As Boden (1976:43) notes,

Persuasive discourse has a potential for dialogic quality [...]. In contrast to monological persuasion, the explicit confrontation of different perspectives which is promoted in the dialogic form, displays the process of influencing the persuadee's views and codes of interpretation in all its complexity.

In spite of the fact that the position of the master is obviously superior to that of the countryman, being more active and taking control over the dialogue on most occasions, the relationship between both parties is not totally asymmetrical. Indeed, Roger is not merely a passive listener, as he contributes with his questions, comments and wise remarks to the development of the discourse of persuasion, as we will see in the course of the analysis. In any case, though Roger is attributed an active role by Ridpath in his discourse of persuasion, the effectiveness of the dialogic nature of the eighth volume of *The Observer* as a persuasive device is reinforced if we consider the unequal status of the participants in the dialogues. Indeed, the fact that one of the participants is the 'Master' and the other is an ordinary countryman reinforces the observer's arguments and position on the different topics they deal with. Consider the following examples:

- (1) Well, Master, and what would you advice to be done, in order to prevent this, and to chastise the French King for his new Insolence and Treachery, in rejecting the Preliminaries agreed to his ministers? (June 4-8. Numb.37)
- (2) I dare not enter upon that subject, Master (...) but I am convinc'd of the Truth of what you say. (June 11-15. Numb.40)
- (3) *Country-m.* But you don't observe the Force of the Argument on the other Side, Master. The Spaniards have call'd the Duke of Anjou to their Crown; and we must allow them the same Liberty to chuse a Successor, that we take to our selves [...].
Obs. I own it, Roger: But to me it seems plain, the Argument is against you; for the Spaniards had not a Freedom of Choice as to the Duke of Anjou [...].

¹² Theoretical approaches to persuasion hardly ever devote their attention to its dialogic potential. See Boden (1976) for a comprehensive analysis of persuasion in dialogic contexts.

Country-m. I am convinc'd of the Truth of what you say, Master; and must confess, that nothing can justify his Title, but a Recognition by the Legislature of Spain fully assembl'd, and left to act without any Force or Constraint (April 13-16. Numb.22).

The three samples above are highly significant of the way the master's views are reinforced. Roger usually supports the observer's opinions in the following ways: by asking for his master's wise advice, as in (1); by totally agreeing on his master's views, as happens in (2); or by being convinced by the observer during the conversational exchange due to the soundness or reasonableness of the arguments provided in spite of their initial disagreement, as in (3). Roger's contributions to the dialogue intend to persuade the reader towards considering the topic from the master's perspective. In these examples, it must be noted that the position of the countryman is clearly inferior to that of the observer, who no doubt has the decisive voice in the matter. This structuring device constitutes a useful element in Ridpath's persuasive discourse and strongly contributes to fulfilling the writer's purposes.

In what follows we will analyse the most characteristic verbal devices of persuasion detected in the verbal exchanges between the observer and the countryman. We will start by looking at two of the most common devices used in the construction of rhetorical style: hedges and boosters.

5.1. BOOSTERS AND HEDGES

Boosters and hedges are effective persuasive strategies in Ridpath's writings. These devices increase or reduce the force of the statement and, by doing so, convey an attitude to the audience. According to Hyland (1998:350-351), *boosting* is used to reinforce "group membership and direct engagement with readers", whereas *hedging* conveys "deference, humility and respect". These devices show the writer's commitment to the truth of the statement and are indicative of different degrees of strength, ranging from very weak statements to very assertive ones. On the one hand, boosters are used to instill trust and confidence in readers due to the impression of certainty and conviction they create. Boosting is by far the rhetorical device most frequently used in the eighth volume of *The Observer* both by the master and the countryman to persuade readers to their views. We find, for example, the adverbs *certainly* and *indeed* and the expressions *I make no question, there's too much truth in it, we*

have no reason to doubt, I make no doubt or I warrant you, just to mention a few. The certainty and assertiveness of this device fits Ridpath's purpose of attacking the French King Louis XIV and his tyrannical power particularly well. Take the example below, in which the observer employs three boosters in the same statement (*I don't wonder*, *certainly* and *we need no doubt*) to convince the reader of the fact that French people cannot stand their King's tyrannical power:

