THE LANGUAGE OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION THROUGH THE LENS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN ONLINE MEDIA

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to analyze the critical language of racism in political communication reflected through online media. The analysis is focused on the elements of meaning and content structure of political statements and the context in which they are used. The analysis highlights the use of words with an intensity of meaning toward negative connotation, which manages to produce the harsh language of racism. Political communication develops an interactive discourse, which is simultaneously related not only to linguistic behavior but also to human behavior. Various political statements regarding immigration issues, the intensity of news published by media on the statements of politicians, as well as the influence they have on public opinion will be at the center of the discussion. Through descriptive and analytical methods, the article will argue and highlight the hostile, racial, and discriminatory language used by politicians, which is contradictory to the international framework on human rights and policies of the European Parliament which are focused on eliminating this approach.

Keywords: *Racism language, Critical analysis, Political Communication, Media, European policies*

1. **Introduction**

Communication permeates all human activities. It has taken on a wide dimension with the advent of social media. Communication is of particular importance not only for the information it transmits but also for the message it conveys. In every moment of communication, people are dealing with meaning and significance (Ollivier, 2015). The language used and the language in use makes possible the analysis of communication, which focuses on the performative ability of the language (Adjei, 2013). The performative function of language is realized through messages, which are nothing but abstract structures of communication. The message is the element with a broad-spectrum discussion because of the situation and context in which it is used. The use of language depends on the context and especially on the attitudes involved in communication (Hymes, 1964). These attitudes are related to several factors such as linguistics, culture, society, and politics. Communication in media and the delivery of messages show different nuances. The words used throughout the political discourse can have a direct, denotative meaning or a particular connotation. The focus of the analysis of messages and communication used in media will be the critical language of racism and discrimination used by political officials, who in recent years, have increased the use of revilement language. The paper aims to analyze the use of language in political communication through social media, the effect that the specific meanings of words have on the message being conveyed, as well as the meaning of the language used.

Currently, communication is placed in a new environment with digital media, in particular social media. In this framework, communication presents other features, beyond the traditional form of written presentation. These distinctive features are attributed to the combination of three components, the written form, the spoken form, and the gestural form. However, the review of research on race and racism in the digital realm identified social network sites as spaces "where race and racism play out in interesting, sometimes disturbing, ways" (Daniels, 2013; Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021).

It is crucial to understand how the meaning of words is constructed and circulated through communication, together with the functioning of message interpretation (Ollivier, 2015). The effect of conveyed messages is not only focused on what the individual transmits but also on how the message is interpreted and reshaped afterward. The article will take into consideration various statements of politicians displayed in the digital media, to analyze the meaning of the language used and the effect it transmits to listeners or readers. The statements of senior British officials regarding immigration issues have been taken as examples. The countries of the Western Balkans and in particular Albania, are facing a rapid emigration of their population to European countries, which has brought the reaction of foreign policy from these countries, often expressed through abusive, racist, and discriminatory language (Thomas, 2021). This is in contradiction with anti-discrimination laws approved in the UK. The Race Relations Act 1965, which prohibited

discrimination in public spaces on the grounds of color, race, ethnic or national origins, was the first legislation of this kind in the UK (Fernández-Reino, 2020).

Conveying the message is a means to develop political communication. The interest in the study of political communication is increased significantly in recent years. It is expected that within modern democratic states, an interaction between government authorities and different members of a political process principally with civil society institutions is provided by political communication instruments and feedback mechanism forming (Chekunova, 2016). It can be said that political communication is considered a bridge between state authorities and society. Moreover, political communication is a core field of media and communication studies. It is concerned with the communicative processes related to the distribution of power, the formation of collectively binding decisions, and the authoritative allocation of values in society (Reinemann, 2014).

The earliest definition of political communication is given by Chaffee in 1975, who linked political communication with the role of communication in the political process. In this way, the importance of the information being conveyed and the impact of its transmission on the listener is described. It is also recognized that political communication is an interactive process related to the transmission of information or messages through politicians, the media, and the public (Norris, 2001a). Through communication, the politician aims to deliver messages to the public, which he chooses to transmit with a certain political nuance. Individuals use political performances to create and transform communities and to establish individual and collective identities. Most simply, political performatives are words, symbols, and discourses that perform the social action of bonding and unifying individuals into collective social actors, the ultimate source of power in a democracy (Armour, 2020).

