

***“L’enfer, c’est les autres”.***

**Lexical ammunition in  
the fight between the  
celestially good and the  
infernally bad**



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## 1. Introduction

The basic objective of rhetoric is the efficient use of language for the purpose of persuasion. This goal is reached, once the sender has managed to turn his or her point of view into a generally accepted one (cf. UEDING/STEINBRINK 2011<sup>5</sup>, 1). Persuasion hence consists in trying to get the audience as addressee to give up their own position in favor of the sender’s (cf. BRETON 2000, 79; 2008, 9; DANBLON 2005, 13). Obviously, the addressee cannot be forced to adopt a new point of view, but persuasion is more sophisticated anyway. The addressee is skillfully led to the new point of view by the speaker without realizing how they are influenced. New perspectives are gradually opened up to them and at best, they eventually realize themselves that the only sensible option is to follow the speaker. If this works out, the addressee has the impression of having decided to change their mind themselves which is important for their self-esteem. The crucial question from the linguistico-rhetorical point of view, however, is *how* the addressee is familiarized with the new position. In other words, the key issue is to find out which are the linguistico-rhetorical strategies the sender resorts to in order to persuade the addressee.

Language is the basic and principal instrument of rhetoric. Yet, language is a highly complex phenomenon, which can be used for strategic purposes in many different ways. My politolinguistic model<sup>1</sup> of discourse analysis (DANLER 2020) consists of five domains: morpho-syntax, lexicology, cognitive semantics, cognitive pragmatics and argumentation. The five of them allow revealing insights into the linguistico-rhetorical art of persuasion. Morpho-syntactic analyses have probably been least common in the field of discourse analysis even though they do shed light onto important, otherwise neglected or overlooked linguistic strategies (cf. DANLER 2007). Cognitive semantics is at the interface between linguistics and cognitive sciences. Pragmatics deals with the use of language rather than with language as a system and consequently also focuses more on linguistic strategies than on linguistic characteristics in a formal sense. Argumentation is not strictly linguistic in the proper sense. The lexical approach, on the other hand, has been widely used in linguistico-rhetorical analyses. As a matter of fact, it seems to have proved to be the most revealing linguistic approach for rhetorical purposes. Therefore, I will choose this approach for the present brief study of Perón's famous speech of August 31<sup>st</sup> 1955, *Cuando uno de los nuestros caiga, caerán cinco de ellos* ("When one of ours dies, five of theirs will die").

A characteristic of political speeches is the opposition between the positively connotated in-group and the negatively connotated out-group. The in-group embodies all the positive characteristics, which are transmitted either explicitly or implicitly, whereas the out-group represents the exact opposite and therefore appears as the epitomisation of evil. Hence the *celestial good* refer to the in-group whereas the *infernally bad* stand for the out-group.

The metaphorical short formula *l'enfer, c'est les autres* ("hell is other people"), seems to be self-explanatory. Yet, there is much more to it than just cheap *enemy-bashing*. The statement stems from Sartre's *Huis clos* ("No Exit"). As it turns out in the play though, other people are not hell because of their evilness, malignity or diabolicalness, which, however, is a widespread misunderstanding. The play gradually unveils that we perceive those people as hell, with whom we have untruthful relationships because it is in those relationships where we tend to show our true faces and so other people see who we really are and that frightens us. Thus, other people see facets of our personalities which we do not see because we do not want to see them, let alone, identify with them. And yet, we cannot help sensing the way other people see us and feel about us. Consequently, it is the other

<sup>1</sup> The term *politolinguistics* was first coined by BURKHARDT in 1996.

people's view of us which ends up influencing the way we see ourselves. For this reason, our self-perception eventually depends to a certain degree on how we are perceived by other people. Seen from this perspective, it becomes understandable that one wants to get rid of one's enemies because they turn out to be a manifest threat to one's own artistically elaborated and well-protected self-concept.

In a certain way this concept can also be applied to opposing political identities and this is what we want to deal with here. Our example is classical populism in Latin America, which is prototypically represented by Juan Perón in Argentina, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico and to a certain extent also by José María Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador. In the present case-study it is my objective to show by which lexical means Perón portrays his enemies as devilish or infernal and, on the other hand, his followers as angelic or celestial.

