

## Vocabulary, Story and Ideology in the Rhetoric of Persuasive Speech

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### Resumen

Partimos de las teorías de la retórica clásica, para hablar de la *inventio*, la *dispositio*, la *elocutio*, la memoria y la *actio*, comunes en todo acto comunicativo, centrándonos en dos de elementos esenciales de la retórica persuasiva: uno que está relacionado con la *elocutio*, es decir, el vocabulario seleccionado que determina la intención que posee el emisor a la hora de realizar el discurso, y el otro relacionado con la *inventio*, esto es, el tipo de discurso seleccionado: la historia o la narración como formato en el que el discurso se enmarca para llegar al receptor con la menor cantidad de esfuerzo y la mayor efectividad posible. Por lo que, desde este planteamiento, se efectúa un estudio de la palabra y el molde por el que llega el discurso para obtener una respuesta emocional en los receptores.

**Palabras clave:** retórica, discurso persuasivo, selección léxica, relato, comunicación.

### Abstract

Taking the theories of classical rhetoric as a starting point, we deal with *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, memory and *actio*, common in every communicative act, and we will focus on two essential elements of persuasive rhetoric: one that is related to *elocutio*, that is, the selected vocabulary that determines the intention that the source has at the time of making the speech, and the other related to the *inventio*, that is, the type of discourse selected: the story or the narration as a format in which the discourse is framed to reach the recipient with the least amount of effort, and the greatest possible effectiveness. So, from this approach, we will study the word and the “mold” through which the discourse arrives to obtain an emotional response in the recipients.

**Keywords:** rhetoric, persuasive discourse, lexical selection, story, communication.

## 1. Introduction

The analysis of discourse, whether of the persuasive kind or not, implies a type of deconstruction in order to arrive at the original idea the author had in mind when creating it. Hence, we start from the actual discursive act (oral or written), from its production, and from there, move backwards. Starting with the effects that discourse has on the receiver, we begin to ask ourselves why and how questions. Why is this essay able to persuade us and how is

that accomplished? What is the discursive part and what is the linguistic part? What words does the author use and what effect do they have on us? What arguments are used and how are they ordered? What format and images are chosen? What ideas are being transmitted and who is the discourse directed at? The production process of the text is enveloped and directly affected by the process of reception. It is a work of pure empathy (Pujante 1996: 33).

Probably, since humankind has had the capacity to communicate, the same pattern for the production of discourse have been followed. It is an intuitive order, a natural order (Pujante 1996: 135). Every communicative act minimally informative (a class, the designing of a didactic unit, an exam, a discourse, a presentation, etc.) follows the same outline already defined by classical rhetoric.

- *Inventio*: Compilation of materials, discovery of ideas appropriate to the object of discourse, invention of what is to be said, format selection, genre, type of audience, in essence, what am I going to say, to whom, with what format, etc.
- *Dispositio*: arrangement of the material, topic structure; that is, how the material is organized.
- *Elocutio*: selection of vocabulary and syntax, the linguistic part, with what words.
- *Memoria*: to memorize it, if it needs to be memorized.
- *Actio*: the action which today is called “staging”, meaning to present and represent the oration in public, to dramatize it (Fernández 2006: 20).

Ultimately, the concept of any communicative act, as common sense would suggest, involves what is going to be said, to whom, and how the discourse is going to be organized and framed in order to continue with the real execution of the plan.

Therefore, from this rhetorical frame previously used by the classic authors, we are going to focus on two aspects, which according to my view are essential elements of the rhetoric of persuasive discourse: one that is related to *elocutio* (the selected vocabulary, the intentional choice of words that comprise the discourse) and the other related to *inventio*, the type of discourse selected, and in particular, the tale, the story or narrative as a format in which the discourse is framed in order to arrive at the receiver with the least amount of effort and the greatest possible effectiveness. That is to say, the word and the mold by which the discourse is delivered in order to obtain a particular emotional response from the receivers.

## 2. Theoretical framework

We begin our analysis from within the theoretical frame in which we move. In concordance with Sperber and Wilson (1994: 219), the description of communication as a mechanism that is comprised of two types of processes, one based on coding and decoding, and the other on ostention and inference, shows with sufficient clarity the routines of communicative exchange. Coded communication is, of course, linguistic, where auditory signals (graphic or words) are used to communicate meaning which is then decoded by the receiver. However, this dictionary meaning, as a manner of speaking, is obviously not all-inclusive; it should

pass through inferential processing, a process of interpretation. By using inference, the communicative intentions of the speaker are unraveled in an attempt to understand what the speaker is trying to say. Inference is nurtured by what Sperber and Wilson (1994: 28-29) call *context*, a set of social and innate ideas that filter the information being received (verbal and nonverbal), they color and interpret inference. Context, in other words, becomes what is known in pragmatics as *encyclopedic knowledge*, information innate to humankind as a species, the result of millions of years of evolution and thousands of years of socialization. This information exists within our communicative exchanges and permeates the stimuli and responses, the signs, the perceptions, and the behavior; in essence it permeates the entire communicative process. That is, on one hand, there is what is being said (the meaning of the words being used) and, on the other, what the speaker is trying to say (the interpretation of the words).