The professionalization of political communications is becoming evident in many established and newer democracies (Norris, 2001b). This is directly related to media communication, where the primary place is occupied by politicians who are most exposed to social networking platforms. This communication is carried out in two forms: individual social platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and general ones such as online media websites. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in concern about harsh criticism from political officials in their communications on social media platforms (Egelhofer, 2023). Foul and abusive language is evident in many statements when the discourse used is not characterized by features of civil and reasoning language.

Linguistic inflections in political communication can be observed through the examination of the language of political statements, which are interpreted in and out of context, causing different effects on listeners. The semantics of the word come loaded, causing the word to have an increasingly negative meaning. The lexicon used in political communication is more directly related to the social condition of a certain stage, which reflects the structure of society and its political stratification. This lexicon has its uniqueness as a marking system

(Lloshi, 1999). Furthermore, even V. Dijk (1997), elaborates on this idea, highlighting that political language studies often focus on lexical style, in other words, on the use of context-dependent words.

Therefore, in every statement, there are expressions related to political representation and social relations. The words used during political communication have a sign function. They bear a certain attitude and refer to the naming of various phenomena in an analytical way. In general, through political communication, a system of words with non-direct meaning is developed. The words are used with such a meaning that they cannot be separated from the ideopolitical stance. Even their repetition in the same sentence several times creates a psychological effect on the listeners. According to Barthes (2008), such cases of using words with secondary meaning in political communication, are called "parasitic system of literal language" (Lloshi, 1999). This means that the use of these stereotypes does not allow the message conveyed in political communication to be perceived and interpreted differently from the primary sense of the words.

The chosen words have closed, highly connotative semantics, by not giving expressive advantages to the words. Unwittingly, the lexicon of political communication falls into the line of a negative connotation, turning the politicians' statements a target of interpretations of the discourse they use. Government's responses to rising levels of migrants and refugees entering Europe have become substitutes for debates on exclusion and security (European Network Against Racism [ENAR], 2016; ENAR, 2017). Through this approach, the discriminatory and racial political communication used in the media serves as an instrument to exert ideological dominance on migrants with a strong emotional impact (Teo, 2000). Moreover, the European Parliament recognized the 'weaponization' of disinformation against minorities in two Resolutions (10 October 2019 and 15 January 2020) where it 'condemned media propaganda and misinformation against minorities and called for the establishment of the best possible safeguards against hate speech and radicalization, and hostile propaganda (Szakács & Bognár, 2021). Based on the above discourse, the research question is posed: does the inappropriate language used in the media towards migrants affect public opinion and the discriminatory attitudes against them?

2. Methodology/ Research design

For the analysis of this paper, the statements of high political officials mainly in the United Kingdom and France were chosen, to highlight the elements of the language of racism and discrimination. Several statements of high political officials were taken into consideration, from October 2022 to April 2023. Political statements were also taken into consideration in earlier periods (i.e. France.24.com), to have a complete geographical panorama of the language of racism in the online media. The scope of the analyses is the language used in political communication, particularly regarding migrants. Several social platforms were analyzed, individual social platforms such as Twitter and online

websites such as BBC, CNN, Euronews, France24.com, LBC.co.uk, The Guardian, and the Telegraph, from which statements with hostile, critical, racial, and discriminatory language are recorded. Words with a pejorative intensity of meaning have been identified, to reflect the harshness of the language used in the transmission of messages to the public. The words used in the communication of politicians have been analyzed in detail. For the cognitive interpretation, the dictionary of the English language was used (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2003), providing all the words with the same meaning that could be used instead of the cognate.

Quantitative data was collected by counting the news presented in one of the online media for a certain period (The Guardian, 2023) to measure the extent of the news that is published related to one of the issues addressed in the politicians' statements, such as illegal immigration. These data served to measure the impact of hostile and discriminatory language on the public and the media, particularly when several expressions taken from political communication are used as news headlines.