## **2. Juan Perón and classical populism in Argentina**

Next, a brief historical review will contextualize Perón's words and a summary of the speech will convey an overall picture of what Perón said. Only contextually embedded can the dichotomy between the celestially good and the infernally bad as subjects of the speech be fully understood.

### **2.1 The economic and political conditions of Juan Perón's rise**

President Hipólito Yrigoyen was overthrown in 1930. On September 6<sup>th</sup> the insurgents under General Uriburu assaulted the seat of government where they met with little resistance. This was the *trágico trauma* of the Argentinian history and the beginning of endemic militarism in the country (cf. ZANATTA 2009, 24). Congress was dissolved and Uriburu was appointed President by the High Court. It was mainly the upper classes that had resented Yrigoyen's commitment to the middle and working classes and therefore wanted to get rid of him. In the 1920s the idea of a national state had not yet entered people's conscience, besides, the *caudillos* continued to have much power over the humble population (cf. WALDMANN 1996, 911; WERZ 2008<sup>2</sup>, 286). Eventually, it was the Great Depression, leading to a dramatic fall of the standard of living, unemployment, rural exodus and general dissatisfaction all over the country, which caused and accelerated profound changes in society. The belief in economic liberalism was shaken and much of the trust in democracy had been lost. Retrospectively, modernism seemed to have threatened the Argentinian identity at its root. Law and order appeared to be the solution and

authoritarianism was considered the new panacea. Protectionism was supposed to strengthen domestic economy, so it seemed logical to limit free trade. Socialism, communism, Freemasonry but also capitalism and materialism were seen as the big enemies of progress and prosperity. Nationalism, on the other hand, started to see a big upswing then. It encompassed the nation and the people as a whole. The nation and the people were perceived as something homogeneous and this is why every kind of pluralism was considered illogical, implausible and even unnatural. Ideological diversification, the plurality of political parties and democracy were despised. The nation was understood as some kind of organic formation and that *organism* was supposed to constitute the ideological basis for corporatism, which would become a really important issue during Perón's presidency.<sup>2</sup> The military was growing stronger and it was supposed to protect the country against immoral liberalism and capitalist selfishness. Yet, what characterized the 1930s in Argentina, the so-called *década infame*, the *infamous decade*, was random authoritarianism and economic exploitation (cf. WALDMANN 1974, 55–59). When in 1943, after the *infamous decade*, Robustiano Patrón Costas, a member of the corrupt and fraudulent oligarchy from Salta, was proposed as presidential candidate, even the military felt that the mark had been overstepped. What followed was a military coup. This military coup triggered a truly nationalistic revolution, which aimed first to lay the basis for a stable authoritarian political system, second to foster industrial development, especially in arms industry, and third to definitely eradicate liberalism as well as communism. All political parties were dissolved, censorship was intensified, schools and universities were cleansed, many communists were imprisoned, the freedom of assembly was restricted and torture increased. This was the overall situation in which Perón was first arrested and put into jail but only to be elected President on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

Perón's idea was to tread a third path (cf. TAGGART 2000, 64) between capitalism and socialism, laid out on the basis of corporatism (cf. WERZ 2003, 49). According to Perón there was no alternative to national harmony. Everything else would be destructive for the nation. Perón painted a gloomy picture of unscrupulous and aggressive industrials for the already intimidated working class to make sure that they would follow him. On the other hand, he warned the upper class and especially the industrials against the threatening proletariat (cf. VILAS 1994, 136). So Peronism was truly double-edged, heterogeneous and contradictory. By supporting the working class, Perón appeared to be extremely progressive. He saw to it that the workers' salaries were raised, that they got paid vacation, pen-

<sup>2</sup> Perón was part of the government from 1943 onwards.

sions and medical care. The price for that was absolute loyalty. Perón aimed to integrate the working class into his system and to gradually eliminate every kind of opposition. At the same time, Perón demanded important concessions from the middle and upper classes. In return, he would keep the working class under control (cf. ROLIM CAPELATO 2001, 152). State, politics and civil society kept fusing and corporate structures kept growing and expanding. Perón saw himself primarily as *conductor* (cf. AMARAL 2009, 30; FREIDENBERG 2007, 83). He was progressive and cooperative but also repressive and authoritarian. His carrot and stick policy was meant to establish himself as the only center of power in the country (cf. HOROWITZ 2012<sup>2</sup>, 34; PRADO 1981, 67; ROLIM CAPELATO 2001, 145). Perón always attached great importance to the personal contact with the people. He was convinced that this was the only way of tying those magic bonds between a people and its leader. Through his Manichaean and moralizing rhetoric, Perón was able to organize the masses and to instill a strong feeling of belonging together in them. On the other hand, he managed to create clear-cut enemy images in his discursive construction of the *other*.

