Legitimizing through Language: Political Discourse Worlds in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Agreement

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LEGITIMISING THROUGH LANGUAGE: POLITICIAL DISCOURSE WORLDS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AFTER THE 1998 AGREEMENT

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This paper employs the hypothesis that one of the functions of political discourse is to legitimise a perceived point of view by promoting certain representations of a socio-political reality. It could be argued that the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement creates a paradoxical reality in Northern Ireland because its language is so vague that it can be interpreted in different ways. This paper analyses linguistic categories used in the text of the Agreement to reveal the type of peaceful reality promoted and the constructive ambiguity used to facilitate agreement. It argues that the success of the peace process depended to a large extent on the particular nuances of discourse in and around this crucial document.

Introduction

As John Whyte (1990, p. viii) notes Northern Ireland is one of the most researched places in the world. Most studies on Northern Ireland are aimed at explaining the conflict by relying on sociological, political or economical theories. This research differs in its attempt to understand this conflict situation by relying on the different perceptions that may be politically transmitted about one single reality. In order to do so, this article looks at political discourse through a discourse analysis framework, and specifically through one characterised by its deep linguistic foundation.

One of the key features of political discourse is that it is a useful way of spreading political beliefs, which are mostly related to the identity shared by those involved in the communication process. This identity is evoked by means of the ideological beliefs which imbue a text and which can, in turn, be defined as mental representations that social groups have both about their own social practices and about the practices of other groups in society (Van Dijk, 1996, pp. 12, 19). Therefore, the ideologies that underlie a text are frequently related to the construction of social and political groups, and in most cases, they are determined by the position of the group in society, and, in particular, are framed "in relation to one or other group that are seen to

threaten the basic interests of the own group" (Van Dijk, 1996, p. 19). These shared mental representations, which include ideological knowledge as well as more general and cultural knowledge, are known as "common ground" (Van Dijk, 2001). Mental representations perform an important function in the process of communication of political discourse as they involve the construction of a mental frame that is shared by the speaker (e.g. the politician) and the addressee. Furthermore, it is such shared identity between communicators which motivates the legitimising task of political discourse (Chilton, 2004, p. 23).

Consequently, the objective of this article is to demonstrate how political discourse in Northern Ireland has a legitimising function of specific actions or world views about reality, and how this function can be unveiled through careful linguistic analysis. It is important to note that these views are frequently opposed on an ideological, political and discursive ground. Hence, it can be argued that the mentioned linguistic structures serve to establish a relationship between legitimisation and the creation of a "paradoxical reality" (Aughey, 2002, p. 2) that may be discursively transmitted. Therefore, we will compare how the representatives of the two main Northern Ireland ideologies – nationalism and unionism – make use of those strategies to justify or oppose the 1998 Agreement.

Analyzing Political Discourse

Language and Legitimacy

The approach elaborated in this paper arise from established research that relates language to conflict – or language to peace (see Wright, 1998; Schäffner and Wenden, 1995; Dedaič and Nelson, 2003). A core assumption underlying discourse analysis is Billig's (2003, p. xviii) belief that human conflict begins and ends via talk, hence establishing an inextricable link between "war" and communication.

It can be argued that words frame, mobilize and motivate political thought and action. According to Van Dijk (1997, p. 28), one of the main reasons for the appearance of human conflict is the promotion of the "ideological square". This is the strategic and underlying principle of political discourse, and it can be defined as a semantic polarization in which propositions have an evaluative nature which promotes the emphasis/de-emphasis of our/their good/bad actions. As a consequence, a polarization between "us" and "them" is created, and this results in the discursive construction of an "ingroup" and an "outgroup".

This idea serves to support the previously mentioned link between language and conflict: a connection which can be expressed in two ways. On the one hand, "language works through discourse to communicate and reproduce ideologies that support the use of war as a legitimate option for resolving national conflicts as well as inegalitarian and discriminatory social institutions and practices" (Wenden, 1995, p. 211). On the other, discourse serves to reproduce and spread the socio-political oppositions that may characterise a given society, as the "socio-political square" and the polarization between the "ingroup" and "the outgroup" can be discursively constructed; a process in which certain linguistic structures may have a prominent role.