3. Results

Political science and the study of law are largely based on discourse related to government deliberations in decision-making, parliamentary debates, laws, and regulations, as well as ethnic affairs. Detailed study of the forms of political discourse reveals underlying socio-political, and in particular, ethnic attitudes of politicians (Van Dijk, 1993). The expression of politicians and the language they use has recently become the object of many studies (Edelman, 1985; Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009; Petrenko & Potapova, 2014), but also the focus of the European political agenda, given that political communication is becoming more aggressive (Cicchirillo et al., 2015). The term 'critical linguistics' was first used by Fowler et al., (1979), who believed that communication does not merely reflect social processes and structures, but affirms, consolidates, and reproduces existing social structures.

In the name of populism or protagonism, current political rhetoric is showing discriminatory, prejudicial, and aggressive language towards immigrants and migrants, which is worth discussing in the context of communication studies. Despite differences in the way immigration and migrant groups are represented in European media, we can observe that migrants are generally under-represented and shown as delinquents or criminals (Eberl et al., 2018).

The European Parliament has drawn up policies for protection against racism, xenophobia, and racial discrimination for all countries of the European Union (De Groot, 2023). The report to the European Parliament states, "People from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds face discrimination and its consequences daily, but the exact scale of the problem is hard to gauge owing to a lack of data and general under-reporting of racist incidents." (De Groot, 2023). However, according to ENAR (2016), politicians and political/media commentators have delivered anti-migrant statements and racist hate speech with impunity.

In the digital age, it is obvious that the language of racism has gained momentum in online media, while the ideology and discourse of discrimination and racism have now laid siege to new communications technologies, such as the Internet (The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2005). The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022), calls attention to the increased level of hate speech directed at migrants and ethnic minorities on the Internet stating that "International and national human rights organizations raised concerns during the pandemic about the increasing level of hate speech on the Internet and often from the media and politicians, language that targeted migrants and ethnic minorities." We will try to analyze the language of racism and discrimination displayed in various politicians' statements about migrants in general (and the Albanians in particular), which appears in the form of institutional racism. According to Banaji et al., (2021), the term systemic racism has traditionally referred to systems that uphold racism via institutional power. Online media is the main means of disseminating political statements and information through newspapers and social networks. Several political statements are separated from the online media during the period October 2022-March 2023, to be analyzed on the language used.

The analysis of the language used and the context in which the statements are applied are the focus of the analysis of the political communication that prompts an interactive discourse. Discourse activity is not limited to the use of language. Verbal and linguistic behavior must be restored within human behavior (Ollivier, 2015). In an official statement where immigration is considered as a matter of "*stopping the invasion of our southern coasts*" (LBC.co.uk, 2022), the analysis focuses on one of the situations of linguistic exchange, specifically regarding the norms of interpretation and understanding of the linguistic message (ethnography of communication), presented by Hymes (1964, as cited in Ollivier, 2007) through the model S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. S-setting (related to the description of the environment of the situation); P-participants (persons involved in communication, i.e. speaker and listener/audience); E-ends (related to the results of communication); A-acts (order of actions during communication); K-key (way of speaking); I-instrumentalities (form and style of communication); N-norms (determines the criteria that are socially acceptable in a communication); G-genre (the type of discourse used). This model was used as a guide for the analysis of communication, not only to understand the language in use but also to analyze the language of communication in real situations within the cultural context. Hymes (1964) carried out the description and analysis of the language through ethnography. Relying on speech ethnography, specifically, in the study of speech variations in different social contexts, Hymes (1964) placed the communicative event at the center of his study. The analysis of communication according to this model focuses on the observation of the parties, who create the event within a certain context. The same approach is followed even for the analysis of the statements on immigration, where all the elements of the above model are observed, to examine the communication in close connection with the social context in

which they are used. The communication analysis according to the ethnographical model of communication has particular importance, as it focuses on the aspect of speaking and on the contextual aspect of communication. This reinforces the opinion that speech cannot be treated detached from sociological and cultural factors, because of the significant role they play in the meaning and interpretation of the message transmitted.