- (4) *I don't wonder*¹³ that the French King should talk so, Roger; for, to put 'em in hopes of Peace abroad, is the best way to prevent their making War upon his tyranny at home, of which his people are *certainly* weary and *we need no doubt*, that they would soon cast off the Yoke of his absolute power, could they once attempt it with safety. (April 2-6. Numb.19)

In the same vein, the observer uses the booster *as I have plainly proved* to assure his interlocutor (and, by extension, the readership) that France represents a more serious threat to peace and stability in Great Britain than Germany:

- (5) *As I have plainly prov'd*, that we are in more Danger from the Bigotry of France, than that of Germany, 'tis as easy to prove we are more in danger from the French than the German Tyranny. (March 23-26. Numb.17)

As pointed out before, boosters are not only used by the observer. Roger frequently uses them to agree on his master's opinion and, by so doing, reinforce his views. To this purpose, he resorts to expressions like *I am of your mind*, *you have made it very plain* or *you have said enough to prove*, among many others. The latter appears in the following sample in which the countryman agrees on the French threat his master takes for granted in (6):

- (6) *You have said enough to prove* that the House of Bourbon is now more addicted to Bigotry than the House of Austria. (March 23-26. Numb.17)

Apart from using boosters to agree with his master, Roger also employs them to show full commitment to his own statements. This is the case of the following text, in which fears about the loosening of Britain's control over its territories are intermingled with fears about a possible agreement on a peace treaty with France:

- (7) [...] since the Honour of our Queen and Parliament is so far engaged against making a Peace with France, 'till Spain, and the Dominions belonging to it [...] it would break poor Roger's heart, if King Charles should not be able to maintain his ground there. *I am sure* and I

¹³ Hereafter, the terms and expressions that we want to highlight in the texts offered as examples will appear in italics.

practically pray every night, that he may not only do so, but recover all Spain and the West Indies. (February 16-19. Numb.6)

Let us now consider the presence of hedges in our corpus. Hedges –or *downtoners* as they are also called– help the persuader communicate more precisely the degree of truth and accuracy in his statements. Hedging is a communicative strategy motivated by politeness as a sociocultural phenomenon and related to the writer's desire to maintain social relationships and gain the confidence of the readership. Hedges have a lowering effect on the illocutionary force of the statement and by doing so, contribute to preserve the social prestige (i.e. *face*) of the interlocutor.¹⁴ After all, one should bear in mind that the presence of hedges in political discourse is motivated by conventions of tact and politeness and, from this viewpoint, hedging can be considered as an effective euphemistic strategy to maintain the harmony in communicative exchanges, as Crespo-Fernández (2005) notes.

The importance of hedges as a persuasive resource is out of doubt: as the persuader does not dare to take full responsibility for the truth of the utterance, hedges convey an image of truthfulness, reflect the persuader's humility and confer deference to readers. Because of this, hedging contributes to assuring a positive interaction with readers, which is of key relevance in order to convince and persuade them. Sometimes this self-effacing or unassuming attitude is shown directly as when the observer makes comments such as *I would give it as my humble Opinion* (June 4-8. Numb.37) but on other occasions it is less apparent. Thus, in the following passage, the observer employs several devices shown in italics that function as hedges to convey the idea of the disastrous state of the French King's affairs, which is more effective and convincing than a straightforward assertion:

- (8) The People *must be reduc'd* to a very great Degree of Desperation, when under such an absolute Government as his, they dare break open his Magazines [...]. This, together with his Obstinacy in refusing the Demands of the Allies, *looks as if*, by the righteous Judgment of God, his Heart were harden'd like that of Pharaoh [...]. To me *it seems* plain, that Heaven has mark'd him out for Destruction; but if the Confederates let him go with any Thing of his unjust Conquests, [...] the divine Justice *may, in all Probability*, revenge it on the Confederates. (April 9-12. Numb. 21)

¹⁴ The notion of *face* (Goffman 1967) is related to the self-image that the participants in a communicative act claim for themselves. Hedging responds to the speaker's need to soften potential social conflicts derived from his assertions which may alter his or her prestige, preserving thus the speaker's positive face. For a full account of the positive and negative dimensions of face, see the seminal work by Brown and Levinson (1987).

It must be noted that, from a pragmatic approach, these hedges indicate how the Maxim of Quality¹⁵ proposed by Grice (1975) is maintained. Quality hedges, as Brown and Levinson (1987:164) argue, provide sincerity conditions: by using hedges such as *may* and *must*, or verbs such as *seem* or *look (as if)*, for instance, the writer does not totally commit himself to the truth of his statement and, in this way, he does not transmit information that might lead to false inferences.

