THE (CYCLICAL) PATH TOWARDS IMPOLITENESS IN ELECTORAL DEBATES

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ABSTRACT: This work proposes, first, an approach to the agonal character of electoral debates, and then analyses the nature of the acts of (im)politeness that appear in them. From there, it presents a triangular theoretical-methodological framework, based on the analysis of functional impoliteness strategies, linguistic-discursive mechanisms for their implementation and social repercussions of impolite acts. Within the first of these three axes, a dynamic quantitative analysis is carried out. This analysis demonstrates the growing appearance of impoliteness in electoral debates, as well as the cyclical nature of this growth —which is increasingly accelerated— in successive sections of these speech events. This quantitative analysis is based on the face-to-face debate between Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba days before the Spanish general elections in November 2011.

KEYWORDS: impoliteness, political debates, pragmatic strategies, quantitative analysis.

1. Introduction

"Without a doubt, whereas in the history of thought Socrates has been the victor, in that of the agora the Sophists have won". This is the idea that came to my mind some years ago as I delved into the plot of *El asesinato de Sócrates*, the novel by Marcos Chicot and runner-up to the Planeta prize of 2016. Indeed, Pericles' Athens harboured a fascinating intellectual and moral conflict: the use of discourse to make the weakest arguments strong, leaving veracity to one side, over and against the idealistic search for truth; the demagogical appearance of wisdom as opposed to wisdom itself. Clear proof of this Sophist victory is found in the first paragraph of Atkinson's (1984, 1) famous book on political communication: if people such as Lenin, Hitler, Churchill, Castro or Kennedy have had anything in common, this has had to be precisely their extraordinary ability to communicate. This weapon is the most powerful that a politician can possess, and it is for this reason that traditionally the leaders of political parties have arisen from amongst the most convincing orators of their cause. However, let it be clear that we are talking about an ability to convince, an ability to make the weakest arguments strong, and not about argumentative rigour.

Let us follow this path and concentrate on the case of a political debate, a televised political election debate in particular, and the specific face-to-face confrontation between the candidates of the two parties most likely to govern. In view of their social repercussion, it is undeniable that such debates constitute a media spectacle, with all the consequences that this entails regarding the very concept of what a debate is. This, of course, means that it is not about opposing arguments where each side tries to demonstrate the rational superiority of their own personal stance with a view to convincing and reaching an agreement. This kind of debate, in this sense, is diametrically opposed to the pragma-dialectical concept about what argumentation is and what it should be, a resolving of differences of opinion, using processes of conviction and stimulating reflection (Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, 41). On the contrary, a political orator is certain that no matter how much one excels in giving an impeccably rational reasoning to justify or refute a point under discussion, it is unthinkable that their rival in a debate will ever be convinced enough to accept their stance. This orator will therefore concentrate on causing a discursive impression, which despite possibly being fallacious from a merely rational standpoint, turns out to be suitable and sufficient to convince a media audience who expects a spectacular knockout victory rather than one achieved with a sum of points. Indeed —let us not forget—, even though the participants of a debate have a direct interlocutor, their main objective is really on the other side of the cameras, meaning that their effort to convince and persuade is addressed to no one but their audience.

Hence, what we are faced with, in an election debate, is not so much a conscientious analysis of proposals but a confrontation of two or more opponents during which each one will do their best to assert their value above that of their adversary. What is more, they frequently try to do this by trying to discredit their rival rather than using their proposals or actions to reason (Blas Arroyo 2001, 11-13). Considering this aspect as a basic characteristic of such communicative events serves to pinpoint linguistic politeness as an extremely interesting theoretical perspective to analyse, making us approach communication from a psycho-sociological perspective.

2. Attacking (one's opponent) and defending (one's stance)

The two key objectives of the orator in an election debate have just been outlined, being that of attacking one's opponent and defending one's own stance. It has also been pointed out that

the former usually weighs more than the latter in the discursive action of a political orator. In this sense, as already explained in a previous publication (Fernández García 2017, 41-43), the attack in an election debate can be understood as a systematic attempt to break down the *ethos* that an opponent attempts to build. According to Charaudeau (2005, 91-128), a politician's *ethos* consists of two main components: the *ethos of credibility* and the *ethos of identity*. And it is precisely against these and their main subcomponents that orators in debates aim their strategies of impoliteness, which will be discussed in the fourth section of this paper.

Charaudeau points out that the *ethos of credibility* is not linked to the social identity of an individual but to a discursive construction of it. It relies on whether politicians are able to convince the citizens of their sincerity, their performativity and their efficiency. In the first place, as regards sincerity, this is defined as the connection between what the candidate thinks and what he says; in the second place, performativity alludes to their ability to do what they promise, meaning that the candidate's words and actions must be coherent; in the third place, efficiency refers to the fact that a politician's actions should produce the desired effects. Other subcategories of the *ethos of credibility* specified by Charaudeau are the *ethos of virtue*, which is related largely to coherence, to thinking and acting in a constant way, according to the candidate's principles and what he preaches, which also has to do with his/her transparency when communicating to citizens; and the *ethos of competence*, which demands from the politician «à la fois savoir et savoir-faire» (Charaudeau 2005, 96).

