

Us vs. Them: *Ideological Bias and Confrontation in Newspaper Leaders*

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ABSTRACT

The initial hypothesis of this paper is that, given the intention to persuade an audience, a handy device is the division of the world between two opposed sides, which allows readers to decide where they stand, and therefore causes them to accept the argumentation proposed. This can be seen in newspaper leaders, which summarize the medium's opinion and try to gain the readers' support for their views of the world. In our study, the devices that support this vision are seen through an analysis of newspaper leaders corresponding to a turning point in history: the late eighties, reflecting the state of affairs immediately before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. To illustrate the way they operate within a text, an analysis of a newspaper leader is suggested.

He who is not with me is against me,
and he who does not gather with me scatters.
(Matthew 12:30)

No-one who does a miracle in my name
can in the next moment say anything bad about me,
for whoever is not against us is for us.
(Mark 8:39-40)

This paper proposes a contribution to the analysis of the lexis of political invective, a genre in which not only value judgments, but the whole of the referential and metaphoric repertoire used implies a constant bias towards the

facts and events described; we shall concentrate on the vocabulary used to describe the two opposing sides in any political confrontation as seen from one of the extremes, and shall discuss its importance within the «given» of any political ideology.

One of the devices leading to the creation of a linguistic code which is shared to the maximum extent by the speaker and the addressee of an utterance is the usage of terms which are in agreement with the political stance of all participants in discourse, in such a way that the expectations of the addressee are not broken and ideological identification is made easier. This notion is closely related to what is called by Alcaraz (1990: 145) *pragmatic presupposition*, the «knowledge, expectations and values necessary for an utterance to be meaningful», and to other broad ideas such as *culture*, *Weltanschauung* or, simply, *ideology*¹; however, the relationship is a reciprocal one, because language is determined by the ideology of its users, but at the same time, different wordings of the same facts contribute to shape social and political discourses.

In this sense, lexicologists have often focused their attention on the eternal problem of how some terms, through repeated use, have acquired a positive or negative load in some contexts, known in diachronic semantics as «pejoration». Although the usual target of such studies has been everyday language, it is also logical to transfer such ideas to political vocabulary, which is constantly modelled by its users: George Orwell pointed out (1946: 148-9), talking about the word *fascist*, that at that time had already become a kind of offensive weapon, synonymous with «something not desirable», although, were we only to pay attention to what dictionaries say, it should mean «supporter of the Italian regime which began in 1922 and was dissolved in 1943».

Thus, within the field of ideology, synonymy and antonymy are anything but based on scientific or even referential grounds; rather, it could be said that they are generally organized in terms of dichotomies, in such a way that an easy separation between good and evil is offered. The author must gain the readers' acceptance by means of constant reference to these concepts, so that they know all the time where both they and the writer stand, and how they must think and act in order to maintain this identification. In the case of the written press, it must be considered that, as Hodge and Kress (1993: 15) remind us, the choice of newspaper is the one that does not involve too great a challenge to the reader's ideas; this, together with the power of the media, which according to Fairclough (1995: 2) may «influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations and *social identities*» (my emphasis), has led us to search for the devices of persuasion through identification in newspaper leaders.

Such a shared subcode, which is taken for granted before communication starts, is also reinforced by a careful distribution of euphemisms and disphemisms, in such a way that what is ideologically acceptable is associated with

positive ideas, while a gloomy fog of dysphemisms is created around any political enemies, thus setting the grounds for invective. Such a strategy, which is commonly known as manicheism, is present whenever sides are taken ideologically, even if it is not as blunt in the newspapers we have chosen (*The Times* and *The Sunday Times*) as in the so-called popular press or tabloids, which verge on the excessively simple –otherwise known as «jingoism»–, as their readership does not demand an explanation of who the «goodies» and who the «baddies» are. The difference lies in the audience to which they are addressed (800,000 copies of *The Times*, compared with six million for *The Sun*, in the late eighties) and in the educational level of their readers.

For our analysis, we have studied all leading articles published in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* during the month of January 1989. Two remarks must be made: on the one hand, we are aware that a number of years have elapsed since the appearance of the corpus in question, but this is precisely why we have chosen these examples. It is our belief that, when political issues are at stake, a reasonable distance must be maintained, if only from a chronological point of view; in this way, we have the added bonus of seeing the implications of what could seem normal at that stage. On the other hand, it could be argued that *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* do not have exactly the same political stance, the latter being slightly more conservative than the former. However, and with a view to providing an overall picture of a whole month and the issues covered (*The Times* does not appear on Sundays), we have decided to disregard the small differences there may be within a similar political ideology.