## 2.2 Contents of Perón's speech *Cuando uno de los nuestros caiga, caerán cinco de ellos* ("When one of ours dies, five of theirs will die")

In this speech, delivered on August 31<sup>st</sup> 1955 (PERÓN 2010), Perón reminds the audience that the *Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires had just witnessed an outrageous massacre, committed by public enemies, in which two hundred innocent citizens had lost their lives. Yet the generous and indulgent Peronists were willing to forgive for the sake of peace. However, the enemies' answer was hypocrisy, violence, offensive speeches and aggressive pamphlets. It was obvious that they did not want peace. According to Perón, there was only one possible conclusion to draw: Violence had to be answered by still more violence. Anybody who resisted state authority could be killed by any Argentinian henceforth. The true Argentinian people themselves, i.e. the Peronists, had to see to it that peace and order were restored. Five Anti-Peronists would be killed for every dead Peronist. The public enemies, i.e. the Anti-Peronists, pretended to be for freedom and justice but only to reach their own goals. What they really wanted was to return to the situation of 1943. The Peronists would have to fight together in order to avoid that, otherwise all the recent achievements would be lost again. As the Anti-Peronists did not want peace, they should get a bitter fight instead and the Peronists were supposed to fight until the last enemy would be eliminated. The nation and especially its economy needed peace, so peace had to be restored. Any kind of violence was justified to achieve that goal.

### 3. Lexicology, the lexical and the pragma-lexical approaches

Lexicology deals with the structure of the vocabulary. It is about how to classify words, how to group them together, and how to account for their origin and history. The lexical approach to discourse, however, is about the strategic functions of words in discourse. Pragmatics, on the other hand, is about the use of language in general, whereas the pragma-lexical approach is about the use of individual words. In what follows, we will first deal with the lexical and then with the pragma-lexical approach to discourse.

#### 3.1 The lexical approach

Words are never good or bad, positive or negative. Yet, words are used to present something or somebody in a good or in a bad light. What is considered good or bad in a given society largely depends on *doxa*, i.e. on societal values. The words *friendship* and *enmity*, for example, refer to opposing social relations. The evaluation of those relations is of ethical, moral, ideological, and maybe religious but not of linguistic nature. A political speech is usually not neutral but it judges people, ideologies, actions and achievements. For this reason, it is revealing to find out the connotation of the words used in reference to the different groups of people that appear in a speech. In this way the *celestially good* as well as the *infernally bad* can be identified and categorized.

According to the ethical and moral values of a Western civilization, such as the Argentinian, the key words<sup>3</sup> used by Perón in the above-mentioned speech will be classified into six categories: *miranda* vs. *anti-miranda*, flag words vs. stigma words, program words as well as swearwords. First of all, however, it has to be clarified what *key words* are. The term is anything but clear and, as expected, there are many different definitions. LIEBERT's dynamic concept of keywords is based on the sociological idea of group identity. Social groups want to know who they are, where they come from and where they go. Words which give answers to these existential questions are key words for the respective group according to LIEBERT (2003). Key words contain an evaluative dimension and often even have implicit directive functions (cf. BACHEM 1979, 63–65; SCHRÖTER 2009, 20). Sometimes they seem to communicate complex argumentations which, however, turn

<sup>3</sup> The rudimentary categorization of key words used here is based on Burkhardt's much more elaborate and complete classification of key words (cf. BURKHARDT 2003).

out to be hidden fallacies. Formally, key words need not necessarily be individual words. They can also be more complex expressions in the sense of syntagmatic units. *Ofrecer la paz* or *ofrecer perdón* will be considered *key words* because they are meant to convey *key concepts* characterizing the referent. In this case it is the concept of [being peaceloving] which is supposed to be associated with the Peronists. At any rate, KLEIN (1989, 11) considers key words to be the main weapon in political dispute because they fulfill the three central functions of political discourse: They describe, they evaluate and they appeal. Before classifying the key words in Perón's speech, the above-mentioned categories need to be briefly explained, though.