As regards the *ethos of identity*, this refers to a political leader's ability to make citizens identify with him and to do the exact opposite with his/her adversary, for example, distancing him/herself and juxtaposing his/her own positive aspects with his/her opponent's negative ones; showing the latter's isolation by emphasising that no one could identify with him/her, or looking down or making fun of him/her, making it clear that this person is anything but somebody whom others consider worthy of identifying with. When referring to the specific subcategories of the *ethos of identity*, we can highlight the *ethos of power*, which emphasises the leader as overwhelmingly strong, or the *ethos of intelligence*.

Hence, concerning all the different categories of *ethos*, the orator's objective in the debate will be two-fold: to boost his/her own and to damage his/her opponent's. Suffice to say, in this characteristic atmosphere of confrontation, the tension produced between the desire to communicate efficiently on the one hand is of great interest as is the risk of excessively trying to crush the public image of the interlocutor, on the other. Indeed, the expediency of a political orator not appearing excessively aggressive in a debate lies not merely in a question of aesthetics nor of evaluation of an opponent but in the fact that this could have an important repercussion in the attitude of the public to whom the debate is addressed, that is, the potential voters. This is what occurred, for example, in the widely studied French face-to-face debate between L. Fabius and J. Chirac in October 1985, in which, due to the somewhat —let us say— unsupportive, aggressive and excessively belligerent attitude of the former, the public poured their support onto the assaulted player (Boudeau *et al.* 1989, 128). Furthermore, the orators are conscious of this fact and when they consider that their opponent is playing dirty, they draw attention to it so as to discredit them to the audience. This is what the progressive leader, F. González (Partido Socialista, henceforth PSOE), did to the conservative leader, J. M. Aznar (Partido Popular, henceforth PP), in the first of their famous televised debates which brought them together in 1993 (the first ever held in Spain), when the latter called him "a master in the art of pretending", and to which the former stated that he himself had avoided being offensive, whilst his opponent had fallen "into that temptation". One must think, therefore, that the objective of a political orator should not be to "crush" their adversary at all costs, but to measure their words in order to communicate in a more efficient way, with as little loss of face as possible to their public image.

Being more aggressive, hence, as regards the limits this oversteps and the image offered to an audience, bears no guarantee of damaging a rival's image more, but instead could be more damaging to the very instigator[1]. This was proved, for example, in the study about the televised debate of J. L. Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE) and M. Rajoy (PP) before the general elections in 2008 (Fernández García 2008). According to the surveys, both political parties were at a technical tie before the debate took place, but the PSOE finally won the elections after Rajoy revealed a particularly aggressive stance and a marked destructive discourse during the debates, as opposed to the more balanced and cautious performance of Zapatero, whom the public considered victorious.

3. Is a political debate impolite? Is there politeness in an election debate?

Hence, is there politeness in an election debate or does this type of discursive event tend to take the form of a series of attacks in which only impoliteness reigns? Furthermore, is this impoliteness really impolite? These were two of the most interesting questions about the nature of communicative behaviour in an election debate that were raised some years ago (Fernández García 2014). Let us begin by answering the last of these questions. The fact that the presence of conflict in an election debate is even considered as institutionalised (Harris 2001) has led some scholars to question whether this impoliteness should really be considered as such, or simply a natural form of behaviour in this communicative context (Blas Arroyo 2011, 221-222). However, in answer to this, one could allege that firstly, even though impoliteness be the custom, it is neither necessary nor omnipresent, as depending on the topic under debate, its participants and other circumstances, the general tone of the meeting could vary considerably. Secondly, one could say that even in debates characterised by their high level of verbal aggressiveness, it is possible to find calm phases in which impolite markers disappear and even polite ones emerge (see Fernández García 2000, 119-121 and 134-137). Impoliteness is not always, consequently, the norm, the unmarked option in a debate, which leads one to deduce that it is illogical to affirm that, due to its systematic character, it could lose its identity. For this reason, when impoliteness appears, whether face attacks to adversaries should be considered as expected or unmarked or not, it may be posited that their purpose is to harm their public image and to bring them into disrepute before the audience by employing means that are the reverse of what is generally understood as a polite attitude (Fernández García 2014, 68-69).

Let us recognise, therefore, on the one hand, the genuine nature of impoliteness in an election debate. And, on the other hand, we ask ourselves now whether politeness has its place in a debate. One must bear in mind, in this sense, that its presence is not incompatible with the leading role of a dialectic attack against an opponent. That is to say that even though disagreement and criticism are practically constant elements in a debate, this does not necessarily imply that impoliteness should be too. Indeed, it is true to say that during such disagreements and criticisms, looking beyond whether they are uttered more or less directly or even whether they are accompanied by impolite elements of strength, these could appear accompanied by markers of polite mitigation: there could be, consequently, an attack of the opponent, but not necessarily impoliteness.

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[1] See Hernández Flores (2005) for the negative repercussions on one's own image that impolite behaviour could have.