Nevertheless, the fact that these are newspapers supporting a clearly defined *Weltanschauung* –a conservative one, in this case– is irrelevant to the persuasive strategy which is employed². If we remember the different forces which are at work in political language, described by Hodge and Kress (1993) as the S-form and the P-form, i.e. solidarity and power, the devices we shall study here work in two ways, for they both underline the common links between the readers and the newspaper and, at the same time, make extensive reference to the difference between such group and any of its enemies. Therefore, we shall find notions commonly associated with conservatism and right-wing policies –since they are shared by both author and readers– alongside with others which might be used by left-wing politicians and writers, but their purpose at all times is to maintain an opposition between two sides, i.e. the newspaper and its readership, on the one hand, and any kind of political opponents, on the other, as we shall see through the use of the following devices:

- (a) *us vs. them*
- (b) *The West, Western, etc. vs. the Eastern bloc and fundamentalism*
- (c) *democracies vs. dictatorships*

- (d) *state, government, country, etc. vs. regime*
- (f) *Law and Order vs. crime.*³

(a) **us vs. them**

The pronouns *I, you* and *we* do not always have an indexical or an impersonal usage, in «general» contexts like *If you overcome initial setbacks you always reach your aims* («if one...») or in hypothetical cases like «if I hit a policeman, I will certainly get into trouble». A hint of their importance is evidenced by Mellizo (1968: 42) who, working on a 14,000– word corpus of Spanish political texts at the Lancaster College of Technology, showed that 12% of the words were plural verb forms.

In expository and persuasive language, *we* seldom corresponds (except in very marginal cases, such as reading aloud or collective writing) to a plural «I». As a starting point, reference may be made to the proposal made by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980: 41) on the meanings of *we*, which includes a multiplicity of combinations, ranging from *I* to (*I + you*) or even (*I + you + they*). Among these inclusive possibilities, the usage of the pronoun becomes more personal in ideological texts when *we* comprises *I* («the author») and *you* (which corresponds to the reader); building on these grounds, an intentional usage of *we* may trigger off a situation of «textual solidarity», the initial premise of which is the acceptance of a shared knowledge between the author and the readers. In this way, the first appearance of the pronoun reaches the reader, who feels flattered by the author, and thus a favourable predisposition is created towards the text and its message:

- (1) President Reagan's success in reviving the American dream at home has been as important to all of us as his restoration of American pride on the world stage. The West needs both for its security. By scoring the double, the Gipper has earned all our thanks. (Will the West Wake Up?)

Personal pronouns also appear quite frequently towards the end of the article, which would coincide with what classical rhetoric called *captatio benevolentiae*, or the final appeal to the reader's approval; at this stage the leader analyzed becomes less argumentative and more persuasive, and as Fairclough emphasizes in his analysis of TV presenters, this *we* constitutes a claim to represent the audience's point of view⁴:

- (2) Yet there are still those in the West who would leave us helpless to prevent the rise of nuclear and chemical banditry. They argue that, because the West has nuclear and chemical weapons, we have no

moral ground from which to prevent others getting them: we should get rid of ours before lecturing anyone else. (Will the West Wake Up?)

However, in order to prepare the grounds for confrontation, the most useful device in persuasive texts is the so-called «inclusive *we*», in which the first person, *we*, including the author, the reader, the party or the newspaper (and anyone considering themselves «intelligent») opposes *them*, the left in this case, and in general those who disagree. This coincides with Hudson's (1978: 153) view that «There is a 'we' and a 'they' atmosphere about British politics», as we can see in the same leader:

- (3) Which man would we least like to see with a chemical weapons facility in his backyard? Colonel Gadaffi...

Generally speaking, it may be said that persuasive language contains a system of opposition and/or differentiation expressed through an implicit or explicit juxtaposition of first and third person plural pronouns. Other examples we may quote range from a mere indication of comparison between different elements, such as the section entitled «Us & them» in *The Observer*, to uses showing a clearer idea of confrontation, as in the results of a game of canasta (two columns headed «us» and «them») or in this example, from a review in a local newspaper of the film *For Queen and Country*, a title with interesting connotations by itself:

- (4) His former mates are now all small-time hoods or rich drug dealers. An 'it's us against them' mood prevails. (*East Cambs Town Crier*, 13.5.89, p. 18)

For Hodge and Kress (1993: 163), the contrast between *us* and *them* is typically found in any P-ideology, for it emphasizes superiority and difference between groups. Although it may be said that there is also an element of identification, or an S-form, in the way pronouns help the readers and the audience to identify a common ground, the fact remains that vocabulary of this kind seems to be constantly looking for confrontation, which sometimes is not merely political, but becomes real:

- (5) War between states and their enemies may sometimes be inevitable in a wicked world. That is a fact. Mrs Thatcher should find an opportunity to tell the hidden bombers of Lockerbie just how well she knows it. (Eyes for Eyes) ⁵.