Miranda are key words which are positively connotated in a given society regardless of any specific ideology. *Fairness* or *justice* would be good examples. The left, the right and the center of the political spectrum claim to stand for fairness and justice. The signified behind the signifier will not be the same for the different parties, though. Anti-miranda are the opposite. All political camps distance themselves from the concepts represented by anti-miranda. *Greed for profit* or *injustice* would be examples for this category. Flag words are positively connotated key words but only according to certain ideologies or political positions. For opposing ideologies or political positions those words are stigma words. The topic of *wealth tax*, which has recently been discussed in various member states of the European Union, clearly illustrates the idea. For left-wing parties it is a flag word whereas for ultraconservative right-wing parties it is a stigma word. Generally speaking, stigma words are negatively connotated key words which are associated with a certain ideology. Program words are key words which translate operational concepts. *Cooperation*, *development* or *pacification* are just three examples which indicate strategic plans. The sixth category is the one of swear words. Swear words are offensive words which are used to denounce the opponent who cannot even defend himself or herself. *Public enemy*, *betrayer of the nation*, *instigator* or simply *criminal* are key words which are occasionally used as swear words in political speeches to refer to the political opponent without any further explanations as to why the term is used.

As expected, in Perón's speech the miranda, flag words and program words refer to the Peronists whereas the anti-miranda, stigma words and swear words are addressed to the Anti-Peronists. The following categorization will yield the corresponding images (cf. DANLER 2020, 217–220).

### 3.1.1 Miranda

<i>la grandeza de los demás</i>	[recognize] the greatness of other people
<i>[...] hemos ofrecido [...] nuestra paz</i>	[...] we offered (our) peace [...]
<i>[...] tranquilidad entre el gobierno, sus instituciones y el pueblo [...]</i>	[...] peace between the government, its institutions and the people [...]
<i>prueba de [...] prudencia, [...] prueba de nuestra energía</i>	proof of [...] our caution, [...] proof of our strength
<i>justicia</i>	justice
<i>la razón</i>	reason
<i>calma</i>	calmness
<i>paz y tranquilidad</i>	peace and quiet

### 3.1.2 Anti-miranda

<i>infamia de los enemigos del pueblo</i>	infamous actions of the public enemies
<i>afrenta al pueblo</i>	offense of the people
<i>voluntad criminal</i>	criminal volition
<i>discursos superficiales e insolentes</i>	superficial and impertinent speeches
<i>hipocresía</i>	hypocrisy
<i>procedimientos subversivos</i>	subversive procedures
<i>violencia</i>	violence
<i>los que conspiren o inciten</i>	those who conspire [or] incite
<i>una acción violenta</i>	a violent action
<i>[...] infamia, [...] insidia y [...] traición</i>	[...] disgrace, [...] furtiveness and [...] treason

### 3.1.3 Flag words

<i>un movimiento nacional</i>	a national movement
<i>paciencia y [...] tolerancia</i>	patience and tolerance
<i>una actitud pacífica</i>	a pacifist attitude
<i>ofreciendo [...] perdón</i>	offer forgiveness
<i>una represión ajustada a los procedimientos subversivos</i>	a repression appropriate to the subversive procedures
<i>[...] contestar con una violencia mayor</i>	answer with more violence
<i>orden de las autoridades constituidas</i>	order of the authorities
<i>libertad</i>	freedom
<i>lucha</i>	battle

### 3.1.4 Stigma words

<i>oligarquía</i>	oligarchy
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### 3.1.5 Program words

<i>la pacificación</i>	pacification
<i>[...] la colaboración del pueblo</i>	[...] the cooperation of the people
<i>[...] la demonstración</i>	the demonstration [of one's own position and values]
<i>la última advertencia</i>	the last warning

### 3.1.6 Swear words

<i>los enemigos del pueblo</i>	public enemies
<i>los traidores</i>	traitors
<i>los victimarios</i>	murderers
<i>hombres criminales</i>	criminals
<i>los instigadores</i>	instigators
<i>los alteradores del orden</i>	subversives