That said, is this politeness really polite? Blas Arroyo (2011, 251) believes that not only is impoliteness an unmarked element of a debate, but that politeness, when it appears, is also false politeness, and its function, generally, is not to mitigate the attacks, but to intensify them. This affirmation, however, is difficult to defend at all times as it requires close scrutiny. There are countless examples we could give where the political orator in a debate uses absolutely genuine polite markers, such as, to name three cases, when a disagreement is mitigated with a doxastic element ("in my opinion"), when criticism is mitigated with a deictic defocalization ("many things have been done badly") or when an interruption is justified ("sorry to interrupt you, but…"). One could think that the orator's intentions for using such polite markers are in essence selfish, as they are not employed to protect the adversary's image but that of the very orator, but this does not hinder us from understanding that they act, in effect, as mechanisms of politeness.

This does not mean, of course, that the false politeness which Blas Arroyo (2011) refers to, that apparent politeness which really functions as a booster of impoliteness in a discursive attack, does not exist. However, this is only the case when there are certain specific pragmatic conditions. As Terkourafi (2005, 251) rightly explains, what makes a marker of politeness function as such is the contextualised use of elements conventionally associated with politeness, as long as their conventional polite potential be not cancelled in any other way, through generalized implicature (Grice 1975). Let us look, for example, at the words that the socialist candidate A. Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE) used in his face-to-face debate with the conservative candidate M. Rajoy (PP) prior to the general elections of 2011:

> (1) Rubalcaba: Me gustaría saber si usted tiene alguna propuesta para financiar la sanidad pública más allá de esos de esos principios generales que ha anunciado usted en una clase de primero de economía que le agradecemos todos los españoles, estoy seguro.
>
> *Rubalcaba: I'd like to know if you have any proposal to finance public health beyond those general principles you have announced in a first course class of economy that, I'm sure, all Spaniards appreciate.*

Certainly, the positive politeness that entails the speech act of gratitude seems to be clearly neutralized here, since, with an ironic sense, the socialist candidate tries to sneer at what, in his view, has been a puerile and simplistic explanation of the conservative candidate.

One may conclude, subsequently, regarding the two questions posed in the title of this section, that election debates constitute a genre where impoliteness appears as a clear protagonist. However, this does not hinder the fact that politeness may also be present, and when it is, frequently possesses an absolutely genuine character, although this may sometimes be lost, making it in fact act as a mechanism of impoliteness.

4. Strategies, mechanisms and social repercussions

Now that the role and the nature of politeness and impoliteness in an election debate have been outlined, an analysis of the latter will be carried out. As already mentioned, it takes on a fundamental role in this discursive genre. This analysis will be based on the in-depth research model provided by Fernández García (2017), who based it on three fundamental axes:

a) the functional strategies which orators use to attack their adversaries (that is to say, *what* orators *do* when they attack a rival, for example, accuse them of lying or make fun of them),

b) the discursive-linguistic mechanisms used to implement the aforementioned strategies (that is to say, through *which means* they put them into practice, for example, making use of lexical intensification or ironic statements) and

c) the social repercussions that such attacks have from the point of view of linguistic impoliteness (that is to say, *what consequences* the attacks have, in what specific aspects they stain the social image of their rival).

Hence, this model serves to approach three successive elements of the same object of study (that being an impolite attack) using analytical categories of a varied nature which cover different dimensions of this impolite act. These analyses combine the respective quantitative and qualitative components. Let us take as an example the analysis of strategies: on the one hand, from a quantitative perspective, what is studied is the frequency with which they are used, their greater or lesser significance for one orator or another, their greater or lesser presence in certain phases of the debates, etc.; and, on the other hand, a qualitative analysis pays attention to the main characteristics, subtypes, etc.

The analysis to be carried out builds on the foundation of scholars who have dedicated their research to understanding how linguistic impoliteness functions both generally (Culpeper 1996, 2011, Bousfield 2008) and specifically, from the perspective of political communication (Harris 2001, Blas Arroyo 2011), and concentrates especially on overcoming the methodological incoherence which has been dragged along since Culpeper's (1996) pioneering work, consisting of an indiscriminate mishmash of strategies and mechanisms. Let us think, for example, that of one of the most employed strategies is for a candidate to contradict their rival, to constantly dispute what they say; and a frequently used mechanism to do this is to use rhetorical questions in their replies. Indeed, one is faced with these elements which correspond to different dimensions of the communicative act, and as such they should be studied (what is more, it is clear that the strategy of contradicting a rival could be done through many other mechanisms and the use of rhetorical questions, in turn, could also be used to carry out other strategies).

Beginning by making an initial distinction between strategies and mechanisms, I have managed to list sixteen strategies of impoliteness, grouped within four macrostrategies. This inventory was made, on the one hand, from collecting contributions from scholars such as Culpeper (1996), Bousfield (2008) and Blas Arroyo (2011); and on the other hand, from meticulously and systematically analyzing the televised election debate between M. Rajoy (PP) and A. Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE) during the Spanish general election campaign of 2011. The pinpointed macrostrategies and strategies consist of the following:

1. To attach negative facts (projects, values, behaviours, etc.) to the adversary.

   1.1. To criticise (or show the failure of) his ideas, actions, etc.
   1.2. To tell him that he is mistaken, to disagree, to contradict, etc.
   1.3. To accuse him of ignorance, incompetence or inaction.
   1.4. To criticise his discursive behaviour.