Both aspects are closely connected, and from them comes the idea that language plays an indirect role in promoting values, beliefs and social practices that justify (Schäffner and Wenden, 1995, p. xxi) political policies or particular world views as presented by politicians. Justification and legitimisation are synonymous – mainly because "within the perspective of political philosophy the notion of justification might be related to legitimacy" (Chilton, 2003, p. 95). Thus, as argued by Chilton (2004, p. 23), one of the key functions of political discourse is legitimisation, defined as "the promotion of representations," a pervasive feature of which "is the evident need for political speakers to imbue their utterances with evidence, authority and truth."

Language and Representation

In addition to legitimisation, one of the main features of political discourse is representation. Representation and legitimisation are achieved in political discourse through what Chilton calls "discourse worlds":

> the "reality" that is entertained by the speaker, or meta-represented by speaker as being someone else's believed reality. There are various meaning ingredients that go into these discourse realities, but the essential one is the projection of 'who does what, to whom and where'. (Chilton, 2004, p. 154)

Legitimisation and its fulfilment through the creation of discourse worlds helps us understand how, and why, different parties react in different ways to specific events or situations, such as the variety of responses by political parties in Northern Ireland to the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 1998. The concept of "discourse worlds" explains the subjective and ideological representation that the political parties make of that "reality" and how they do so by presenting that subjective view as a "universal truth".

Taking this into account, we establish the main hypothesis that it is through political discourse that a particular world-view about certain socio-political aspects or actions is legitimised. This legitimisation is achieved through the strategic, ideologically-motivated – and sometimes also unconscious – manipulation (Chilton, 2002) of language with the aim of promoting certain values.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to analyse the legitimising function of political discourse, our starting point is the critical discourse analysis paradigm (Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 1993) because it highlights the inextricable link that exists between language and society (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, pp. 271-280). The objective of critical discourse analysis is to "interpret and understand how and why reality is structured in a certain way" (Wodak, 1989, p.14), and do so by relying on linguistic analysis.

Within this paradigm, both Fairclough (1989) and Van Dijk (1993, 2001) propose a theory which is based on three components, mainly aimed at explaining the connection between language and society. The importance of this connection is also related to the legitimising function of political discourse. Given that legitimisation is achieved through specific discursive representations (Chilton, 2004, p. 23), it can be argued that those representations are determined by the ideological beliefs held by the persons involved in the communicative process, and that those ideological beliefs determine a social representation – or discourse world - that is, at least partly, connected to the identity of the communicator.

Those discourse worlds are frequently related to at least one of the main types of discursive legitimisation that can be identified, namely semantic, pragmatic and socio-political legitimisation (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997, p. 71). Semantic legitimisation involves the justification of a specific and subjective view of society which is frequently a reflection of the utterer's point of view about society. This subjective representation tends to promote the creation and consolidation of ethnic – or national – identities, and it could be argued that in Northern Ireland it might be related to the perpetuation and justification (see Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999, p. 93) of the two communities, and the defence of Northern Ireland's constitutional status as upheld by their respective political ideologies. Pragmatic legitimisation aims at justifying an action which is usually considered to be controversial such as the 1998 Agreement, whose existence and approval/disapproval is justified in different terms by each of the four main

Northern Ireland political parties. Finally socio-political legitimisation involves the justification of the social and political role that any instance of discourse plays in the situation in which it takes place, that is, it involves an authorisation of the uttering of that discourse.

Methodology

A link could be established between the different components of discourse, the type of legitimisation and the three-stages in the analysis. Thus, the description stage would involve doing a linguistic analysis of the text so that semantic legitimisation can be uncovered; interpretation would mean taking into account the immediate context to obtain semantic and pragmatic legitimisation; and explanation would require considering the broad socio-political practice to expose socio-political legitimisation. We will briefly explain below the type of analysis that has been done, although a more complete account can be found in Filardo (2008).

The first stage involves the description of the linguistic structures that form part of the text. This analysis consists of looking at three linguistic categories which we have elsewhere called "microlegitimisers" (Filardo, 2008), and which involve the identification of temporal, space and personal pronouns and indicators, the use of proper names and referential expressions, and the appearance of given metaphorical expressions. The use of these linguistic cues by Northern Irish politicians has been marked in the discussion below through the use of "inverted commas".