Based on the context and inference as purported by Sperber and Wilson, there exists a concept of *frame*, introduced in 1955 by the anthropologist G. Bateson. *Cognitive frames* are a set of cognitive structures, information that is located in our memory based on past experiences that filter and give form to perceptions, and whose main function consists of helping to process, organize and understand new information and experiences. As such, the character, the richness, and the structure of prior knowledge condition new knowledge. From this same perspective, A. G. Greenwald (1968) formulated his theory about the cognitive response, which states that people compare the new information received with preexisting information that is remembered, the feelings associated with these memories and with biographic experiences. Indeed, the rational analysis of the benefits and the prejudices is not as important as the affective memories about decisions previously taken.

Years later, George Lakoff (1996, 2004) would refer to his theory of cognitive frames, mental structure that frames are mental structures that comprise our way of viewing the world, and form part of our social encyclopedic knowledge; this is the basis for the interpretation of our messages. Once a word is received, its frame within the brain is activated, which can either be an image or some other type of knowledge. The Frame Theory explains, in part, an individual's interpretation of the messages received, since each decoded word passes through the filter of the corresponding frame in order to be interpreted (within the frame the information regarding the individual's experiences and social learning in association with the word in question appears; that is, we have autobiographic knowledge of the words). Each individual, according to their knowledge, experience and socialization, interprets terms by assigning different meanings, connotations, and emotions, and then, they respond. Thus, we do not see things as they are, but see them as we are.

Emotions, therefore, can have a personal component, which is related to our past experiences and socialization, and can also have a universal component, a product of the signs, perceptions and conducts that we share as a species. This in turn facilitates the prediction of the emotional reactions of the listener, because, as pointed out by Max Weber (1996), power is no more than the capacity to predict with maximum precision the conduct of others. If we foresee how a listener, a voter, or a client will respond, we know where we have to stimulate in order to evoke a response that is appropriate to our own interests; this is how persuasive

communication takes place. The communications professional understands the uncertainty in which humankind lives, and the gregarious need to be accepted by those around us so as to not feel isolated or vulnerable. They also understand the need to live in a predictable world and the enormous consequences that these types of behavior have in communication: the need to be reciprocated in order to avoid falling into cognitive disharmony and thus rejected by the group, and the submission to authority and the long list of universal and social conducts that lie beneath different types of communication and are targeted to evoke appropriate responses to persuasive discourse. For this reason, discourses are built with words and arguments that are repeated relentlessly because they are effective and expose a society that is stuck in a state of redundancy, incapable of escaping the vicious circle imposed by persuasive communication.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Vocabulary, Ideology and Persuasion

Hence, in persuasive communication, arguments and suitable words are consciously chosen for each listener to stimulate a metacognitive frame consciously incited by the speaker. As highlighted by G. Lakoff (2004: 46), we know that women

[...] like certain words, so when you are talking to an audience of women, here are the words you use as many times as possible: *love, from the heart, and for the children*. And if you read Bush's speeches, *love, from the heart, and for the children* show up over and over again.

Sam Leith (2012: 291) points out that although G. W. Bush was made fun of owing to his verbal clumsiness, in reality he was an extremely effective orator. He used emotive code-words, without the distraction of logic, in an irrational way. So, when Bush says "Families is where our nation finds hope, where wings take dream" it may sound absurd, but after the first emotional impact, its absurdity is a lot less important than the fact that the audience hears "families...nation...wings and dreams...".

Ancient rhetoric was already aware of this, since there is nothing new under the sun.

Aristotle says:

[...] there is no such thing as foul language, because in whatever words you put a given thing your meaning is the same. This is untrue. One term may describe a thing more truly than another, may be more like it, and set it more intimately before our eyes.

The epithets that we apply, too, may have a bad and ugly aspect, as when Orestes is called a "mother-slayer"; or a better one, as when he is called his "father's avenger". Simonides, when the victor in the mule-race offered him a small fee, refused to write him an ode because, he said, it was so unpleasant to write odes to half-asses: but on receiving an adequate fee, he wrote *Hail to you, daughters of storm-footed steeds?*, though of course they were daughters of asses too. *Retórica* (1405b). (My translation).