2. To attack the credibility of the adversary.

   2.1. To claim that he lacks credibility.
   2.2. To accuse him of lying (being untruthful, etc.).
   2.3. To accuse him of hiding the truth or concealing evil intentions.
   2.4. To brand him as contradictory or incoherent, to highlight his contradictions or incoherencies.

3. To take distance from the adversary and to show his inferiority.

    3.1. To make the differences that separate them manifest.
    3.2. To clearly show his isolation.
    3.3. To scorn him, to show indifference towards him.
    3.4. To mock him, to ridicule him.

4. To invade the space of the adversary, to pose obstacles for him.

    4.1. To reveal facts that make him feel uncomfortable.
    4.2. To show the deficiencies of his arguments clearly.
    4.3. To urge (or to put pressure on) him to do (or not do) something.
    4.4. To hinder him from expressing himself fluently.

If we were to go back to the second section of this paper to remind ourselves of the components of a politician's *ethos* which Charaudeau (2005, 91-128) identifies, the relationship these have with the aforementioned strategies becomes quite clear: the two first macrostrategies, on the one hand, entail a visible endeavour to damage their rival's *ethos of credibility*; and the third and fourth ones, on the other hand, evidently go against their rival's *ethos of identity*.

Regarding the second axis of this study, the mechanisms, it is important to point out that, in themselves, they are not instruments of impoliteness —it is undoubtedly very risky to establish a reciprocal relationship between form and function, as Albelda & Barros (2013, 41-44) demonstrate when talking about mechanisms of intensification—, but they are resources through which strategies of impoliteness are put into action. By classifying these mechanisms, depending on their differing characteristics, one distinguishes between *explicit* and *implicit* mechanisms, with different subcategories within each one of them. Furthermore, the third axis, dealing with the social repercussions that strategies have from the perspective of linguistic impoliteness, begins by connecting the theoretical tradition created by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) with the model developed by Spencer-Oatey in different publications (amongst which were 2002, 2005, 2007 and 2008). This has had the advantage, among other things, of overcoming the excessive individualism centred on in the classic theoretical approach, highlighting the group dimension and interpersonal component, as Spencer-Oatey (2002, 541) recommends.

5. Cyclical nature

The theoretical-methodological foundation described above undoubtedly constitutes a powerful tool which, when applied qualitatively and quantitatively, allows for an in-depth insight into the way in which impoliteness appears in election debates, as demonstrated at length by Fernández García (2017) when studying the televised election debate between Rubalcaba and Rajoy in 2011. From a quantitative perspective, it was pointed out that the study was one that could be called *static*, in the sense that it offered global data about the debate in general, such as which strategies were more or less significant, which ones were more characteristic of one orator or another, etc. However, this is not all that will be analysed here with the aforementioned data. Instead, the description of a complementary analysis will be established, which we could call *dynamic*, and which is extremely revealing regarding the way in which (im)polite behaviour evolves during the debate.

Besides the fact that a face-to-face encounter in a particular election debate could be more or less belligerent, what is doubtlessly true is that this type of communicative encounter is far from

"flat". Indeed, apart from the fact that there might or might not be great moments of tension, there will always be highs and lows in this respect. This has already been analysed in previous works (Fernández García 2000, 2009, 2014) where the "warm up" in the dialectical rivalry of a debate is referred to. The study begins with Kotthoff (1993), who analyses the context surrounding an argument and explains that when an argument begins, the conversational format changes: disagreement becomes more and more explicit, ending up becoming the preferred option, that is to say, the unmarked option, according to the concept of *preference* in conversational analysis. Furthermore, it appears that in such contexts the most important thing is to contradict rapidly and coherently. These situations of open confrontation could lead, in their extreme, to what Kotthoff (1993, 201-202) calls *opposition format*: once a dispute has begun and once the preference to disagree has been established, such a "format" consists of each one taking, during their turn, a rhetorically important word from the intervention of the interlocutor and making it the centre of their wording of a counterattack, which revolves around the previous idea.

In certain contexts (for example, in situations of competitiveness, the political debate being a prototypical case), the approach of open disagreement can, therefore, become an unmarked option. Furthermore, the change in the format of the conversational structure consequently gives rise to another level of linguistic politeness, where the illocutionary acts of the speaker do not try to mitigate the threat against the interlocutor's image and to safeguard a positive relationship with them, but precisely the opposite. Such a situation, clearly, is typical in an election debate. To this one could add the acknowledgement in previous studies of the cyclical character of such processes. Indeed, not only does this dialectal tension in the debate tend to intensify after a more or less relaxed beginning, but this process, once it has reached its climax (generally at the end of a thematic segment), begins all over again.