The importance of those linguistic structures is highlighted by the fact that they are the indicators of a given discursive representation, and a subsequent (de)legitimisation of a given reality. That is the second stage of the analysis, which involves interpreting the "textual" cues we have previously identified. There are two main aspects included within the interpretation stage: the uncovering of the discourse world that pervades the speech, and the portrayal of the (de)legitimised controversial political action that motivates it.

Any textual feature has an (ideological) value which is related to the portrayal of three aspects: the subjects (participants) who are presented in the discourse, the relations that are established between those subjects, and the contents that are transmitted (Fairclough, 1989). Identification of subjects involves uncovering the (imagined) that is portrayed as being at the centre –

or main space – in the discourse world, that is, the one whose beliefs are considered central to the speaker (Anderson, 1991). Besides, certain discursive ties and oppositions may be established with other communities, and that type of relationship is an indicator of the ideological similarities or differences between them. Those discourse participants – or communities – are characterised in relation to other certain cultural, historical, geographical and political entities and actions, which are frequently recalled by means of verb tenses and pronouns, and metaphorical and referential expressions,. All these elements together make up the speaker's discourse world, which is, in turn, the semantic legitimisation that is spread through the analysed instance of discourse.

This discourse world is the ideological point of departure for the pragmatic (de)legitimisation of a given political action – the Agreement, in this case. Uncovering this (de)legitimisation is the second aspect in the interpretation stage, and it involves looking at the relationship that is established between the controversial political action and the elements of the discourse world that have been previously identified. Therefore, we will mainly focus on the contents (Fairclough, 1989) that are transmitted and how those relate to the discourse participants and the relationships that are established between them.

Finally, any text is linked to and has a role in the social practice within which it is embedded. That takes us to the third and last stage in the analysis: explanation. Every instance of political discourse performs a political role in the political practice where it can be found (Fairclough, 1989). Therefore, the objective of this last stage is to see how that political function is discursively authorised, that is, we need to uncover how the text legitimises the socio-political context of practices which it gives expression to.

This methodological proposal has a double objective. On the one hand, it serves to show the link that can be established between language and society. On the other hand, it connects the creation of (discursive) conflict with the legitimising function of political discourse. These two objectives may be connected to a broader aim to highlight the validity of discourse analysis in the socio-political sciences as a means of raising our awareness of the social and political processes including "conflict".

The selection of instances of discourse for the analysis has been based on three criteria. First of all, the "reality" which is discursively portrayed is the Agreement, which becomes the "thematic dimension" upon which text selection is based. This is justified by the different political reactions to this document, which were partly motivated by the ambiguity of the language employed (Alonso, 2001, p. 434-436; Bew & Gillespie, 1999, p. 359). This

thematic criterion is connected to a "temporal dimension", that is, the date – 10 April 1998 – when the Agreement was signed. Consequently, the first reaction of political parties to the Agreement allows us to see the initial response that is made to this document.

Finally, it is necessary to consider a "speaker dimension", which involves looking at the portrayal of the Agreement by representatives of opposed ideologies, namely unionism and nationalism, and of different representatives within those ideologies. Thus, we have focused on the reaction of the four main Northern Ireland political parties: the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Féin (SF) on the nationalist side, and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) on the unionist one.

The next two sections of the article compare how party leaders from both political traditions in Northern Ireland discursively (de)legitimised the 1998 Agreement. Four texts (the first formal public statements by each leader of the four main political parties in response to the announcement of the multi-party agreement on 10 April 1998) have been selected as the basis for analysis.