This significant shift, which lies in the choice of words, establishes the meaning construction of the discourse, the true discourse. In this way, reality is perceived in a different way, and the perception of reality is modified, this is the objective of a particular word choice. The keywords generate images, consolidate previous conceptual frames and are the precursor of emotions; emotions are the understanding. Put more concisely: facts are facts but reality is perception.

As observed, within persuasive language there can be a *lexical selection* that is motivated by the desire to elicit an appropriate response to a word from a previously identified frame. Indeed, it is not the same if the mule is the offspring of a steed or of an ass. The positive value of interest needs to be selected. If we wanted to denigrate we would have said the offspring of an ass, of course. Positive emotions are cultivated by particular word choices. But, obviously, it is the outer shell of the word, the meaning that provokes the answer, and from here it is the use of meaning that is a constant concern in the world of advertising, politics, and canonical persuasive discourse. There comes a time, then, where the true meaning of the words becomes unimportant, and is surpassed by the auditory effect they provoke and their ability to produce a psychological impact on the listeners.

This may well be the case, for example, in the use and abuse of meaning, where there is a clear discrepancy between the social meaning that is decoded by the receiver and the meaning that is coded by the sender. That is to say, on many occasions semantic neologisms are created, approved by public administrations and unknown to the majority of society but employed by the speaker who pretends to persuade; while the receiver, persists in remembering the original meaning.

In advertising and the commercial vocabulary, knowledge of the meaning of words by the receiver ties, in a way, the agent's hands; for example, in Spain, *zum* (*juice*) cannot be sold as something else. Therefore, what can be done? The definition of *zum* can be varied in order to manipulate it according to special interests. The major part of orange juice is so processed that it would be almost impossible to drink it if it were not for the flavorings, yet it is still called *zum*<sup>1</sup>. There is only a small amount of orange juice in the orange juice sold in supermarkets, which also contain a large amount of added sugar. This is the paradox of this drink, as although it contains similar levels of sugar to those found in a can of Coca-Cola it has a much better reputation. This is what is bought, and what can also occur with juice, Iberian jam, yogurt, sugar, etc., as well as with democracy or socialism which is also sold.

In these cases, it is not a question of connotation but of the premeditated change of meaning. This is not a natural variation, but a deliberate extension of meaning with perverse aims. The emotional response is exploited beyond the denotative meaning of the word.

However, the problem does not only revolve around the word/noun itself, but in the adjectivization of the term, which can lead to a complete change of meaning. The persuader is aware that the receiver retains the noun and views the adjective as embellishment, but in most cases, the adjective completely disfigures the noun which it accompanies. For example, according to the RAE (2014), “*yogurt* is a variety of fermented milk that is prepared by

reducing its volume to half thru evaporation and later subjecting it to the action of a fermenter called *maya*". The social meaning does not go as far, apparently, as to know the name of the fermenter in question, but it does recognize that the milk in yogurt, at a certain temperature, ferments and becomes thick and acidic, the characteristics of yogurt.

Not long ago, in Spain, the company *Leche Pascual* fought hard in the courts for its *dairy desserts* (that have a shelf life of a few months and do not require refrigeration) to include the word *yogurt* in the labelling. Finally, the Spanish government allowed this type of yogurt to be labelled as *pasteurized yogurt*. However, in reality, this product is not yogurt. The positive social weight of the word, its reputation, and its interpretation in the frame of a healthy lifestyle allowed it to be included within the category of *yogurt*, when in actual fact it was not. Adjectivization also plays a role in the handling of meaning.

The *people's democracy* of communist regimes is not democracy, and the *organic democracy* of General Franco in Spain under the dictatorship is also not democracy. Democracy can be *parliamentary* or *constitutional*, but not *people's*, which would be redundant and unnecessary.

As can be appreciated from these examples, it is not only nouns, although they (nouns) constitute the majority of cases, which suffer from this virus that transforms and mutates meaning. Humpty Dumpty, Lewis Carroll's character in the book *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), summarizes this fact very well:

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more nor less,' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master-that's all.' (Lozano 2008: 16)

The lexical selection is, therefore, the fundamental weapon of a persuasive communicator. The sender lexically selects a series of words upon which the receiver applies rules of decoding and inference. That said, in the lexical selection, the sender, the professional of persuasion, intervenes in both processes manipulating the terms: in the coding process, changing the meaning of the word to manipulate the decoding; and in the inference process which conscientiously stimulates a specific frame in agreement with the person's interests. Hence, not only is the word chosen but also the frame.