So what I propose to do with this dynamic analysis of impolite acts of an election debate is to objectively demonstrate that those processes of dialectical warming up, in which the presence of impoliteness rises exponentially, constitute a fact, just as their cyclical nature does. The methodological path to achieving this is through obtaining and analysing the corresponding data not of the debate as a whole, but of the development of the dialectal exchange during its temporal progression. Thus, in order to apply this analysis to the televised debate between Rajoy and Rubalcaba in 2011, fourteen control points of the corpus analysed were established, and positioned every time both rivals had intervened once (that is, after every couple of turns)[2]. These points are taken as a reference to analyse the average frequency per minute that certain phenomena appeared during the course of the debate.

However, before beginning with the quantitative analysis, let us first pause to observe the extracts of the first four interventions where Rubalcaba closed the turn-taking in the first thematic segment of the debate, in which the socialist leader opened the turn-taking and where he systematically made an effort to condition the subsequent turns of his rival.

> (2) RUBALCABA: Yo me gustaría que nos dijera aquí si está usted pensando que […].
>
> *RUBALCABA: I would like you to tell us here whether you are thinking that […].*
>
> (3) RUBALCABA: Y::/ y ya que hablamos de contratos, déjeme que le haga una pequeña pregunta. […] Me gustaría que me dijera si […].
>
> *RUBALCABA: And::/ and now that we are talking about contracts, allow me to ask you a small question. […] I would like to ask you whether […].*

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[2] The turn taking in that debate was as follows: each of the two orators had an opening turn, five turns in the first thematic segment, four in the second and three in the third, as well as a closing turn.

(4) Rubalcaba: En resumen, señor Rajoy, le pido: a) que diga rotundamente si […]; y segundo, que me explique […]. ¿Va usted a sacar a las PYMES de la negociación colectiva, señor Rajoy? ¿Sí o no?

Rubalcaba: To summarise, Mr Rajoy, I am asking you: a) to say categorically whether […]; and secondly, to explain to me […]. Are you going to exclude the SMEs from the collective negotiations, Mr Rajoy? Yes or no?

(5) Rubalcaba: <u>Dígame</u> usted: ¿va a cambiar el desempleo? ¿Sí o no? ¿Lo va a bajar o no lo va a bajar?

Rajoy: Ya le he dicho/

Rubalcaba: ¿Va a pagar lo mismo que están cobrando los trabajadores ahora? ¿Sí o no? […] respóndame con claridad a estas dos cosas, a las dos. ¿Va usted a bajar el prest/ la prestación por desempleo? ¿Sí o no? ¿Va usted a aplicar su programa? ¿Sí o no? Y segundo: ¿va usted a aplicar su programa en la reforma laboral? ¿Sí o no?

Rubalcaba: <u>Tell</u> me: are you going to change the unemployment rate? Yes or no? Are you going to lower it or not?

Rajoy: I have already told you/

Rubalcaba: Are you going to pay the same amount that workers are being paid now? Yes or no? […] reply clearly to these two things, to both. Are you going to lower unemployment benefits? Yes or no? Are you going to enforce your programme? Yes or no? And in second place: are you going to apply your programme to the labour reform? Yes or no?

By observing these extracts together, we undoubtedly obtain revealing results. In (2) we see how the socialist leader, who is closing his first turn in the first segment, although employing his strategy to try to condition his rival's next intervention, does this by using clear grammatical mechanisms of mitigation, such as the conditional tense and the past continuous tense in the Spanish subjunctive mood to formulate a demand for information. In (3), whilst closing his second turn, even though he uses an imperative mood, the tone is still similar, as the imperative mood appears in the permission to ask (a question that, furthermore, is "small", thus reducing the level of the imposition) and he employs it again after using the conditional and the subjunctive mood. The issue in (4) is different, at the end of his third turn, where we see

a) that the previous grammatical sequence (formulae of the type "me gustaría que nos dijera", *"I would like you to tell us"*) is now substituted by the Spanish present indicative tense followed by a present subjunctive ("le pido que diga", *"I am asking you to say whether"*),
b) that he asks Rajoy to respond "rotundamente" *("categorically")* to his questions and
c) that there is a direct question ("¿Va usted […]?", *"Are you going to […]?"*), followed by an emphatic disjunctive ("¿Sí o no?", *"Yes or no?"*).

And this tendency is accentuated clearly in (5), at the end of the fourth turn in the segment, with an accumulation of imperatives in his wording and a cascade of questions, revealing an attitude of evident harassment.