Nationalist Discourse on the 1998 Agreement

Both the SDLP and SF gave their support to the Agreement, although there were several differences in the ideological arguments – and strategies – used by each to do so. The main difference can be seen in the socio-political entity that occupies the central space in the speaker's discourse world. On the one hand, Gerry Adams' discourse world relies upon the centrality of the "community" to republicanism, with which he establishes an affective frame (Johnson, 1994, p. 210) through his use of an inclusive "we" (Wodak and others, 1999, p. 46) or by focusing on their shared beliefs. Besides, their cultural characterisation is based on a "united Ireland" (Adams, 1998), which becomes their imagined homeland (Billig, 1995, p. 174), and the central geographical space upon which Adams' discourse world is based. On the other hand, Hume constructs a discourse world which is based on the centrality of the 1998 Agreement and the structures proposed in it. Those structures are perceived as an attempt to build a political space that is common to all the participants in Northern Ireland political life. Given the centrality of that political space, it is perceived as the imagined homeland within which his world is located. Thus, we do not have references to a "united Ireland" (Adams, 1998) as the imagined homeland, but to "an agreed

Ireland" (Hume, 1998), a phrase which acknowledges the necessary consent of all its members in order to be able to work.

It is this difference in the characterisation of the central entity in the discourse space the one that lies at the core of all the other portrayals. Thus, in Adams' speech we do have references to the constitutional status – which do not appear in Hume's one -, mainly aimed at delegitimising the Northern Ireland "statelet" (Adams, 1998) whose existence the republican ideology does not admit. Besides, the British government is only attributed a political role, which is, in turn, negatively evaluated because of its submission to the unionists' will; the latter being metaphorically presented as children whose wishes need to be fulfilled. Besides, the role of the British nation is negatively portrayed because of the alleged wrongs they have committed in Ireland – as it can be seen in their carrying out negatively-evaluated actions such as "interference, occupation" or "involvement" (Adams, 1998) – and because of their perceived historical responsibility for the origin in the Northern Ireland conflict. This highlights one of the oppositions that underlies Adams' speech: between republicanism and the British government.

That external opposition is connected to an internal one which can also be uncovered in this speech. The opposition between republicans and the British government becomes tied to the opposition between republicans and unionists through   indexical references to "they" and "the British government and the unionists" (Adams, 1998). In relation to the portrayal about these groups, it should be noted that the existence of the republican community is legitimised through references to its historical roots ("those risen people throughout this island" [Adams, 1998]); a strategy which involves a perpetuation of that ideology throughout time by anchoring discourse in past events in order to justify the present (Chilton, 2004, p. 59). The historical legitimisation is also connected to a victimisation strategy (Alonso, 2001, p. 241), in which nationalists and republicans are said to suffer from the negative outcome of past events such as "British military and RUC harassment", "the days of nationalist rule" or "the nationalist nightmare" (Adams, 1998). That victimisation can be contrasted to the positive role they attribute to themselves in preventing the other community – the unionists – from suffering from the negative actions they have experienced in the past, and it also contributes to legitimising the republican "struggle" (ibid). The republican struggle is justified not only because of their reaction to those negative past actions – "partition", or "British militarism"(Adams, 1998) – but also by relying on the previous historical existence, in their view, of a united Ireland.

The positive representation of republicans is highlighted through their commitment to peace – which is often contrasted to the negative "blocking of progress" and "preparation for war" (ibid) which are metaphorically attributed to the unionist community – and through their representation as contributors to the peace process.

The lack of a geographical imagined homeland in Hume's speech, and the importance of the common political structures proposed in the Agreement serve to justify Hume's construction of discourse participants, as they all form part of one single imagined community which is bound together by the "new" (Hume, 1998) shared identity that can be created through the Agreement, and indexed by means of an inclusive "we" which is frequently accompanied by the determiner "all" (Hume, 1998). Moreover, that new identity does not involve "diminishing" one's previous identity, as different "shades of opinion" (Hume, 1998) can be encompassed within it. Relations between the members of that new community should, in Hume's (1998) view, be based on "partnership" and "participation", two concepts which index the future and which are contrasted to the previous – and still existing – relations that are based on mistrust and division; two concepts that, as we have already seen, still underlie Adams' discourse world.

Likewise, Hume also constructs a discourse world in which the central political space is occupied by the SDLP, mainly because he and the SDLP see the Agreement as incorporating the party's beliefs. This also contributes to a positive representation of the self, which is endowed with an authority trait, and is presented as the source of epistemic truth (Chilton, 2004, p. 60). Thus, we can see how all the aspects that form part of Hume's discourse world are, unlike the ones in Adams', aimed at transmitting an image which is based on the lack of opposition, either between the two traditional Northern Ireland communities, or between the political parties that represent them.