As we can see, the device may be applied to countries, social classes, political parties or even football teams. The distinctive feature of political thinking as expressed in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* is the connection between the following pairs:

- those in the right vs. those in the wrong or the evil-minded ones;
- (usually Western) democracies vs. (usually Communist) dictatorships ⁶.

According to Fairclough (1995: 24), the personalization of this kind of discourse is also useful in that, while it underlines the opposition between Western allies and foreign dictators, it blurs out «the category of social (and especially class) subject», which makes it –although this is not explicitly stated– a feature of capitalist, liberal discourses. It must be said, however, that *them* has a variety of uses that goes beyond the East/West confrontation, in such a way that it can also comprise «anyone disagreeing with us»:

- (6) No sneer about President Reagan was too absurd for them, no jibe too cheap. The old movie actor who became Governor of California and won the White House twice did not fit their idea of the leader of the Western world. (Farewell to the Chief)

Within this general confrontation between *us* and *them*, we may also look at the use of deictic expressions such as *here*, *now* and *today*, which equally exceeds the mere reference to physically observable features of dialogue. All those elements possess a general value meaning «in a space/time shared by utterer and addressee», which is not necessarily the real context of the utterance and reaches towards a more personal domain, in a leader entitled «Islamic Intolerance»):

- (7) The Muslim community must not try to bring about a de facto ban here by strong-arm methods...
- (8) We cannot have the intolerance of the mullahs here.

(b) The West, Western, etc. vs. the Eastern bloc and fundamentalism

Ever since the Cold War, the confrontation between East and West has been a handy premise for any reasoning trying to remind the reader what is right and what is wrong, to such an extent that in some cases it seems as if the authors wanted to prolong it beyond its real «operational life»:

- (9) The need now is to hold the line in support of Nato and not be swept away by Gorbienmania. (Wrong on Rights)

Political thought clearly requires a common enemy, somebody that can make all at home huddle together against a foreign threat. Were the enemy to disappear, as is hinted in the previous example, what would be the point of all the allusions to *the West*?:

- (10) The West has yet to wake up to the fact that the world is on the brink of a terrible new age...
- (11) For decades now, the West has grown accustomed to technical disarmament questions...
- (12) ...are the Western powers (and nowadays the Soviet Union) more responsible than potential possessors of mass destruction in the Third World? (Will the West Wake Up?)
- (13) Western fears turn on the dangers that the Federal Republic may shift eastwards. (The German Danger)

Of course, in this case the antonymous term refers to the other side of the former Berlin Wall, which is why frequent allusions to the East are found. In the following example, it seems as if the mere reference to «the Eastern bloc» might suffice to downplay any positive actions taken by the then GDR:

- (14) Herr Honecker's Government [...] shows no signs of relaxing its regulations on emigration, which remain some of the least flexible in the Eastern bloc. (Selective Signatorics)

However, since, as the author of this leader reluctantly admits, communism is beginning to falter, a new enemy is necessary to maintain the solidarity between all the members of the audience. The US Secretary of State, Mr Alexander Haig, once declared: «International terrorism will take the place of human rights in our concern because it is the ultimate abuse of human rights» (quoted by Elliott *et al.* 1983: 157); this device, which allows Western countries to ignore abuses of human rights committed by allied states, can be linked with the traditional conservative idea that any manifestation of political violence anywhere in the world is part of a Soviet design to rule the world. However, the fear of communism dies hard, as we can see in this fragment and the metaphor used:

- (15) Communist confidence may be melting but that will not make American leadership of the free world any easier. Support for the international policeman –as for the domestic kind– tends to fall with the perceived threat of crime. (George Herbert Bush).

(c) **Democracies vs. dictatorships**

Orwell (1946: 149) also realized that the word *democracy* is one of the terms the definition of which is almost exclusively subjective, for it has me-

tonymically come to name, instead of a specific form of government, a country or simply something which the speaker does not approve of:

In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only there is no agreed definition but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime call it a democracy, and fear they would stop using the word if it were tied to any one meaning.