These closing turns of Rubalcaba in the first segment of the debate are, as aforementioned, a first but enlightening demonstration of how the argument becomes tenser as the debate follows its course. If we were now to employ a dynamic analysis of what happened in this first segment regarding the total sum of impolite strategies used on the part of both orators, we find the following:
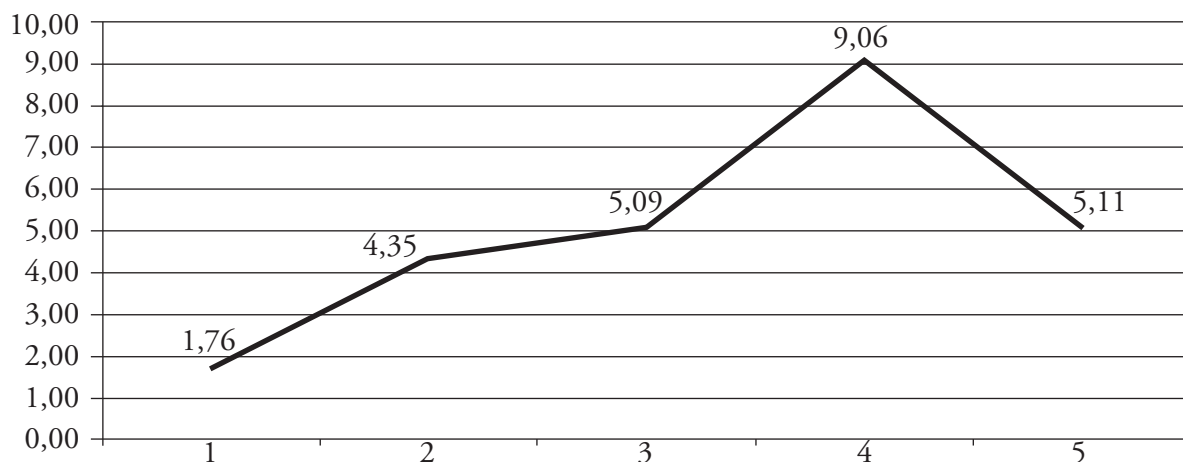
GRAPH 1. *The average use of strategies per minute during the first thematic segment.*

Leaving aside the final fall in number in the fifth turn-taking (which is explained by a series of specific factors that will not be discussed here), it seems crystal clear that, after a relaxed beginning (in the first turn-taking, the average use of strategies per minute is 1.76), the rising tendency becomes steady and constant, peaking during the fourth turn-taking with an average of 9.06 uses of strategies of impoliteness per minute. This means that the first analysis of the ends of Rubalcaba's turns in the first segment made from a qualitative approach is confirmed by this quantitative approach: the use of impolite strategies in the debate clearly rises after a calm start. In short, the tension in this war of words rises during the course of the debate.

However, could we also —according to the data— affirm that this process has a cyclical nature? Indeed, a close observation of the debate shows clearly that the beginning of each one of the two next thematic segments was once again more relaxed and that it was after this that the tension gradually began to rise. The results undoubtedly and radically dispel any doubts on this:
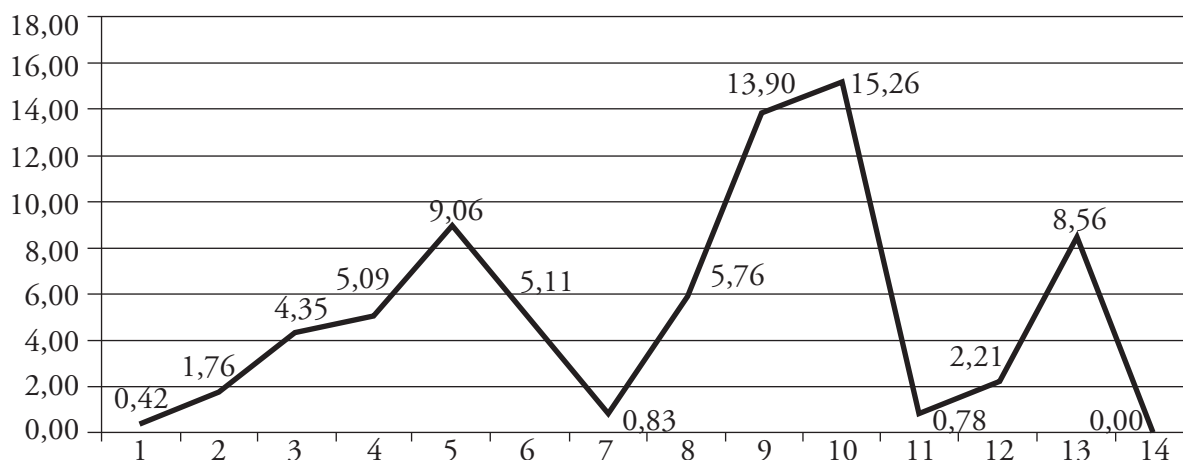
GRAPH 2. *The average use of strategies per minute throughout the debate.*

Regarding the aforementioned explanation of the first segment (whose five turn-takings, lasting forty minutes, appear in graph 2 as control points 2 to 6), it should be added, to begin with, the scarce use (exclusively by Rajoy) of strategies of attack during the turns of presentation of the debate, with an average of 0.42 per minute (control point 1). From that point onwards, as seen, the rise continues during the first segment, accelerating particularly in the fourth turn and braking in the fifth one.