Because of the centrality of the Agreement and its future implementation, that temporal reference is the one which underlies Hume's discourse world. In particular, the future is indexed both through the auxiliary verb "will" – which emphasises the certainty of whatever is being signalled (Chilton, 2004, p. 60) –, and through references to "a positive future" (Hume, 1998). This future time is given a central role in the new Northern Ireland political life, and it is contrasted with the past, which is constantly characterised in a negative, and which should be forgotten. For this reason, Hume argues that the only possible structures that will work in Northern Ireland must be based on changing the future and creating new relations and new structures that do not involve or "recycle" (Hume, 1998)

any of the elements of the past. Besides, it is the "responsibility" of Northern Ireland inhabitants to contribute to and control those future changes; ideas which serve to issue a deontic command for political parties to "work together" for "creating new agreed political structures" (Hume, 1998).

In the case of both politicians we find a pragmatic legitimisation of the Agreement, although that is discursively portrayed in different ways which are intrinsically connected to the socio-political elements that underlie each politician's discourse world. First of all, Adams highlights the unquestionable role at the Talks of those who are allied to this community, namely "republican negotiators" and "the Irish government" (Adams, 1998). Besides, he also emphasises the positive outcome the republican community may obtain from this document by presenting it as a transitional "stage" (ibid) in the path towards the final destination of a united Ireland, an idea which is portrayed by means of the metaphorical conceptualisation (PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY IS TRAVELLING ALONG A PATH TOWARD A DESTINATION), which is at times nested within the conflict metaphor (STRUGGLE IS A JOURNEY) (Charteris-Black, 2005, p. 45, 53, 73). This "stage" is part of an overall "struggle" within which other historical "phases" in republicanism are included, such as the 1916 proclamation of the Republic, the civil rights movement or the hunger strikes. Historicism reappears as a legitimising method when Adams places the historical origin of the Agreement with the IRA ceasefire; something which contributes to depicting the IRA as having an active and voluntary role in the promotion of peace.

Furthermore, the legitimacy of the Agreement is based on the weakening of the Union because negative aspects of British legislation – referred to as the "British territorial claim" (Adams, 1998) – have been revoked, and all-Ireland co-operation has been increased by the creation of all-Ireland bodies. Republican fears about the Agreement are also counteracted by locating them on an unreal world, indexed through modality indicators (Chilton, 2004, p. 60).

In Hume's speech the Agreement is also legitimised, although he relies on the importance of the future, and the unique "opportunity" (Hume, 1998) this accord offers for solving the conflict, overcoming and healing past and still inherent divisions in Northern Ireland, and for creating one single identity within which all the Northern Ireland traditions can be included. This is based on the Agreement's opposition to conflict and sectarian victories and on its representation as "common success" (ibid) for both of the communities. Thus, the need of endorsing this document is highlighted because it represents a new beginning. Consequently, any possible rejection of the Agreement based on existing fears is discarded by focusing on its

positive achievements. These ideas are endowed with a high degree of certainty, spread through the use of the present simple tense, and the categorical commitment of the speaker to truth and validity that this tense implies (Fairclough, 1989, p. 120).

Finally, in the case of both politicians we can see a socio-political legitimisation of their speech, which his mostly based on either the speaker's role as leader of the party and on the centrality of SF for the implementation process– in the case of Adams – and on the centrality of the SDLP and its actions and principles – in the case of Hume. Nevertheless, we can see slight differences in how those strategies are employed. Whereas Hume relies on the authority-role attributed to the SDLP to justify the deontic command – issued mostly through modal verb (Chilton 2004, p. 60) – for a "yes" vote at the referendum, Adams stresses the prominent role of SF and republicans, as they are the ones that have to work with the unionist community. Thus, Adams' speech has a double socio-political legitimising function aimed, on the one hand, at persuading his own community to endorse the Agreement, and, on the other, at stressing the importance of SF to perpetuate the existing "peace" (Adams, 1998).