Every analysis of spoken or written language produced in discursive interactions should take into consideration the broader view of texts (or communication) in terms of meaning-making and how they may be attributable to other meanings held in the society or context within which discourse occurs (Adjei, 2013).

Through statements such as:

"*We want those people who work, not those who rob*" (France.24, 2021)

"*It is not at all fortress Europe, but it is not a supermarket Europe either.... There are doors and you must go through the door,*" (Euronews, 2022);

"...to act as a powerful deterrent against dangerous and illegal travel" (CNN, 2023);

"*Illegal arrivals were in flagrant breach of our laws and the will of the British people and if the government did not respond it would betray the will of the people we have been elected to serve"* (BBC, 2023)

it is understood how the production and understanding of language in political communication are related to the context of language use. The words used have abusive, hateful, and discriminatory meanings and racial language can be perceived very easily. Nevertheless, to make sense of what is said, one needs to take into account the social context within which the discourse takes place. (Willig, 2008). An illustrative example comes from another statement by a politician.

"*One element is finding Albanians when they arrive, detaining and removing them. What I was highlighting was the weekly flights removing illegal Albanian migrants to Tirana, working in concert with the Albanian government"* (The Telegraph, 2023).

The first element that is analyzed is the identification use of the labels for the immigrant population, which turns out to be widely used in political statements, at a time when the issue of immigration affects many countries. According to Rucker et al., (2019), negatively connoted labels may engender greater prejudice against migrants. The words "*detaining and removing*" used in the statement show high-intensity meaning by reinforcing the word's negative connotation. While other words with milder connotations could be used for the same meaning. Instead of the word "detaining", similar words such as keeping, holding, retaining, bounding, and enclosing could be used. Instead of the word "removing", evacuate, withdraw, abolish, or transport, transfer could be used (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2003). The words have been chosen in such a way that they take on a significant meaning related to the situational context in which they are used. In terms of language, if words without ambiguous meanings are chosen the communication becomes easier and understandable, otherwise, the emotional effect they produce, unfolds harsh and

racist language in communication. This is related to the elements of the Hymes model: E-Ends, K-key, and I-instrumentalities, which are chosen by the speaker, for the communication to fit the context in which it will be used. In this case, the lexicalization of the semantic content, i.e. the use of one word instead of another, only serves to manifest nuances of the language of racism or discrimination.

Often political communication statements are filled with generalizations, which refer to the specific characteristics or activities of a certain group of people. (Teo, 2000). The statement published by Telegraph Media Group is an example (The Telegraph, 18.01.2023).

"The Prime Minister, Home Secretary and I have made it a particular focus of government policy to try to deter those Albanians from coming here in that manner"; "The key thing is that Albania is a safe country. It is not Afghanistan or Syria. It's demonstrably a safe country. It is an EU accession state, exactly the place that people should be returned to, and we are going to return as many as possible".

This type of generalization, often used at the comparative level to strengthen the political argument, is given in the form of references that appear repeatedly to a certain group, to show that the references are an endemic part of the culture of that group.

"*I expect the vast majority to be returned under the agreement with the Albanians."* (The Telegraph, 2023).

Virtually all claims on immigrants, minorities, and especially refugees open with national rhetoric replete with various forms of positive self-presentation (Van Dijk, 1993). The language used has a special kind of code in political communication, which serves to attract specific political audiences. We find a clear overrepresentation of discriminatory communication, a trend already observed in various publications made in the media. (Gaikwad & Nellis, 2020). Another specific case refers to: "*One element is finding Albanians when they arrive, detaining and removing them. I was highlighting, working in concert with, I expect, The Prime Minister, Home Secretary and I have made it a particular focus."* (The Telegraph, 2023). The linguistic interweaving that is realized through the blending of standard tools with reinforcing tools is related to the N-norms element of the Hymes model, where the speaker chooses words to make the message understood and his attitude interpreted. Rhetoric generally comes in the first person singular, to realize the dialogic role of statements. The words used in political communication, most of the time, do not have subjective colors. They appear in their function influenced by individual emotion. In such cases, political communication is filled with words that mark the direct meaning, but their presentation with mediated emotion and pathos fulfills the performative function in the prism of political statements. Studying the text in its context allows us to understand the language of racism, which is recently being studied through the prism of racism through political discourse (Van Dijk, 1997; Doane, 2006).