Ultimately, we find ourselves with words positively or negatively stereotyped, according to the situation, that drive the interpretation towards the world of positive or negative values of the receiver, many times, independently of their social meaning. In line with this principle, the lexical selection in persuasive communication employs different strategies:

- Words where there is a clear distinction between the social and administrative meaning (*juice, yogurt, etc.*). Semantic neologisms are frequently found that accommodate the contents. The signifier is maintained, but the signified is adapted to the interests of the user. The signifier has its own weight. The content is arguable,

interpretable and negotiable. Quite often they are shells of words filled according to the speaker's likes or dislikes (*Spain*: for some, *a nation*, for others, *a nation of nations*, etc.).

- Positive words that are accompanied by an adjective which contradicts the real definition with the aim to exploit its social prestige (*organic democracy*, *people's democracy*, etc.). In other cases, it is the adjective that searches for the emotional response of the individual who filters the word referred to within their particular frame. As we already know, words predispose the receiver to certain lines of thought. We only need to recall the example given by Luis Veres (2006) about a restaurant menu:

Natural homegrown green beans with chorizo slow-cooked in a traditional clay pot according to grandma's old-fashioned recipe.

And they brought beans with chorizo. The emotional usage of the vocabulary is evident. Words come loaded with extras that are the fruit of our own experience, words evoke a particular line of thinking. When faced with a specific signifier we react emotionally according to our cognitive frame with respect to the autobiographic experience of the word. The evocations produced by words like *homegrown*, *traditional*, *natural*, etc. set off an emotional reaction prompted by the response of a certain frame.

- Words close in meaning, with common semantic roots, but opting for what best suits their interests according to the frame used for the interpretation: it is not the same that a car *collides*, *clashes*, *smashes*, *bashes* or *squashes*, although in all of these cases an accident occurs. It is not the same to quarrel as it is to condemn, reprimand, admonish and chide. They provoke emotions and responses that are clearly different. There are additional meanings associated with the words. It has been tested that the statements of witnesses present at the scene of an accident considerably varies according to how the question is presented
  - How fast was the car travelling when it collided into the bus?
  - How fast was the car travelling when it smashed into the bus?

In the second situation the velocity would be seen as being greater.

Another example: in the language used in the press, the journalist is the spokesperson of the illocutionary force contained within the declaration of a politician and, therefore, of his or her intentions. As Escribano Hernández (2009: 11) explains

The translation of a speech act into a verb that describes it becomes one of the most effective maneuvers carried out by journalists for orienting ideology. A certain act can be expressed using different verbs of varying illocutionary intensity, which is something that is exploited by the journalist to add nuance, to orientate the intention concealed behind the words of the protagonist and, ultimately, to transmit a certain image of themselves to the voters

- (1) Aznar: “Pensions are in danger if the PP does not govern after the 14<sup>th</sup> of March”

|       |            |                                                                                                 |
|-------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aznar | says       | <i>that Pensions are in danger if the PP does not govern after the 14<sup>th</sup> of March</i> |
|       | assures    |                                                                                                 |
|       | confirms   |                                                                                                 |
|       | insists    |                                                                                                 |
|       | insinuates |                                                                                                 |
|       | denounces  |                                                                                                 |
|       | criticizes |                                                                                                 |

Obviously, *says* is not the same as *denounces*. It is the verb functioning as a mechanism that focuses the interpretive function of the news. More examples:

The famous incident of the former King of Spain, Juan Carlos I, during his confrontation with the then president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, which was summarized by the Spanish and Latin American press with a great display of verbs that was ideologically orientated as “Why don’t you shut up?”:

- (2) *El País*: The King to Chávez: “Why don’t you shut up?”.
- (3) *El Mundo*: King *shouts* at Chávez, in Aznar’s defense, “Why don’t you shut up?”.
- (4) *El ABC*: King *cuts* Chávez *short* for insulting Spain: “Why don’t you shut up?”.
- (5) *Nuevo Diario* (Nicaragua): King *shuts up* Chávez.
- (6) *20 minutos.es*: “Why don’t you shut up?” *blurts out* the King to Chávez in the Iberoamerican Summit.
- (7) *El Público*: The king *orders* Chávez to shut up.
- (8) *Clarín.com*: “Why don’t you shut up!” *demands* King Juan Carlos of Chávez.
- (9) *El Nacional* (Venezuela): “Why don’t you shut up! King Juan Carlos *tells off* Chávez.

- (10) *El Nuevo Día* (Bolivia): The King of Spain gets angry and commands Hugo Chávez to shut up.

(My translation)

At present, it is common knowledge among the American left that you shouldn't call yourself "liberal" but rather "progressive". In the questionnaires that were conducted after the 2004 elections, the Republicans beat "liberals" by fifteen points; however, the "progressives" beat the Republicans by two. The ideology is identical, the label is different and the result is also different.