The key words here are *defenders* and *praising*, for they indicate a pragmatic view of meaning, more connotative than denotative, depending on the speaker's point of view. As would be expected, newspapers like *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* cannot avoid this trend, and identify the *we* of previous examples with *democracy*, thus reinforcing the group that has to fight against a common enemy:

- (16) The words mean, in fact, precisely what is called for in response to those who would terrorize democracies out of their will to resist. (Eyes for Eyes)
- (17) It is an act of violence which is intended to intimidate and it is unacceptable in a free democracy. (Islamic Intolerance)
- (18) Japan is the third great pillar of Western democracy. (Funeral Rites)

This last example involves a slight deviation from the «common referent and code» division resulting from these terms, since it does not aim at confirmation, but is an introduction. All the previous instances are based on shared ideas, concerning well defined groups of friends and foes; in this case, the same terminology is used to include a new element within the *we* embracing the author and the reader. It is desired that Japan, which years ago was an enemy of Britain, should become an ally, and through the identification with *democracy* it becomes something familiar, belonging to the field of «what is acceptable»:

A variation upon this *democracies* is to be found in *the free world* quoted earlier:

- (19) Communist confidence may be melting but that will not make American leadership of the free world any easier. (George Herbert Bush)

This example provides a clue to what kind of enemy is to be expected, i.e. *socialist/communist countries, dictatorships* and the like (although *terrorism* can also be included, as we have seen in previous fragments):

- (20) There is also a distasteful political slant to the draft principles of the criminal code which presuppose socialism as the single acceptable political system for the Soviet Union.
- (21) But Mr. Vorontsov is still trying for the incompatible twin goals of preserving some role for the Marxist People's Democratic Party, and coaxing the resistance into some sort of cohabitation. (Over to Mr. Gorbachov)

(d) **State, government, country, etc. vs. regime**

Many political writers of different slants, including Orwell himself in one of the previous quotations, are quite fond of using the term *regime*, instead of a more neutral *country* or *state*, in such a way that countries are seen through their governments ⁷:

- (22) The transfer of sophisticated weaponry to nasty regimes, which then pass them on to terrorists, is going to be the West's main headache in the next decade, and the world's worst nightmare in the next century. (Will the West Wake Up?)

The case of this word might illustrate the importance of connotations in the usage of a term. According to the 1961 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word means simply «a manner, method or system of rule or government»; however, the 1982 supplement adds «now frequently applied disparagingly to a particular government or administration» —although the citations are from 1955—, and the 1989 edition already features the new meaning. Indeed, in political texts *regime* is used to name, not political systems, but countries whose governments are not democratic, and therefore not to the author's taste; the *OED*'s citations are associated with Yemen and Chiang-Kai-shek, in the case of *The Times*, and with Ian Smith's government in the former Rhodesia, as used by *The Guardian*. On the opposite side, references to other «acceptable» states can be made through other words not related to power (*regime* is synonymous with *power*, *dominion*, *rule*, etc.), but to the country or to the government. In this leader, the term is used for socialist or Islamic countries in all three examples:

- (a) If the Russians were serious about avoiding more bloodshed, he said, the Kabul regime must go.
- (b) A more moderate regime, Islamic but not dedicated to jihad, would be in Afghanistan's long-term interest...
- (c) There is no Western interest to be served by the emergence of an Afghan regime which might swing the pendulum in Iran back towards militant fundamentalism. (The Great End Game)

We are shown three different choices, all of them meriting various degrees of unacceptability for the leader writer; in (a), a communist government; in (b), a potentially peaceful Islamic government (although the presence of *but* presupposes that both features are usually incompatible); and in (c), an aggressive Islamic government. As an alternative to all of those, the likelihood of a democratic rule deserves a different name altogether, that of *government*:

- (23) The emergence of a Government with real popular backing will take far longer than the six weeks left before the Soviet troops depart..

(e) Law and Order vs. crime

A frequent element in conservative terminology, shared by both speakers and addressees, is that derived from the idea that the individual must be protected against crime, be it political or otherwise; perhaps the main difference between liberal and marxist discourse is that the former emphasizes the danger of crime and how it must be punished, whereas the latter questions its origins within the economic system. In the words of Elliott *et al.* (1983: 155), «within liberal-democratic political thought, the state is usually understood to derive its legitimacy from its constitutionality [...] and an adherence to the rule of law», in such a way that state repression is overlooked; Fairclough (1989: 177) defined law and order as one of the main pillars of Thatcherism's «authoritarian populism».

As we saw earlier, Fiske (1990: 166) underlined the identification between «defenders of law and order» and «us», based on the idea that crime is likely to strike a personal note in the readers' minds. Hence the choice of topics in many leaders, which echo their audience's worries (as in «Light at Night»):

- (24) The Government is rightly determined to raise the level of public alertness concerning crime prevention, but most of its efforts so far have been concentrated on household security. The security of the streets at night is no less dangerous.