To argue that racist or discriminatory language is being used, we must consider several dimensions of the communication appearing simultaneously in several

textual elements. The way we describe others, define others or label them plays an important role in the way we express ourselves in communication.

To illustrate the analysis of the language used in communication, we will refer to a part of the communication structure according to Van Dijk (1997), which serves to categorize the elements of the racial language of the political statements examined.

Table 1

Categorization of the Elements of racial language

Elements of racial language	Examples	Categorization of the elements
Meanings of words	detaining, removing, invasion, robbing, swiftly, as many as possible, the vast majority,	Meaningful intensity
Argumentation	People who work, go through the door, under the agreement	Connection with context
The style used	Migrants illegally, swiftly removed, small boats will be detained, people who rob; door, removing, removed, illegally	Aggressive register Repetition of words
Semantic moves of the declarer	Arrive, detain, remove, fortress, stop, returned, invasion, back	Negative connotation
The selection of specific words	People who do not rob, it's not a supermarket, It's not a fortress, it's not Afghanistan or Syria, a country like Rwanda	Generalization, Categorization, References
Description of the issue according to personal experiences (the use of reinforcing means in statements)	working in concert with, was highlighting, I expect; I have made it	Ideology, attitudes, thoughts
Rhetorical elements	dangerous journeys, a particular focus of government policy, it would betray the will of the people we have been elected to serve	Media influence Populist influence

The media mostly uses political communications as daily food (Owen, 2017). Such statements are inflated or exaggerated by the media, causing a kind of racial tension in society (Drew, 2011), which in most cases can be artificial due to the negative influence of the media as a consequence of provided interpretations and comments of statements. The coverage of statements in the media amplifies over time. Generally, the entire statement or its keyword replaces the article titles, therefore reinforcing the effect of the language of racism or discrimination.

Only the statement "*stopping the invasion of our coasts*" is been used 35 times as the title of articles in various British online media, only on the day this statement was given (31.10.2022). The word "*invasion*", used with the intensity of meaning towards the negative connotation, manifests the basic concept of the declarative content. The content of the word refers to the semantic extremity, reflecting the political emotion, which configures the context in which it is used. Therefore, the selected word has provided the right media effect, being picked up by a high number of online media outlets as an article title. A significant media effect is caused even by the statement "*Migrants entering illegally on small boats will be detained and swiftly removed under the new legislation. Removed back to your country if it's safe, or back to a safe third country like Rwanda.*" (BBC, 2023).

Through this statement, the group of words "*swiftly removed*" represents an aggressive style of communication, which turns into the representative of many mass media titles, due to the strong emotional charge of the words. Headlines, in this case, form a cognitive macrostructure, which conveys the meaningful content of the news through a single sentence (Teo, 2000). Therefore, the language used is identified as harsh, racist, and discriminatory.

4. Discussion

The protection of migrants under international law extends to several dimensions. They include protection under International Humanitarian Law which applies to situations of armed conflicts (Geneva Conventions 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977), protection under International Refugee Law (UN Refugee Convention, 1951), which applies to persons who meet the refugee definition under international, regional, or domestic laws, and protection under International Human Rights Law, which applies to all persons at all times (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948) and several other treaties for the protection of human rights (the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, 1966; The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, etc.). At the regional level, the European Convention on Human Rights is built on the principles of freedom, equality, non-discrimination, and protection of human dignity, and provides a set of human rights addressed to each individual (The European Convention on Human Rights, 1950). Regardless of the international protection given to migrants, people from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds face discrimination and its consequences daily. Thereupon, since 2000, the European Union has

introduced legislation to combat racial and xenophobic discrimination (De Groot, 2023).