Similarly, the countryman's criticism concerning the military operations of the French Army acquires a sense of objectivity insofar as he resorts to the clause *if I remember right* to refer to the amount of French soldiers that invaded Port St. John:

- (9) I have seen Letters from Newfoundland, which give an Account that a small Numb. of French Men from Placencia, not above 50, *if I remember right*, have made themselves Masters of Port St. John in that country, by Treachery. (February 9-12. Numb.4)

Such sense of objectivity is also attained by the idea of flexibility the observer transmits to the readership through the use of another conditional clause:

- (10) What Sort of Partition do those Men propose, Roger? *If it be a reasonable one*, I am not so fond of my own Opinion, but I can easily abandon it, when I hear good Arguments against what I have said (April 13-16. Numb.22).

The use of hedges in (8), (9) and (10) contributes to creating an impression of objectivity attached to the interlocutor's statements. And it goes without saying that this objectivity is an important factor in the discourse of persuasion.

5.2. RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Rhetorical questions are used in political discourse for its persuasive effect. When such biased questions are used, a reply is not expected from the reader or

¹⁵ Grice put forward four Conversational Maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner) that language users are supposed to adhere to in the attempt to achieve a successful communication. The Maxim of Quality was formulated as follows: "Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" (1975:6).

listener, who is left to think about what is expected to be an obvious answer. In so doing, these questions, far from seeking information, assert or deny something in a convincing way. For this reason, rhetorical questions have the force of a strong assertion. Besides, rhetorical questions tend to reinforce the emotive nuances of the message: they obviously do not leave the reader indifferent to what the answer is and to what the writer means.

This device is frequently used both by the observer and the countryman in the issues of the journal. In the following example, the Master makes a series of questions for which the answers are obvious in an attempt to reinforce his views:

- (11) Pray, Roger, ask those gentlemen, why we and the other Confederates should not have a Compensation for the Blood and Treasure we have spent in the War, as well as the Dutch? And if such a compensation must be made, whether it must be reasonable, that it should be at the charge of the French, who have unjustly invaded their Neighbours, or at charge of the Spaniards, who have been unjustly invaded, and have had a successor imposed upon them contrary to their fundamental Laws, and solemn Treaties and Oaths? I take it, that in all Courts of Justice [...]. (April 13-16. Numb.22)

The force of this persuasive device is also evident in the text that follows. The countryman employs a series of rhetorical questions effectively so as to attack Louis XIV and warn the readers against the feared consequences of an invasion of the French Army:

- (12) *Country-m.* For who will secure us that the French King, and his Grandson, the Duke of Anjou, when once the Confederacy is broke, and that they have got a Time to breathe, will not send over the St. Germain's family with a Fleet and an Army, to give us another Sort of Visit than their last? Who can hinder them from sending some of the Millions they receive annually from the West Indies, to arm and animate our Malcontents at home to join them? [...] who can assure us that they will not attempt to drive us totally out of the West Indies?

Obs. You say very well, Roger. (May 4-7. Numb.28)

As seen in the two examples above, the master and the countryman's questions obviously succeed in the context of the communicative exchange because, as Rhode (2006:135) notes, the "discourse participants share a prior commitment to similar, obvious and extreme answers". In this regard, as this author points out, rhetorical questions are "biased, yet at the same time uninformative."

5.3. DYSPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE

With the purpose of shaping the readers' beliefs and not leaving them indifferent to Ridpath's opinions expressed by the two participants in the dialogue, the Scottish journalist has recourse to negatively loaded words, both metaphorical and non-metaphorical, to express his attitude of extreme contempt towards the French Crown, Tory politicians and members of the Clergy. In other words, Ridpath resorts to the explicit advocacy of dysphemism¹⁶ to attack his opponents and, in doing so, attract the readers' attention and convince them of their views. With this in mind, Ridpath employs intemperate and coarse language which, on some occasions, takes the form of a direct insult. Ridpath thus uses language as a weapon in order to persuade, as we will see in what follows.