## 3.2 The pragma-lexical approach

The pragma-lexical or lexico-pragmatic approach deals with the issue of semantic underdetermination of words in discourse. The big advantage and the big disadvantage of words at the same time is the fact that mostly one and the same signifier has a number of signifieds. Behind the signifier *house* there is a wide range of signifieds just like the signifier *dog* stands for numerous canine concepts. It is equally obvious in verbs like *write* or *cut*. *We write with a pen, we write on the computer* or *we write on the mobile phone* and *we cut the grass, we cut the hair* and *we cut the cake*. The verbs *to write* and *to cut* mean different things in these examples. The theory of prototypes tries to get to grips with that. However, there is another problem. Signifiers do not only have different signifieds, but signifieds tend to have fuzzy boundaries. As far as those fuzzy boundaries are concerned, one distinguishes between *the restriction of meaning, the extension of meaning* and *approximation*. If the signified is narrowed down in discourse, one speaks of restricted meaning. If it says, for example, that 23 year-old Jane wants to meet a bachelor, *bachelor* does not stand for any bachelor because she is likely to look

for a man more or less her age and heterosexual. Yet, a 90 year-old gay man might also be a bachelor. If, on the contrary, a signified is extended in the act of communication, one speaks of extended meaning. So, if we say, for example, that after the party there were lots of empty bottles on the floor, we probably do not mean to say that all of them were completely empty. Even if only one drop is left, strictly speaking, the bottle is not empty. Yet, we speak about empty bottles.

Approximation is the third topic of lexical pragmatics, which I want to take into consideration here. It means that what is literally indicated does not fully correspond to the actual referent. When it is claimed, for example, that every Argentinian knows that Buenos Aires is the capital of Argentina, it is false, because *every Argentinian* also includes every Argentinian baby. Or, when it says that 60% of the Paraguayans are bilingual, the percentage is most probably rounded and it is only more or less 60% of the population. Thus, approximation also helps to simplify and to delimit the referent in an artificially clear way.

In what follows I will group together the key words of Perón's discourse whose semantic components can be categorized according to the above-mentioned criteria restriction, extension and approximation. The questions which will follow the key words point to the respective restriction, extension and approximation:

### 3.2.1 Restriction of meaning

<i>[...] hemos ofrecido [...] nuestra mano y nuestra paz</i>	[...] we reached out and offered [our] peace Question: Unconditioned peace?
<i>Daremos [...] pruebas de nuestra energía</i>	We will prove our strength Question: Which kind of strength?
<i>[...] hemos de defender los derechos [...] del pueblo</i>	we have to defend the people's rights Question: Defend in which way?)
<i>[...] aunque tengamos que terminar con todos ellos</i>	[...] even if we have to eliminate all of them Question: Eliminate in which way?
<i>necesito la colaboración del pueblo</i>	I need the collaboration of the people Question: Which kind of collaboration?
<i>nuestra nación necesita paz y tranquilidad</i>	our nation needs peace and quiet Question: Which part of the nation? Which kind of peace?
<i>nuestra patria [...] ha debido ser sometida muchas veces a un sacrificio</i>	our mother country [...] has had to make many sacrifices Question: Which ones?

In these cases the communicated meaning is narrower than the one inscribed in the individual words.

### 3.2.2 Extension of meaning

<i>[Nosotros representamos] un movimiento nacional</i>	We represent a national movement Question: Is truly the whole nation concerned?
<i>nuestra inmensa paciencia y nuestra extraordinaria tolerancia [...]</i>	our immense patience and our extraordinary tolerance [...] Question: What kind of patience and tolerance? Was their reluctance to react really and exclusively the result of patience and tolerance or maybe rather the result of indecisiveness and hesitance?
<i>[Esos doscientos cadáveres destrozados fueron] un holocausto más</i>	These two hundred mutilated corpses were one more burnt offering Question: A sacrifice is offered intentionally, so what kind of sacrifice was that?
<i>[Hemos vivido dos meses en] una tregua</i>	We have had a two-month armistice Question: What kind of armistice?
<i>[... hemos dado suficientes pruebas de nuestra] prudencia</i>	we have given enough proof of our caution Question: What kind of caution? Maybe caution based on indecisiveness here?
<i>[Pero yo pido al pueblo que sea él también] un custodio</i>	But I also ask the people to be a guardian Question: What kind of guardian?