A "Clean Air Act" may provoke a positive reaction in the brain quicker than an "Act regulating atmospheric emissions". The managing director of an important Spanish bank (BBVA) recommended that journalists not use words such as "rich" owing to their "enormous emotional burden", and suggested instead the use of "high income person" (Irene Lozano, *El País*, October 12, 2011). There are multiple examples of this sort.

- Words of zero meaning: technical terms, euphemisms, lexical neologisms; those words that the receiver responds to emotionally, usually, succumbing to the expert employing these kinds of words: *peptides*, *trace elements*, *laminin*, *glycosaminoglycan*, *elastin*, *keratinocytes*, *fibroblasts*, *amino peptides* or *sirtuin* (Díaz Rojo, Morant and Westall 2006 in beauty products; or when talking about horizontal modulus of special typology, a reference word commonly used but not very well understood, which is actually hiding the real meaning – shanty towns. The receiver does not understand these terms, but infers that since they are technical, they are scholarly, and thus they conform.

Whether or not, the meanings are trustworthy, the sender is completely aware that the receiver does not know the meanings they think know. On other occasions, the speaker chooses the word that is the most positive to achieve their objectives or they hide behind euphemisms, technical terms or lexical neologisms that obscure a meaning that may be more transparent by using another word. The object is to evoke a particular frame. Others, simply, make up a semantic neologism of which the receiver cannot understand, and not just because of a lack of cultural knowledge. This is technical semantic neologism and thus is beyond the reach of any receiver that is not a specialist in the field, such as meanings lost in the Official State Bulletin (BOE) and in the discussions of the parliamentary committees. These meanings are not registered in dictionaries but are utilized and backed, with impunity, by current legislation in some cases, and by policy strategies in others. Additionally, specific words can be intentionally selected and directed at changing the perception of reality in favor of the interests of a certain group.

### 3.2. Genre, Story and Persuasion

Thus, all of this text and vocabulary must be molded into a particular format. One of the tasks of *inventio*, following the line of deconstruction that was referred to at the beginning of this

article, is to find the format with which we are going to work. Some types of advertising choose the format of a letter. In general, formats generate expectations, and if we choose a letter format the receiver decodes it and infers as if it were a real letter. The sender saves information by using that which is shared with the receiver, frames the discourse in a certain genre that he or she uses in a persuasive manner, and thus the receiver decodes and infers that message with a predisposition determined by the same genre. A letter can be a personal and intimate form of communication or a formal and authorized one depending on the heading and the form of addressing the recipient.

The letters sent to our houses by politicians are a good proof of this, as personalized letters cause us to believe the communication is individual when in fact millions of letters are posted.

Observe how a Movistar ad (Fig. 1), for example, exploits the *Manifiesto* format to evoke a certain response and interpretation. A manifesto has a specific structure and awakens inferences characteristic of this type of document.



Figure 1. Movistar ad

The person receiving the advertisement, after the visual impact, stops at the top of the page with *Manifiesto*. If our receiver refers to their knowledge of the world, to the cognitive frame which is evoked to interpret and to understand the meaning of this word, they will find that it carries with it important ideas that have marked ages, ideologies, social and political

movements (communist, surrealism, -isms and revolutions), and that it follows this specific outline and the principles and the names it upholds.

The advertiser is relying on the genre, on one hand, and on one term that resonates widely with authority; manifestos have social credibility, a good reputation. The advertiser knows that the word has great evocative power. Certain words, in general, have this power and it is one of the most utilized persuasive techniques. Words predispose us, as we have seen, to favor certain lines of thought.

We come to expect that facts in the world are produced in a determined way, in a specific order and always by the same agents. (Fernández 2006: 77). In modern literary theory, genre is defined as a horizon of expectations that indicate to the reader the codes that need to be actualized for interpretation to occur.

One of the most commonly used formats of recent times is the narrative format, the tale, the story, an account, on their own or in combination with a discourse as an additional persuasive element. Similar to the aforementioned examples, the receiver decodes and infers as if dealing with a story or tale, or a real account that presents a structure and a development that the receiver already anticipates, and that requires the least amount of cognitive energy to be processed because the outline is already known, one that has been experienced from a young and tender age. It is not strange that V. Propp (1928) in his *Morphology of a Folk Tale* discovered that most of the tales he based his work on presented the same storyline, the same literary stereotypes, a structure that, by the way, was repeated throughout the centuries, allowing us to see that the foundations of social personality are almost all universal, intrinsically human. The same stereotypes follow us around, arousing identical emotions, and our rudimentary feelings are repeated along history: *mutatis mutandis*, the same heroes, the same values, the same ideals, the same order, the same contents, the same arguments, etc. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (1959 [1949]) is in the same line as this.