However, our interest in this paper is to check whether the notion of crime can be expanded to include, not only street, everyday crime (which any government would be happy to eliminate, although the emphasis may vary, as we saw before), but any other action by the newspaper's opponents, described as criminals:

- (25) Few causes can be so unpopular as that of alleged terrorists who have been convicted of responsibility for causing innocent deaths in shocking circumstances. (Eyes for Eyes)

As an extension of this notion of «the enemy within», the threat can be also used in the international sphere we saw before, always applied to «undesirable» countries, which thus become an actual menace to the reader's personal security:

- (26) The US attack, [...] was justified both as punishment for aiding crimes that would come before no court and as deterrence against crimes for the future. (Eyes for Eyes)

In this example, the author has chosen to repeat the term *crime* rather than any other co-reference device (*act, action*), so as to arouse a direct reaction in a reader who is already deeply frightened by the idea of bombs in passenger aircraft; any other synonym, such as «international terrorism» or any other, would be more accurate, but would not convey the connotations of closeness, which can be more easily perceived by a reader who may not be much interested in politics. Such is the case of *doorstep*, which is associated, beyond the metaphor, with our own house:

- (27) A far greater danger faces us now that we are in an age when the messiah can provide the freedom fighter with the means of mass destruction and horrifying blackmail on the West's own doorstep. (Will the West Wake Up)

A CASE STUDY: «EYES FOR EYES»

Among the texts that constitute our corpus, and in order to see all combined persuasive strategies at work, we have chosen a leader dealing with the crash of a PanAm passenger aircraft which dropped upon Lockerbie, a Scottish village, at the end of 1988 (see Appendix 1). We have decided on this leader due to the frequent occurrence of confrontation devices, for the argumentative line is based on the two main fears of the readership of the *Times* and the *Sunday Times*: terrorism and fundamentalism.

Firstly, it is interesting to see how even textual cohesion devices are part of the argumentative plan: the leading idea of the fragment, «War between states and their enemies... wicked world», appears at the beginning (*Eyes for Eyes*) and is repeated at the end in the second but last sentence (*that*) and in the last word (*it*). This can be read as a hint that most of the grammatical and

lexical devices we shall find result from a deliberate choice, where almost every element is meaningful.

However, before looking at the way the lexis of confrontation has been used, it is worth seeing how the leading idea is itself introduced through the use of presupposition. In this case, at the time of publication (January 3rd, 1989) it had not been clearly determined whether the Lockerbie incident had been due to terrorist bombing, mechanical failure or any other reason. Indeed, nowhere in the text can we find an explicit assertion that a crime has been committed.

However, the whole of the article is based on an initial premise, which we shall call P_1 , defined as «the disaster was the result of human action». From these an even more intricate set of inferences is derived, none of them explicitly:

$P_2 = \{ \text{the killing of the persons in the aircraft was unlawful} \}$

$P_3 = \{ \text{murder is defined as the unlawful killing of human beings on purpose} \}$

$P_4 = \{ \text{there was a political purpose in the action described} \}$

$P_5 = \{ \text{a terrorist is someone who inflicts violence upon non-military personnel for political purposes} \}$

$P_6 = \{ \text{punishment should be as severe as the injury suffered} \}$

These presuppositions are of a miscellaneous character: P_2 and P_4 have been introduced by the author him/herself, whereas the notions of «unlawful» and «political purpose» have as their logical consequence P_3 y P_5 , respectively, since they result from the accepted definition of *murder* and *terrorist*; finally, P_6 may be seen as introduced by the author, since it corresponds to the common ideology shared by the writer and the readers. All the inferences allow the leader to begin with a title such as «Eyes for Eyes», which suggests the possibility of retaliation, and with the clause «...terrorists who committed murder in the skies over Lockerbie...», in which the relative pronoun is used as a handy device to introduce the inference as desired.

This is the clearest presupposition, since it is the one the leader is built upon; however, there are many others which give support to the argumentative process:

«How much more can the innocent be affected by the failure to deter further terrorist crimes» (*more* => «the innocent have been affected»; *further* => «there has been a terrorist crime»)

«But that is another trap» (*another* => «the previous assertion was also a trap»)

Now the scene has been set, let us look at how the opposed sides are organized in the text. Firstly, it is worth analyzing the way the items *US* and *American* are used; both are included in the general notion of the self-identifying «The West», and are even introduced as a kind of justification for any action that has been or may be taken, especially in «The American raid in Tripoli in 1986 was a milestone...». Thanks to the positive connotations of the word, even the item *raid*, which means «surprise attack made by troops, ships or aircraft», becomes acceptable.