These quotations show that the original meaning of the words has been extended and, strictly speaking, thereby distorted or falsified.

### 3.2.3 Approximation

<i>[...] hemos vivido dos meses en una tregua</i>	we had a two-month armistice Question: Exactly two months?
<i>Esta conducta que ha de seguir todo peronista</i>	This behavior which every Peronist has to follow Question: Every single Peronist?
<i>[...] caerán cinco de ellos</i>	[...] five of them will die Question: Every time exactly five of them will die?
<i>[...] quiero terminar estas palabras recordando [...] a todo el pueblo argentino [...]</i>	I want to conclude this speech by reminding the whole Argentinian people Question: Really the whole Argentinian people?

<i>Pero una sola cosa es lo que ellos buscan [...]</i>	But there is only one thing which they are looking for [...] Question: Really only one thing?
<i>Para que ello no suceda estamos todos nosotros [...]</i>	All of us will make sure that this does not happen Question: Really all of them?
<i>[...] la lucha se la vamos a hacer por todas partes y en todo lugar</i>	[...] we will fight against them from every side and in every place Question: Really from every side and in every single place?
<i>Pero yo pido al pueblo que sea él también un custodio</i>	But I also ask the people to be a guardian Question: The whole people?
<i>[...] hoy comienza para todos nosotros una nueva vigilia de armas</i>	[...] today a new armed guard starts for all of us Question: For all Peronists?
<i>Cada uno de nosotros debe [...] ofrecer todos los días en todos los actos, la decisión necesaria para salvar esa causa del pueblo</i>	Each of us must take the necessary decision to save the cause of the people in every act and every day Question: Each of them, every day and in every single act?

These examples show that many times the indicated referent is concerned only in part which is again a distortion or falsification of reality.

#### 4. Conclusion

The most prominent effect of the categorization of key words in discourse is the polarization of antagonistic groups. In the given speech the Peronists stand for the respect for other people's achievements, peace and quiet, caution, modesty, energy, justice and reason. They are patriotic, patient, tolerant, pacifist, freedom-loving, militant but also obedient, severe and revengeful. They answer violence with still more violence. On the other hand, Anti-Peronists are associated with infamous actions, offense, crime, treason, murder, incitement and subversion. Anti-Peronists are portrayed as superficial, hypocritical, violent, reactionary, conspiratorial and presuming.

The restriction as well as the extension of meaning serves to present complex situations and constellations in a highly simplified way. Additional and specific meanings which the sender ascribes to the words used in his speech melt into the standard meaning of the respective words. However, the orator does not explicitly comment or expand on that so that afterwards he cannot be pinpointed, let alone held responsible for certain (mis)interpretations of his statements.

The positions and fronts appear to be clear, there seems to be no need for discussion. The speech is a painting in black and white, there are no shades of grey to make sure no one is tempted to think, let alone hesitate. The clearer the differentiation between the (celestially) good and the (infernally) bad, the easier it seems to achieve the rhetorical goal of convincing others of a political camp.

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## Speech

PERÓN, Juan Domingo: *Cuando uno de los nuestros caiga, caerán cinco de ellos*, 31 de agosto de 1955, in: TITTO, Ricardo J. de (ed.), *El pensamiento del peronismo*, Buenos Aires 2010, 112–115.

## Abstract

Political language, characterized by various rhetorical strategies, can be classified as technical language. The overall goal of rhetoric is to convince the addressee of the sender's opinion. A very efficient rhetorical strategy is the use of words for the purpose of manipulating the addressees which will be illustrated by a speech made by Juan Perón in 1955.

After a brief historical overview of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina and a summary of the content of the speech, Peron's words will be examined from the lexical and the pragma-lexical perspectives. From the lexical point of view, numerous words used in the speech are assigned to six categories as a result of semantic evaluation. It turns out that the words with positive connotations refer to the Peronists, while those with negative connotations refer to their enemies: Good and evil are identified. From a pragma-lexical perspective, it becomes clear that the meanings of the words used in the speech are fuzzy, which again contributes to the polarization between the good guys and the bad guys.