Why does this format work for persuasion?

[...] in a study carried out in 2007, the market researcher Jennifer Edson Escalas discovered, using audience testing, that individuals reacted more positively to advertisements with a narrative format than direct advertisements, those that encouraged the viewers to think about the arguments presented about a product. In the same way, in 2006, another researcher, Green, concluded that labelling information as facts increased critical analysis, while classifying the information as fiction had the opposite effect. In other words, the audience and consumers more readily accept ideas when their brains are activated in narrative mode than when it is activated in an analytical way. (Hsu 2010: 42). (My translation).

Conclusion: here are a few stories.

Jerome Bruner (1986: 11-14) considers that a person obtains knowledge about the world through narrative structures. The human is, in essence, a narrative being. The tale is considered as an appropriate means for which facts of the world become comprehensible for people since, inevitably, people select, organize, and provide their experiences in a narrative manner. The construction of reality through narrative is, in other words, the basic cognitive source for which human beings know the world and, also, themselves.

Stories represent life itself and that is why, as a format, they are well understood and passed on. They are the language of life and life experiences; they are the tales of each and every day.

A life has a beginning, a center and an end, like a story. A life is about someone doing something, like a story. A life has a main character in the center, as a story usually has. A life can be full of conflicts, can be seen as a set of reoccurring themes, and can also be divided into certain episodes, once again the same as a story. A life is kind of world inside of a world, like a story. (Arroyo 2012: 134). (My translation).

It is not strange for us to think that, from the time we are born, the story is integrated into our lives, a story with a concrete structure, with a, quite often identical, morphology, as we have had the opportunity to see. This familiarity with the format provokes quick assimilation of the contents. Most of the information that we receive in the early years of our lives has this format, narrative and oral, where we learn stories, stories with a moral, religion, culture, from time immemorial. Almost everything that they tell us (be careful with the verb, *they tell*), we frame as a tale.

Carlos Ruiz Zafón (2009: 292-293) explains the situation very well in *El juego del ángel*, through the mouth of the devil who says:

Martin, fables are perhaps one of the most interesting literary mechanisms invented. Do you know what they teach us?  
—Moral lessons?  
—No. They teach us that human beings learn and absorb ideas and concepts through narratives and stories, not through magisterial lectures or theoretical discourses. [...] I want you to analyze how these texts work, distill their essence and determine why they provoke an emotional reaction. I want you to learn the grammar, not the moral lessons. And, in two or three weeks I want you to bring me something written by you, the beginning of a story. I want you to make me believe. (My translation).

Obviously, if we know how it works, if we know the mechanisms which allow it to reach the receiver in the most direct way, if we know how to stimulate the emotional part of the receiver we have everything in our favor to persuade, we have the power because persuasive communication targets emotions, not reason; the power is no more than the capacity to predict with maximum precision the behavior of others.

The use of narrative, the story, the tale is not a new strategy, and it is not a new invention of the great gurus of communication. Probably, since humankind is humankind, we have transmitted our experiences in a narrative format and, before writing was invented, through the language of images. Cave paintings are narratives of facts that have already happened in the lives of prehistoric man. An image is more than sufficient to initiate and even finish a tale; an image is an indication, a seed of a tale. See an image and we can tell a story. A vignette is an indication of the story that is developed and concluded using the information shared between the sender and the receiver. A slogan operates in much the same way. The complete part of the tale that is left out, the encyclopedic knowledge of the receiver, the frame which suggests the image or the specific word based on the culture of the individual, in his or her socialization, because they know a certain format, know its structure and their thinking tends, for cognitive economy, to complete it, to fill in according to the information they possess, and what they expect.

Since words and images are many times seeds of tales, potential tales, it is enough to pronounce the words, provide the image in order for us to complete the rest according to our cognitive frame, with our life experience.

An image about hunting is a story with a protagonist, a beginning, an end, and an adversary, the hunted animal. The person who views this image lives it as a protagonist. In a way, almost unconsciously, these men were carrying out proselytism for those admiring their work, the same as they did thousands of years later when language burst into their lives and the tradition of oral production began with real and invented facts told as stories many times converted into legends.

And, thus, from the onset of memory, the tale has been used for propagandist purposes, tales with images exploited by political and religious powers for ennobling their men and their deeds to legitimize facts and behavior.

Likewise, the tale through writing and word, from biblical parables, mythology, sermons, the *exempla*, to stories, the epics, the *evidentia*, the fables, etc., thousands of years have been subject to tales, thousands of years they have caused us to take them on almost unconsciously, in a passive way, this is the objective. The use of the tale, the embedded tale, or the tale itself.