Metaphorical language no doubt constitutes a potent source for dysphemistic reference in Ridpath's writings. Through metaphor, he attacks his opponents, as happens in the following case, in which the observer uses animal-related insults. He considers French rulers as lions and ranging bears:

- (13) If there had been no such treaties, they were never allow'd, by the Laws of God or Nature, instead of a lawful Governor, to choose *a lion or a ranging bear*, as Solomon calls a wicked Ruler, who will break over all Fences, and commit depredations upon his Neighbours. (April 13-16. Numb. 22)

Following the well-known Conceptual Metaphor Theory model initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980),¹⁷ this insult is based on the association between a person and an animal by virtue of the conceptual metaphor HUMANS ARE ANIMALS or, more precisely, VIOLENT HUMAN BEHAVIOUR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR, proposed by Kövecses (2002:122-125). In (12), a wolf is used as the source domain in a conceptualization which provides the raw material for offence and insult. This conceptual association allows us to transfer the attributes and behaviour of this animal to human beings, who are seen therefore

¹⁶ Following Allan and Burridge (2006:31) we understand by dysphemism "a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance".

¹⁷ It is not our purpose here to analyse in depth the fruitful cognitive model of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Suffice it to say that this cognitive approach claims that metaphor is a device with the capacity to structure our conceptual system, providing, at the same time, a particular understanding of the world and a way to make sense of our experience. From this standpoint, metaphor is defined as "a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system" (Lakoff 1993:203); that is, a mapping or set of conceptual correspondences from a source domain (the realm of the physical or more concrete reality) to a target domain (the concept we want to delimit and reify).

capable of committing depredations upon the properties of others. At the same time, and regardless of the animal used as source domain in the corpus consulted (a lion, bear, fox or wolf), the effect of comprehending humans as animals is to deny their humanity, which reinforces the intentional force of the insult.

Similarly, the observer employs the conceptualization HUMANS ARE HUNTERS, or, more precisely, considering the context of the text below, THE SOLDIER IS A HUNTER (Wills and Steuter 2009) when he denounces that some politicians would like to see Scotland under Louis XIV's tyrannical power. By virtue of the conceptualization which equates a soldier to a hunter, French soldiers are referred to as *Hunts-men* and Scotland conceived of as a *Hunting-Field*:

- (14) You know there's a set of men in the world, who have long ago been for making Scotland a *Hunting-Field*, and no doubt but those of arbitrary principles and restless Passions, would be glad the French were the *Hunts-men*. (February 12-16. Numb.5)

By virtue of this conceptual association, French people are conceived in terms of hunters whose aim is to make a hunting-field out of Scotland, which is ultimately seen as the prey. The implications of this conceptual metaphor are that French people are invaders ready to invade and devastate Scotland. Ridpath's purpose here is evident: he tries to warn his fellow Scots against the intentions of the enemies of Scotland and the potential danger of the French Crown.

Before moving to the non-figurative dysphemistic language, it should be noted that the two dysphemistic metaphors commented above present hyperbolic overtones, that is, they involve the exaggerated expression of a negative appreciation of French rulers as wolves in (13) and of French people as hunters in (14). By considerably upgrading the negative features of the referents being dealt with, Ridpath tries to make his readership agree with his views. Hyperbolic metaphor is thus a useful persuasive device in the corpus consulted.

The direct verbal aggression is not only carried out through metaphors. Ridpath also employs non-figurative language to attack his opponents and denounce what he believes unfair political practice. In agreement with the emotionally loaded language of patriotism so characteristic of his political writings,¹⁸ he resorts to terms of explicit reference without any verbal mitigation. Many of the terms Ridpath employs throughout the volume express

¹⁸ In the same impassioned terms, Ridpath described the interference of the English Parliament into Scotland's attempt to found a colony at Darien in his tract *Scotland's Grievances relating to Darien*, written in 1700 (McKim 2008:38-40).

anger and a considerable degree of verbal violence. Adjectives play a crucial role in the verbal attack that abounds in the corpus. To be precise, in order to carry out his purpose, Ridpath has recourse to *evaluative adjectives*, i.e., those subjective adjectives that reflect an evaluation in relation to a norm or ideology (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997:84).¹⁹ These adjectives are appropriate for creating emphasis and attaching emotive value to the noun; for this reason, they are especially useful for manipulating the reader. Evaluative adjectives with offensive overtones pervade the pages of *The Observer* to qualify the French monarchy and its rulers: *arbitrary, treacherous, barbarous, dissolute, wicked* and *tyrannical*, just to mention a few. Consider the example that follows:

- (15) The Dutch are too wise, and know their own danger too well, from the *exorbitant* power and *despotic* government of France, to be for a *dishonourable* Peace. (March 23-26. Numb.16)

The adjectives *exorbitant*, *despotic* and *dishonourable* are emotionally loaded words with a strong appeal to the readership which Ridpath uses to denounce French policy concerning European affairs.