Concerning the purpose of our paper, it can be said that the tone of the passage is summarized in the sentence «War between states and their enemies may sometimes be inevitable...». Again, there is a clearcut division of two opposed sides: on the one hand, Western countries, where we can find also the writer and the reader and, on the other, the alleged terrorists and their sponsoring states, the latter being as guilty and deserving the same punishment in the writer's view as the bombers themselves. This abrupt confrontation⁸ offers as an added feature the fact that the menace is presented as something coming from outside, which in turn favours the use of a threatened *us*; besides, it is much more effective, considering the *Weltanschauung* of the participants in discourse, to present a double threat, both a political («...terrorize democracies out of their will to resist») and a real one, the latter affecting the readers' well-being and their lives.

At this point, a few comments on the term *terrorist(s)* may be in order. Above, we said that the term has a widely accepted definition, but the problems the British press has when referring to Northern Ireland as compared with foreign affairs seem to indicate otherwise. In fact, the choice of term already implies sides are taken, for, as Bonanate (1979: 197) stated, «deciding whether an action is terrorist is more the result of a verdict than the establishing of a fact; the formulating of a social judgement rather than the description of a set of phenomena», which places terrorism within a criminal rather than a political context. This can be seen in the co-referential equivalents chosen to refer to the more general *terrorists* («...the terrorists who committed murder...»; «...the same number of terrorists as perished...»); the enemy appears under various guises, all related to the accusations that are made:

«...by bringing hardship to the families of the guilty ...»
 «...to tell the hidden bombers of Lockerbie just how well she knows it.»

All these dangers, related to the semantic fields of «aggression» and the corresponding dysphemisms, are opposed to *us*, to a carefully delimited «the innocent», all the likely victims of the would-be terrorists, as we can see in the sentence («How much more can the innocent be affected by the failure to deter future terrorist crimes»), and, above all, to the *West*, sometimes literally («...the West understood the threat that it faced»), sometimes as represented

by Great Britain and the United States (*American, US, British, the White House, Downing Street* and, more generally, by *the international forces of law and order and civilized societies*).

The uses of invective, dysphemism and euphemism are closely linked to these opposed elements. All the insults and dysphemistic descriptions are directed against *the terrorists*, from the idea of terror itself («...terrorize democracies», «...the wrong that terrorism brings») to any other co-referential equivalents («...the terrorists who committed *murder* in the skies...»). The interplay between euphemisms and dysphemisms, is exploited to the maximum extent to outline the difference between the two opposed sides or, in terms of argumentative language, to distinguish what is justifiable (euphemism, creating solidarity) from what should be punished and, whenever possible, eliminated (dysphemism, asserting power and difference). As might be expected, the language used when describing the opponents places great emphasis on the consequences of terrorism in terms of human suffering, and no justification is allowed, unlike anything which refers us to «our side», to what should be done. This, in turn, is surrounded by positive connotations, or at least by attenuated descriptions that include some reasons for the actions carried out ⁹:

«... a just response to evil must be a measured response.»

«...there must be a reasonable prospect of deterring wrong, not just punishing it.»

All actions that may be taken by Western countries in response to past events are described as *measured retaliation, deterring wrong, measured or just response* and *proportionate reaction*, that is, abstract words which hardly contain the idea of violence, and when they do, always constitute a defence and never an attack. There are only two moments where direct tokens are used, such as *war* and the previously analyzed *raid*, but both are mitigated within the same syntactic clause in which they appear, either by a positive value judgment (*milestone, inevitable*) or a dysphemism aimed at the other side (*threat, wicked*):

The American raid on Tripoli in 1986 was a milestone on the way to showing that the West understood the threat that it faced.

War between states and their enemies may sometimes be inevitable in a wicked world.

CONCLUSIONS

Persuasive communication, as a result of a shared ideological ground, requires a number of common terms, showing a number of familiar attitudes

and references which condition the linguistic units that will be used. As Whitaker (1981: 12) reminds us, «newspapers sometimes choose their own ways to describe people», but this is only the reflection of a wider repertoire, which can also be found in political speeches, which endows discourse with a number of affective, predictable connotations preparing the ground for invective and the assignation of euphemisms and dysphemisms.

In this paper we have seen how, for the purpose of political persuasion, one of the most effective argumentative devices is the creation of two opposed sides, surrounded by positive and negative connotations as desired, in such a way that the readers can identify themselves with the acceptable trends and seek protection against the threat –which goes beyond the mere use of language– of their opponents. In this way, with an adequate dose of solidarity seasoned with a few drops of power, persuasion is guaranteed, for the text and the audience belong to a tightly knit subculture, in which, as Fiske (1990: 164) has pointed out, the connotations and myths are shared by all. At the end of the day, it is ideology that creates identities.