Aristotle said (*Rh.* 1394a):

Fables are suitable for political addresses and have the advantage that, while it is difficult to find events that have already happened similar to those before us, it is easy to apply fables, because what is required, the same as with parables, is that their similarity is recognized and this is something that can be achieved through philosophy. [...] the events are better exploited for deliberation, since most of the time what is going to occur is similar to what has already happened. (My translation).

And, thus, from then to the present day we have seen ourselves subjected to learning through narrative structures. We are prone to consume and adapt to stories of which we can identify

with. For this reason, tales are used and created. We can create a tale or use it as an example or as proof. We know the outline; it is foreseeable and easy to follow.

And, as always, someone says or does something for the first time that in the end they did not invent. What has been exploited over the centuries has now been given a name and “created”: it is what today is known as *storytelling*, a communicative technique much more effective than propaganda. Advertisements and electoral campaigns are filled with stories: Bush’s campaign in 2000 was built on his personal fight against alcohol. As Ramzy (Salmon 2008 [2007]: 145) confirms “People don’t buy products, but rather the stories that these products represent. Nor do they buy brands but the myths and archetypes that these brands symbolize.”

The political advisor for the US Democratic Party, Stanley Greenberg (Gutiérrez 2009 usually employs a suggestive phrase to refer to the political contest between leaders and the political parties: the tale, the narrative is the key to everything. Consequently, the political parties (and the politicians) who tell the best story win. Not long ago, Iñaki Gabilondo titled one of his interventions in *El País* (6/9/2011) “Beat ETA by winning the tale” (“Hay que ganar a ETA la batalla del relato”,

Advertising and politics are plagued with tales. The Marlboro example presented by Pratkanis and Aronson (1994) is clear.

There was once a packet of filter tip tobacco, difficult to sell, that they tried to make popular among ladies using tacky slogans such as “soft as May” and “a delicate and ivory-colored filter tip”. It was such a failure that in the 40s it was withdrawn from the market. The brand was called Marlboro.

In the 50s, when the use of filter cigarettes intensified, the tobacco company Philip Morris once again tried to commercialize the brand, but unsuccessfully. At this time women made up 75% of the consumers of filter tip cigarettes and a flip-top box. The company claimed: “Marlboro offers the best of flavors” with the additional suggestive wording “Why not relax and smoke a Marlboro”. This led nowhere and failure continued. The customers wanted Winston.

At the beginning of the 70s, a comprehensive analysis of the sector was conducted on the sale of filter tip tobacco and the habits of smokers. It was discovered that the messages being sent out were directed at all sectors, except for those who were just leaving adolescence in search of an identity and a place in the adult world. Hence, a powerful and suitable message was prepared for these impressionable teens, seekers of their own personalities.

Then arrived a cowboy, weathered from the wind, riding over the immense landscape into the sunset; a symbol of independence, manliness and the search for liberty. “Come to Marlboro Country” said the advertising slogan. The insecure youth found within this image something that gave them a sense of security, indifference, masculinity, and infinite horizons. The advertisement was effective. Years later, the brand, which had been rejected since the 20s ended up being the most sold brand in the US market. (My translation).

Once again, the story wins.

In the field of politics, Darío Villanueva<sup>2</sup> (2010: 46-53) studied in detail the rhetorical effectiveness of speeches given by Obama and how he used what classic rhetoric calls *hipotiposis* or *evidentia* in his discourse. This consists of the precise mentioning, with excruciating detail, of a specific example that illustrates the arguments put forward by the orator; that is to say, encomia or discourses representing circumstances that tell stories where people, behavior or realities are described in order to praise or condemn them.

To exemplify the spirit of the American people to overcome adversity, Obama introduced in his speech the:

[...] hope of change that he had seen in the eyes of a “young woman in Cedar Rapids” whose night job wasn’t enough to pay the medical bills of her sick sister. This is the same hope that a group of settlers took with them to rebel against an empire, and the fighters of the “American Civil Rights Movement” led by James Bevel and Martin Luther King to march from Selma to Montgomery, in the racist Alabama of the Klu Klux Klan and Governor Wallace [...] the fight of the textile workers of Spartanburg or of the dishwashers of Las Vegas, the hope of a little girl attending the school that collapsed in Dillon or the boy whose school is the streets of Los Angeles. And to put an individual face to a whole people, a new *evidentia*, he mentioned Ann Nixon Cooper, who stood in line in order vote at the age of 106. (My translation).

The story of Ashely was a video clip that was broadcasted 30,000 times on the local channels of nine “swing states” where the result of the battle between the Republicans and the Democrats in George Bush’s presidential campaign was uncertain. According to observers of both parties, this changed the general course of the US presidential election in November 2004. It was a story, and built an image of Bush as being gentle and protective<sup>3</sup>.