Racism is a phenomenon expressed at the dimension of society, groups, individuals, and institutions, and is thus not to be analyzed as an attribute of the person or agency, but as a more complex, structural phenomenon. It is assumed that racism is communicated through the media in the form of social representations (European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations [ERCOMER], 2002). In 2019, an EU-wide Eurobarometer survey found that more than half of Europeans believe that racism or ethnic discrimination is widespread in their country, but with considerable variation (De Groot, 2023). To address racial discrimination and the inequalities it causes, a series of strategies and actions have been put forward, among which the European Parliament (European Commission, 2017) calls towards the media to put an end to this approach, can be highlighted. The most efficient role of the media in avoiding racism and ethnic discrimination is related to the use of language in mass media communication.

Political communication used on social media seems to be one of the main sources of hate speech. In general, politicians display inappropriate and problematic language. Because of their influence, politicians also have the necessary access to control and express themselves in online media. In their linguistic habits, several characteristic elements are distinguished, which according to Van Dijk, (1993) are categorized into surface structures such as sounds, intonations, gestures, letters, graphic displays, words, and the order of words in a sentence, which are counted as linguistic subdisciplines, and underlying structures, related to meaning and interaction. Only the basic structures were used to explain the statements of political communications since the object of the study was focused mainly on the analysis of meaning and interpretation, which is directly related to the attitudes and ideologies of the communicators. Their discourse crosses the limits of freedom of speech, taking on negative connotations. Racism in the media is often not blatant: it is precisely the implicit stereotypical representations, generalizing or justifying statements, or even the very 'absence' of ethnic minorities' viewpoints in news about them, that produce the widespread prejudiced beliefs and the legitimization of exclusionary practices and hostility towards them (ERCOMER, 2002).

There is no debate that migration is one of the defining issues of the globalized world. In terms of facts and figures, no historical period has ever faced such a huge displacement and replacement of human beings across borders and boundaries (Jacomella, 2010). The language used towards migrants mainly by politicians shows not only their attitude and ideology but also the efforts they make to play the role of the protagonist. Their positions are supported and appreciated by the media, trumpeting solidarity towards politicians regarding immigration issues. The research of the online media regarding the racist statements of different politicians towards migrants and the amount of news they reflect shows a media mobilization to interpret, comment and promote the same statement of political communication repeatedly over time. If we refer to

the website of "The Guardian" newspaper, there are counted about 73 articles published on the issues of illegal immigration for the period March 18 - April 18, 2023. The intensity of news in this newspaper reaches up to 4-5 announcements per day. Among the articles, some writings reflect the harsh and racist language of high officials, but also items that try to show the opposite side of the negative opinion about immigration. This shows that the media responds to politicians' statements with the same language they speak. If the statement conveys harsh, hostile, racist, and discriminatory language, then media releases will also carry the same spirit of such a language. In this way, the research question of whether the inappropriate language used in the media towards migrants affects public opinion and the discriminatory attitudes against them is also answered.

5. Conclusions

This paper aims to outline the features of harsh, racial, and discriminatory language used by politicians in online media regarding immigrants. The analysis of political communications focuses on the elements of essential structures, which are related to the components of the meaning and content of the message being transmitted. Communication on this topic carries controversial linguistic behavior in terms of meaning, content, and context, classifying the language used as racist and discriminatory. The meaning of language in political communication is related to the context of language use, therefore most of the words used in statements should be considered for analysis within the contextual situation. Among the words that are selected for political communication, there are found:

   a. words with semantic intensity towards negative connotation
   b. repetition of the same word to reinforce the effect of harsh language of racism
   c. aggressive style of use, which is represented by the expressed negative connotation
   d. generalizations or categorizations on the issue addressed in political communication
   e. politicians' ideologies and attitudes are given through descriptions based on personal experiences
   f. the public's media influence on political communication appears in the promotion of hostile and discriminatory language by commenting and interpreting such news with continuous repetition over time.

The intensity of news about political communications with inappropriate language causes negative tension in society, which makes it possible for the public to perceive the communication with pathos, in the same way as the speakers who broadcast it. Regardless of the policies and strategies of the European Parliament to end the racial and ethnic profiling promoted in the media, this approach must find understanding space from the politicians, who are the originators of the harsh language of racism and discrimination through political communication.

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