NOTES

¹ For broader discussion on ideology and the media, see Fiske (1990), Hodge and Kress (1993), Whitaker (1981) and, above all, Fairclough (1995).

² Bias is equally found, of course, not only in conservative, liberal discourse, but wherever any political stance is present; as Fairclough (1995: 46-47) warns us, «The only way to gain access to the truth is through representations of it, and all representations involve particular points of view, values and goals. Accusations of 'bias' tend to overlook this».

³ Of course, this does not imply that these are the only devices to be found in political discourse; some authors, such as Hodge and Kress (1993: 138-139 and *passim*) or Fairclough (1989 and 1995) have analysed modality, questions, hedging and theme-rheme structure (particularly the use of passives). Our desire is to concentrate solely on the idea of confrontation as such, to such an extent that, as we shall see later, sometimes politics is a real war.

⁴ This feature was observed by Fairclough (1989: 197 and 1995: 181), who has described the use of *we* as a way to claim solidarity by placing everybody in the same boat, but also ... claim authority in that the leader is claiming the right to speak for the people as a whole; this is, as Fairclough himself points out, one of the features of Thatcherite discourse.

⁵ Taylor (1986: 212) quotes many instances of the notion of war applied to all fields, and more specifically terrorism, such as Mrs. Thatcher's government waging «the battle against terrorism», and describes the difficulties he encountered in getting journalists to explain to him the difference between *terrorists*, *guerrillas* and *freedom fighters*, proving his point that «words are crucial in describing and defining the contemporary phenomenon of political violence not just in Northern Ireland but worldwide».

⁶ A number of studies can be found tracing the importance of the *us/them* opposition in the media; Fiske (1990: 166) describes how the TV camera, during the Notting Hill riots in 1976, ensures that a quick identification takes place between the reader and the police, and the point is made that «the police are right, non-violent, defenders of the law and order, that they are *us*. The young blacks, on the other hand, are aggressive, anti-social, *them*» (author's italics)

⁷ A similar feature has been observed by Fairclough (1995: 95), who found that, during the Gulf War, references to Iraq usually focused on Saddam Hussein as a co-reference device, whereas the West was rarely referred to as *George Bush*.

⁸ This kind of confrontation does not leave room for any neutral terms: Taylor (1986: 213) noticed that, although the word *guerrilla* is the theoretically neutral term between *terrorist* (which is used when talking about home news) and *freedom fighter*, the use of *guerrilla* would sound «neutral in excess» to some people expecting a higher degree of compromise, and would therefore be perceived as biased.

⁹ «By comparison arguments that suffering caused by isolated violence was an isolated mistake, that *under provocation some retaliation may be necessary* [...] are more common». (Elliott *et al.* 1983: 166, my italics).

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APPENDIX 1

Titles of the leaders analyzed (all leaders published in January 1989)

<u>Day</u>	<u>Title(s)</u>
1	The Lead She Deserves
2	Spectre and the Feast/Their Man in Havana
3	Eyes for Eyes/The Great End Game
4	A Senior Problem/Mao's Africans/For the Majority
5	Wrong on Rights/In the Air/The Farming Interest
6	Political Waste/The Other European Market/English Standards
7	End of an Emperor/Debate at Dorneywood
8	Will the West Wake Up?*
9	Electronic Shock/A Higher Framework/Light at Night
10	Crash without Crisis/The Price of Books
11	The President's Bequest/Funeral Rites/A Greener Giant
12	International Chemistry/Abbey National Plc/Flying Backwards
13	Epidemic of Confusion/Retreat from Hong Kong/Five and Under
14	Cabinet of Experience/A Parson's Pleasure/England Expects...
15	Farewell to the Chief*
16	Middle Eastern Promise/Mr Ridley's Folly
17	Guildford Appeal/Islamic Intolerance/Brighter Benefits
18	Football Freedom/Money in Brazil/Cross-channel Quotas
19	Selective Signatories/No Refugee/Bright Figures
20	The German Danger/Closed Council/The Hostage Years
21	George Herbert Bush/South African Succession/A Licence to Teach
22	In Praise of Tolerance*
23	British History/A Barbarous Trade/The Bright Side of Yugoslavia
24	Negative Thinking/Mr Gandhi's Failure/Realpolitik for Lords
25	Filling the Moat/Over to Mr Gorbachov
26	"Big Bang" for the Bar/Ripples from Recruit
27	Mr Lawson's Europe/London Lines/Bourse of State
28	Into the Fortress/The Kidney Trade/Angelic Guests
29	Who's Taking Liberties?*
30	Dark Side of the Moon/Confronting the Mahdi/Sex and the Synod
31	Reviewing the Troops/Prisoners of the Past/London in Springtime

The leaders marked with an asterisk appeared in *The Sunday Times*; the rest appeared in *The Times*.