But, one does not need to go to the USA to contemplate the use of *evidentia* in political persuasion. In the Spanish parliamentary elections of 2008 all the parties agreed to radically change the concept of the election video that had been used up until then. Now they sell stories: a 94-year-old man, an ordinary elderly person that plays cards, drinks coffee, lives alone, well-contextualized in a house containing traditional furniture and who has been around the block a few times and is leafing through an album of photographs faded from the passing of time. After a life full of hope and deception, he decides to vote for the Socialist Party because it had allowed him to feel hopeful again<sup>4</sup>. The effectiveness of the advertisement is obvious, and even more so when the opposing parties use the same strategy<sup>5</sup>.

As Luis Arroyo (2012: 27) points out

If politics are shows, we could extend the dramatic metaphor to the contents of initiatives and projects to discuss the *tales* of leaders and the *scripts* they *represent*, conforming to a *scenography* almost always designed according to a *narrative*

*sequence*. The politicians themselves are like *characters* that *act* in a *drama* presented to the spectators, generally passive to those who are trying to incite certain emotions.

It is certain that, quite often, we need stories to turn to for support, and it does not matter if they are true or false because in the world of politics this is not relevant. We need stories that overthrow the opponent, stories that are repeated to the point of exhaustion with the aim that they appear credible. There are still people in the USA that think there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. If the story evokes passion, then that suffices. The video of the Syrian boy<sup>6</sup> that feigned being killed by the bullets of gunmen in order to save the life of his sister is the total exploitation of genre and format for the purposes of propaganda. The video is false (*El País* [Verne], 15/11/2014):

What is seen in the images is not even Syria: it was filmed in Malta in locations used to shoot films such as *Troy* and *Gladiator*. The boy and girl are both professional Maltese actors and the voices heard in the background are Syrian refugees that live in Malta. The effect of the virality, generated by the empathy and the disbelief that the video produces owing to the altruistic act involving minors whose lives are supposedly saved almost by miracle, seeks to promote awareness about the children caught up in warfare. To make the video more credible, shooting sounds are incorporated and the resolution is not very good and the camera shakes. This is an attempt to imitate many of the recordings that, thanks to new technologies, anonymous citizens upload to YouTube, even in the midst of war. (My translation).

Format is used to its full advantage<sup>7</sup>.

Stories with goodies and baddies, stories, often false, that stir feelings are the ones that decide elections and the ones that are used more and more often in advertising. In election campaigns technical, economic, and social issues are not discussed as much as the purely emotional ones. The exact same thing happens in advertisements: the product is no longer being discussed. Advertisements are stories, idyllic characters, happy, adventurous, and desirable images that have desirable lives; we want to emulate them and form part of this group that we can identify with, which enshrouds us or in which we see ourselves reflected.

#### 4. Conclusion

As we have shown in this study, the speaker selects what is going to be said, what topics are going to be treated and in what order, what arguments are going to be used, which stereotypes, how they are going to be addressed, which tone, which story is going to be told, who the characters will be, what will be the conclusion, the moral, and the discursive or cognitive frame. And, we have to fit a linguistic selection appropriate to the objectives of persuasion (vocabulary, syntaxes, etc.) and approach it with staging adapted to the ideals of the listener: the clothing, the attitude, the tone, the gesture, the context, the *ethos*, the images, etc. These are, nowadays, the basic ingredients to achieve success in persuasive communication that finds in emotion its most desired speaker.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In English, it is distinguished *orange juice* from *orange drink* (which is artificial).

<sup>2</sup> As pointed out by Villanueva (2010), “The rhetorical competence of Barack Obama is also manifested in his ability to empathize with the listeners, thanks to his appropriate *actio*, the sober but sufficiently emphatic performance that accompanied his speeches. Likewise, we should not overlook his good judgement in selecting the writers of his speeches and the capacity to transmit to them his fundamental ideas – rhetorical *inventio* or the content of the message – to which they later had to find the correct words – *elocution* – and underlying the words, the structure or *dispositio* most effective for the intended purposes. Great, poetic and efficient speeches in terms of the ability to move and mobilize the listeners”. Ultimately, this is the basic aim of the use of the tale: to persuade.

<sup>3</sup> Available in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWA052-B148>

<sup>4</sup> Available in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZLfxfW3Nk>

<sup>5</sup> Available in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcF5oEYDk8M>

<sup>6</sup> Available in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UujzrZhblU>

<sup>7</sup> The story of the soldier Lynch is another example of the use of the narrative format for political propaganda. Available in <http://www.voltairenet.org/article124446.html>