Let us see how, in control point 7, which corresponds to the average use in the first turn taking of the second thematic segment, after the commercial break, the tone of the debate changes radically once more. Here, the average use of the strategies is practically the same as the introductory interventions of the debate (here being 0.83; the latter being 0.42), meaning that it is even below the average of the first turn in the initial thematic segment (1.76 in control point 2). In fact, in the intervention where Rajoy opens the second segment, it is clear that the discussion has cooled down considerably: there is a positive discursive attitude, an absence (for a number of minutes) of direct criticism of his rival, he looks directly at the public, etc. (only at the end of his turn does he employ direct criticism again and with this, a look at Rubalcaba). Let us study the first moments of this intervention:

> (6) Rajoy: Muchas gracias. Bien, eh:: eh los españoles eh:: no quieren que nadie quede en el camino. Eso es lo justo. Eh:: pero en la vida hay muchas contingencias desfavorables que devienen en injusticia y, por tanto, debemos ocuparnos de ellas. Debemos garantizar la igualdad de oportunidades, porque el origen o la situación de una persona no puede ser un obstáculo a que llegue lejos en la vida. El Estado debe garantizar también que nadie quede desamparado, abandonado a su suerte en los momentos difíciles: en las enfermedades, en la edad avanzada, en las situaciones complicadas. Y, por tanto, el Estado debe garantizar esto porque es lo justo. Y para conseguir estos objetivos hay que garantizar <u>un </u>sistema público de pensiones, <u>un</u> sistema educativo público y un sistema sanitario público; y también, lógicamente, debemos mejorar la situación de aquellas personas que no pueden cuidar o valerse por sí mismos, las personas dependientes, y disponer de servicios públicos para las situaciones, para las personas que están en situación de dificultad.

> *Rajoy: Thank you. Well, er:: er Spaniards er:: want nobody to be left behind. That is only fair. Er:: but in life there are many unfavourable contingencies which become injustices, and which therefore we should deal with. We should guarantee equality of opportunities, because one's origin or circumstances should not be an obstacle for one to succeed in life. The State must also guarantee that nobody is deserted, abandoned to their fate at difficult moments: during illness, old age, in complicated situations. And therefore, the State must guarantee this because it is only just. And to attain these objectives <u>a</u> public pension scheme, <u>a</u> public education system and a health system must be guaranteed, and also, logically, we should improve the situation of those people who are unable to look after or fend for themselves, dependant people, and provide public services for these situations, for the people who are in difficult situations.*

And what happens after this calm beginning of the second thematic segment is truly revealing. Let us remind ourselves that this segment lasted thirty minutes (ten less than the first), was divided into four turn-takings (one less than the first), which are reflected in graph 2 as control points 7 to 10. In this way, despite having begun, as mentioned above, in a considerably less belligerent way than in the previous segment, the rising heat of the debate accelerates rapidly. This is true to such an extent that in the second turn-taking of this second segment the average rises higher than that reached in the third turn-taking of the first segment (control point 8, with 5.76, compared to control point 4, which was 5.09). Furthermore, the use of strategies rise sharply in the third turn-taking (control point 9, with 13.90), and even rising more in the closing turn (control point 10, with 15.26).

In fact, this last turn-taking of the second thematic segment was, by far, the moment when most use of impolite strategies was made: in a mere seven and a half minutes there were 116 uses of these strategies, with an average higher than 15 per minute. The data, therefore, do not only confirm that the processes of warming up in the debate are a fact and that they are of a cyclical nature, but also that, as forecast by Fernández García (2000, 137-138), after a turning point (such as the end of a thematic segment, a commercial break, etc.), this whole process takes place more rapidly than on the first occasion. Let us illustrate this with a transcription of some moments of this closing turn-taking of the second thematic segment:

(7) RUBALCABA: […] yo le digo que en sus comunidades autónomas empieza a haber derivación de los empre/ de los enfermos más costosos hacia la sanidad pública para mantener el negocio de la sanidad privada, señor Rajoy. Y eso es gravísimo, eso sí que

pone en cuestión,   eso es gravísimo,   eso es gravísimo, señor Rajoy,
RAJOY: Eso es   <otra   insidia   suya>[3].

RUBALCABA: y yo le digo que eso es lo que hay que corregir. Lo tenemos
RAJOY: Eso

RUBALCABA: que corregir.   Eso es gravísimo.
RAJOY: es una insidia suya y, si no, deme los datos: en qué

RUBALCABA: Pregunte usted en Valencia.
RAJOY: hospitales y en qué comunidades.

RUBALCABA: Pregunte usted en la comunidad de Valencia.
RAJOY: No, no, no. Yo no pregunto,   dígame usted los datos,

RUBALCABA: No. Pregunte usted en la comunidad de Valencia lo que
RAJOY: porque, si no, eso es una

RUBALCABA: está pasando.   Oiga, lea la prensa/   lea la prensa
RAJOY: insidia y una acusación que tiene que probar.

RUBALCABA: de ayer por la mañana, de ayer domingo. Es que estuve
RAJOY: No, no. Yo no tengo/   no, no

RUBALCABA: en un mitin en Valencia y no me costó más que leerlo.
RAJOY: La/   oiga,

RUBALCABA: Se lo mandaré mañana, señor Rajoy.   Se
RAJOY: las   las acusaciones hay que

RUBALCABA: lo mandaré mañana, señor Rajoy.
RAJOY: probarlas.   Las acu/ no, no yo

RUBALCABA: Mañana le mandaré la prensa para que la vea usted.
RAJOY: la […] yo   […] hoy

RUBALCABA: […] I tell you that in your autonomous communities there is beginning to be a movement between busi/ the costliest patients to the public health service in order to maintain private healthcare, Mr Rajoy. This is extremely serious, which does call

into question,   that is extremely serious,   that is extremely serious,
RAJOY: That is <more maliciousness on your part>[4].