APPENDIX 2

A leader from *The Times* (January 3rd, 1989)

EYES FOR EYES

To the international forces and law and order the terrorists who committed murder in the skies over Lockerbie are a hidden enemy. We do not know who or where they are.

By contrast, the bombers of flight 103 know exactly who can hit back and cause them harm. They listen closely to the words from the White House and Downing Street for signs of their enemies' resolve –and plan accordingly.

For that reason the Prime Minister's rejection of the eye for an eye philosophy in her television interview on Sunday morning was a mistake. It is likely to be regretted –not least by Mrs. Thatcher herself.

That is not because the United States should, in strict adherence to biblical fundamentalism, murder the same number of terrorists as perished on the Pan-Am jet. The reason is rather that the prospect of measured retaliation by the free world against its enemies must always be maintained. The Prime Minister's words undermine that prospect.

When asked by Mr. David Frost whether the Old Testament formula became valid in the aftermath of so hideous an event as at Lockerbie, she replied that she did not think it was «ever valid». Revenge, she said, could «affect innocent people». The most important thing was that the bombers be brought to justice without safe haven.

We would not quarrel with that last sentiment. We can query, however, if so desirable a state of affairs will come to pass. In the meantime, the aim must be also to deter future acts of terrorism. While the recent statements of President Reagan and President-elect Bush are a help to that end, those from Mrs. Thatcher are not.

The phrasing «an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth» is a trap for the unwary. It does not mean crude vengeance, rather the opposite. It is an injunction to restrain from arbitrary attacks, not a call to carry them out.

To demand an eye for an eye was to be modest in a world of blood feuds that lasted for generations, killing whole families in constant response to distant slights. An appropriate modern version would be that the punishment must fit the crime.

The words mean, in fact, precisely what is called for in response to those who would terrorize democracies out of their will to resist. That is what Mrs. Thatcher should have said.

Unless and until they are captured, terrorists are outside the bonds that bind societies together. As the Prime Minister properly pointed out, terrorists disregard both the law and the ordinary rules of humanity. In the moral scale of human actions, their actions are of the lowest order, a denial of all the gains made by civilization in three thousand years.

Terrorists know, however, that they are rarely hunted as befits their chosen station. Only rarely are they, or their sponsoring states, ever threatened by the prospect of proportionate reaction.

The American raid on Tripoli in 1986 was a milestone on the way to showing that the West understood the threat that it faced. An eye was given for an eye.

The US attack, supported and abetted by the British Prime Minister, was justified both as punishment for aiding crimes that would come before no court and as deterrence against crimes planned for the future. It injected a new uncertainty into terrorist operations.

Regrettably, innocent individuals were killed. It was right for those involved, including Mrs. Thatcher, to express regret for that at the time of the Libyan raid. It was right for the Prime Minister to show concern for the innocent in her interview on Sunday.

But, in the realms of crime and punishment, revenge raids against terrorist bases have no monopoly on «affecting the innocent». The simplest fine or prison sentence, by bringing hardship to the families of the guilty, can «affect the innocent». How much more can the innocent be affected by the failure to deter future terrorist crimes.

Mrs. Thatcher was speaking on a Sunday interview in which she also spoke of her religious beliefs more generally. She no doubt felt comfortable in following a familiar Christian rejection of Old Testament teaching.

But that is another trap. The New Testament refinement of «an eye for an eye» was not an unequivocal contradiction of it. The teaching of Christ is no exhortation to submit meekly to evil, and thereby to let it prevail. It is that anger and hatred are bad counsellors, and that a just response to evil must be a measured response.

An «eye for an eye» was an early example of the principle of proportionality. The mediaeval schoolmen refined it as they welded religious injunctions upon individuals into an international theory of the Just War.

That theory has to be developed today in considering how civilized societies should react to terrorist threats to their being. Violent reaction to terrorism must, for example, be in proportion to the threat that terrorism brings; the innocent must, as far as possible, be protected; there must be a reasonable prospect of deterring wrong, not just punishing it. War between states and their enemies may sometimes be inevitable in a wicked world. That is a fact. Mrs. Thatcher should find an opportunity to tell the hidden bombers of Lockerbie just how well she knows it.