In the same vein, together with evaluative adjectives, Ridpath also resorts to dysphemistic abstract nouns to persuade the readership of his point of view. This is the case of the observer's attack to the French King through a concurrence of the abstract nouns *tyranny, perjury, oppression, rapine* and *persecution*. Consider the following text, in which the juxtaposition of the dysphemistic terms in the same sentence increases the criticism carried out:

- (16) The divine Justice may execute revenge upon him and his subjects for the *Tyranny, Perjury, Oppression, Bloodshed, Rapine* and *Persecution* they have been guilty of, against their own Country-Men, and all the other nations in Europe. (April 9-12. Numb.21)

In the lexical items seen in this section it is their emotional meaning (over their denotational meaning) what springs to mind and makes the words (either metaphorical or not) readily accessible for dysphemistic use and for Ridpath's persuasive aims. As Geeraerts (1997:100) points out, this emotional meaning involves the expression of values and evaluations on the part of the speaker with respect to the referent and contributes to building stereotypes towards social groups.

¹⁹ Kerbrat-Orecchioni's typology of subjective adjectives distinguishes between affective and evaluative adjectives. This author includes axiological (i.e. evaluation in relation to a system of values) and non axiological adjectives (i.e. evaluation in relation to norm) within evaluative adjectives (1997).

5.4. OTHER DEVICES

To a lesser extent, Ridpath also employs other rhetorical devices, mainly of an emphatic nature, to shape belief and form public opinion against politicians. One of them is the use of *parallel structure*, a device which consists in using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. It is used to create emphasis and remembrance of one's words with a persuasive intention as can be seen in the instance below produced by the Countryman and in different examples cited above:²⁰

- (17) Why truly, Master, when I consider'd *what a Man of Blood he has been, how barbarously he has persecuted primitive Christianity, how zealously he has supported spiritual Whoredom and Idolatry* [...]. (June 1-4, Numb.36)

We have detected a case of *persuasion through opposites*, in which Roger attacks politicians through contrast of ideas in a case of inverted parallelism that appears in the following extract, which is technically an example of a *chiasmus*, that is, a sentence with two parts in which the second is syntactically balanced with the first, but with its parts reversed:

- (18) They prorogu'd and dissolv'd Parliaments at Pleasure; they supported ill Ministers, and hinder'd the Influence of good ones; they made their Princes *take their Friends for their Foes and their Foes for their Friends*. (February 9-12. Numb.4)

Persuasion is also attained through *consent from the interlocutor*, as already said at the beginning of this section. In the text that follows, Roger agrees on his master's opinion that the Allies should be together to fight against the tyranny of the French Crown:

- (19) God bless you, Master, *you have satisfy'd me* that the restoring of the Elites of France is no such impracticable thing, as I find some people imaginable, were it once but heartily attempted. (April 2-6. Numb.19)

By agreeing so fervently with his master, the readership is implicitly induced to do the same, following the example of an ordinary man who has proved through the dialogue with his master to be wise and accurate in his comments and remarks, as also happens in (2), (3) and (6).

²⁰ Parallel structures have appeared in (4) –repetition of the to-infinitive: *to put/ to prevent*–; (11) –in the relative clauses *who have / who have*–; and (12), in which the rhetorical questions present a parallel pattern: *who can [...] / who can[...]?*

*Informative-presupposition cleft sentences*²¹ also serve Ridpath's purpose to convince the readership. In the following sample the cleft sentence indicates the high degree of confidence that the speaker has about the verifiability of his contribution and, because of this, constitutes a useful device to persuade the audience to accept his point of view.