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[3] Slowly separating his words.   [4] Slowly separating his words.

RUBALCABA: *Mr Rajoy, and I tell you that that is what needs fixing. We have to*
RAJOY: *That*

RUBALCABA: *fix it. That is extremely*
RAJOY: *is more maliciousness on your part, and if it isn't, give me the facts:*

RUBALCABA: *serious. Ask in Valencia.*
RAJOY: *in which hospitals and in which communities.*

RUBALCABA: *Ask in the community of Valencia.*
RAJOY: *No, no, no. I am not asking, you give me the data,*

RUBALCABA: *No. You ask in the community of Valencia what is*
RAJOY: *because, if not, that is more*

RUBALCABA: *going on. Hey, read the newspapers/ read the newspapers*
RAJOY: *maliciousness and an accusation which has to be proved.*

RUBALCABA: *from yesterday morning, from Sunday last. I was at*
RAJOY: *No, no. I don't have/ no, no*

RUBALCABA: *a political rally in Valencia and all I had to do was to read it.*
RAJOY: *the/ hey,*

RUBALCABA: *I will send it to you tomorrow, Mr Rajoy. I*
RAJOY: *the the accusations must be*

RUBALCABA: *will send it to you tomorrow, Mr Rajoy.*
RAJOY: *proved. The accu/ no, I won't*

RUBALCABA: *Tomorrow I will send you the newspapers so you can read it yourself.*
RAJOY: *the [. . .] I [. . .] today*

The third thematic segment, although having its own idiosyncrasies, provides rather coherent data with everything we have mentioned up to now. Once more, just like in the transition from the first segment to the second, this third one lasted ten minutes less (only twenty) and was structured with one turn-taking less (three, reflected in control points 11 to 13 in graph 2). And we must begin by pointing out that just like in control point 7 (the beginning of segment 2), the average use of strategies suddenly plummets (0.78), which is especially significant in this case, as

a) the argument had very high levels in the previous turn-taking (15.26) and
b) the transition from the second segment to the third one was uninterrupted, apart from a few brief words from the moderator, in contrast to the commercial break that took place between the first and second segment.

Despite these circumstances, as said before, the beginning of the segment was, once more, very serene. This was also aided by the thematic content of this final part: compared to the nuclear character of the two first segments (dedicated to the economy and employment, and to social policies, respectively), this third one was characterised as containing miscellanea, with the orators being at liberty to introduce topics which they considered appropriate. This meant that different topics considered less important were touched upon, without going into detail. These were issues which furthermore made it difficult for the candidates to escape from displaying a certain tone of consensus, such as democratic regeneration or the end of ETA's terrorism. In spite of this, one must

highlight that in the second segment, the average use of strategies had multiplied by three (up to 2.21, in control point 12), rising sharply again in the third (and last segment) until it reached 8.56 (control point 13). This means that the strategies used in the first three turns (despite the topics of the segment being of less importance) nearly equalled the average reached in the fourth turn of the first segment (9.06 in control point 5).

6. Recapitulation and final assessment

At the beginning of this paper it was affirmed that an election debate has turned into a media spectacle in which we rarely find a rational opposition of ideas; instead it is really based mainly on attacking an adversary, that is, on a destructive attitude which sets out to damage the rival's *ethos*, in both its components of credibility and identity. The orator is aware, however, that this attitude of assailment cannot become excessively aggressive as this could be counterproductive to his own interests. And this consciousness is probably what determines that an almost constant aggressive attitude does not lead to a constant use of impoliteness but instead to a debate which goes through more neutral phases in this sense, in which impoliteness loses its predominance and where markers of politeness even appear. Regarding this, I have argued that both politeness and impoliteness have a genuine place in a debate, although it is also true that polite markers, in certain contextual circumstances, may reverse their function and provoke an impolite effect.

From this initial general question about the nature of (im)politeness in an election debate, a model of analysis has been presented which revolves around three related axes which study the strategies of impoliteness used by orators, the mechanisms through which they are implemented and the social repercussions of these impolite acts. This model works on analysing three completely different but clearly interconnected perspectives, which allows for an enriching analysis, both qualitative and quantitative in nature. That said, this study has revolved around this second type, and specifically on the modality which we would call *dynamic* (as complementary to *static*) to objectively demonstrate, using the data taken from the televised election debate between M. Rajoy and A. Pérez Rubalcaba in 2011, that impoliteness in a debate has a growing presence during a debate, in a process of a cyclical nature, beginning at many times throughout the event, but each time in a more accelerated way.

It has been clearly shown that an election debate lies far from constituting an argumentative process of conviction but is rather an event where the candidates mainly pin their hopes for victory on eroding the social image of their adversary. Therefore, theories about linguistic (im)politeness and the methodologies of analysis based on them serve as excellent tools to understand the nature and intricacies of such communicative events.

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