- (20) [...] and 'tis our Happiness, that her Majesty acts accordingly in Perfect Harmony with her Great Council, the Parliament. (March 16-19. Numb.14)

Finally, it is worth noting that the observer –and to a lesser extent the countryman– support their arguments with *supposedly highly credible and solid evidence*. Thus, the observer, for example, continuously resorts to biblical references, –an unquestionable source of truth at the time– as well as to well-known and talented scholars, philosophers and writers and/or their works as a means to support many of his arguments. For example, in the text that follows, the observer resorts to a supposedly well-known author to persuade the British public opinion of the necessity to crush France:

- (21) I am not alone in that Opinion, Roger. The ingenious Author of *The Desolation and Ruin of France demonstrated*, who is a Person of Quality of that Country [...] and one that by his Writings appears to understand Politics, and the Interest of his Country very well, says expressly that nothing but that can possibly restore France to any Measure of Prosperity (April 9-12. Numb.21)

In the same vein, the observer uses figures in order to give more credibility to his ideas and thus conveys a sense of objectivity in his criticism of the French barbarism in Newfoundland. Take the example below:

- (22) [...] the Newfoundlanders had been very often expos'd to the Insults of the French, who, in Jan. 1704, with 600 Men, surpriz'd, burnt and destroy'd all the Settlements, Habitations [...] murder'd many and carri'd off 200 of the Inhabitants. (February 12-16. Numb.5)

Here the reference to the exact number of soldiers who invaded Newfoundland and the hostages that were taken performs a twofold function: first, it helps the reader to trust the observer and believe in his opinions; second, it effectively contributes to building a sense of fear in the reader. After all, we should bear in mind that fear is very useful to have people under one's control, as those who are afraid are more sensitive and likely to be convinced.

²¹ According to Prince (1978:899), informative-presupposition clefts “mark a piece of information as fact, known to some people although not yet known to the intended hearer.”

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

The research carried out in this paper provides evidence for the fact that Ridpath's emotionally-loaded language was used as a political and social weapon at a time when pamphlets and periodicals were recognized as powerful organs of influence. Indeed, we have demonstrated that in the issues of *The Observer* he attempted to influence public opinion and persuade readers to his points of view through verbal devices of persuasion like boosters, hedges, rhetorical questions and dysphemistic metaphorical and non-metaphorical terms. To a lesser extent, he also resorted to the use of other rhetorical strategies to shape belief such as of parallel structures, opposites to present an idea, the initial consent from the interlocutor, informative-presupposition cleft sentences and the use of solid evidence to support his arguments.

It should be noted that Ridpath's emotionally-loaded language is a marked feature of his rhetoric of patriotism. Indeed, his impassioned language reveals a strong patriotic feeling and a firm opposition to what he believed unfair or a threat to the nation. The patriotic appeal is thus pervasive throughout the issues of the volume of the journal that constitutes our corpus and determines, to a great extent, the verbal devices employed by the journalist.

It is also interesting to stress that Ridpath resorts to a wide range of persuasion devices, some of which are very different in nature and purpose, for example boosters and hedges. The coexistence of these devices establishes a balance between the assertivity the interlocutor wants to give to his opinions and the degree of uncertainty or caution which is necessary to resort to in order to show deference to and convince his readers. In this respect, it is worth noting that Ridpath seems to be well aware of the need to engage with readers as a prerequisite to persuade them to adopt his views. To this end, he resorts to hedges as a way to ensure politeness.

The use of dysphemistic language is important in Ridpath's rhetoric style. To attack his opponents, he commonly employs metaphorical terms of abuse and words of explicit reference to distasteful realities. Generally speaking, he uses language which expresses anger and reveals a considerable degree of verbal violence. After all, one should bear in mind that good propagandists or polemicists try hard to attract their audience's attention and not leave the readers indifferent to the message. And it goes without saying that an effective way to move the audience is by overtly using offensive and disrespectful language, however objectionable this may be.

On 19 February, 1713, when Ridpath was tried for being the author of three libels in *The Observer*, the attorney-general said that he "had for some

years past outwent all his predecessors in scandal.” Indeed, as we hope to have demonstrated, Ridpath was a great polemicist and a skilful journalist who mastered the art of persuasion and used words as weapons. Hence the attorney-general’s opinion.

We must finally admit that the analysis of Ridpath’s persuasive rhetoric presented here can obviously make no claim to being complete or exhaustive, given the limited number of issues that constitute the corpus. Though we are aware that relatively large corpora are needed to reach valid conclusions in quantitative terms, we honestly believe that the corpus data used here can be both reasonably representative of the way persuasive techniques were put into practice in political journals during the Stuart period and illuminating in the search for a wider and comprehensive account of the features of persuasive discourse in eighteenth-century political texts.

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