Unionist Discourse and the 1998 Agreement

Unlike in the case of nationalists, there is division within the unionist political spectrum in relation to the Agreement, which is supported by the UUP and opposed by the DUP. Thus both parties portray a discourse world with recurring elements but presented from different perspectives. Key aspects in speeches of the UUP leader, David Trimble, show that the 1998 talks lie at the heart of his conception of the political reality. They are described as a "battlefield" (Trimble, 1998); a word based on the metaphorical conceptualisation (POLITICS IS WAR) (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 51) which shows Trimble's perception of the existing division between the two Northern Ireland communities. Given the prominence of the talks, the central political space is occupied by the UUP, who had an active role at the negotiations. Besides, it is the only unionist party to be evaluated positively as it was the only one fighting for (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 69) the interests and goals of the unionist people, or in other words, the maintenance of "the Union" (Trimble, 1998). On the contrary, the behaviour of the other unionist parties is delegitimised by focusing on their negative role at the negotiations, on their "running away from the talks" (ibid) and abandoning the unionist community, and on their lack of policies for the future. Thus, we observe how Trimble conceives Northern Ireland political life in terms of a division

within the unionist community, which has been curiously the recurrent pattern in the last 30 years of conflict (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 232), and which, as we will see below, also prevails in Paisley's speech.

The intrinsic opposition within unionism is not the only one in Trimble's discourse world, which is also characterised by an antagonism with republicanism; an ideology – which together with the political party standing for it, SF – is always characterised by its commitment to "violence" (Trimble, 1998). For Trimble, that violence implicitly delegitimises both the political role of SF, which is referentially linked to the IRA through phrases such as "SF/IRA" (ibid), and their historical struggle for a united Ireland.

We can see that the same double opposition underlies Paisley's speech, although in this case centres on Northern Ireland, a place which is presented as the imagined homeland of the unionist community, and whose existence is historically legitimised. It is the importance of this central space that lies at the hart of Paisley's conception about Northern Ireland society and their constant fear of living as a minority in a united Ireland.

Thus, the portrayal of discourse participants is based on their commitment to the maintenance of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK, and this involves the broad opposition between nationalism and unionism. For this reason there is a double portrayal of unionists, ones whose behaviour can be legitimised because it is "customary" (Paisley, 1998) and committed to the maintenance of the Union – mainly by opposing the Agreement, at this moment. In addition, the political actions of those 'exceptional' unionists who support the Agreement are delegitimised because they do not seem to defend the Union. This evaluation is connected to the type of ideological relationship established with both groups by means of deictics. This is because Paisley distances himself from the latter group while he places the former at the deictic centre, and creates an ideological connection between them and the self, which is presented as the source of epistemic truth, authority, and knowledge about the future.

Nationalist and republicans are presented as the enemy by means of (POLITICS IS CONFLICT and POLITICS IS WAR) metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 51). Its political representatives – SF – are characterised as being inextricably linked to violence, not only explicitly but also through referential expressions such as "IRA/SF" (Paisley, 1998). Therefore, SF's tie with the IRA "terrorist" organisation is stressed, and the latter is deprived of any political justification for its violent actions. Because of this, the relationship between the two communities seems to be dominated by the underlying opposition between them and by a feeling of mistrust, which results in a conflict pattern underlying Paisley's statement. Paisley and the

DUP's role is justified because they have to fight against (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 69) those who are opposed to the preservation of the Union, regardless of their ideological unionist or nationalist background.

The "Union" (Trimble, 1998) is presented as the geographical centre in Trimble's discourse world, and its existence as a separate entity from the rest of the island is legitimised by means of reference to it through its legal name – "Northern Ireland" (ibid). Nevertheless, it should be noted that, in this case, the role of this area within the UK and the British Isles is highlighted. Thus, it can be argued that a Northern Ireland imagined homeland is delimited for the unionist community, not a Northern Ireland on its own, but one whose Britishness needs to be acknowledged. History plays an important role in justifying this trait, because it is linked to past events, such as the the Act of Union, aimed at maintaining the Union. Trimble also places himself within that historical tradition, which is likewise used to legitimise his party's support of the Agreement.

This different portrayal by the two unionist leaders about the same reality serves to explain the difference in their response to the Agreement, which Trimble legitimises not only through reference to historical facts, his party's achievements on the maintenance of the Union, but also through the UUP's centrality to the Northern Ireland peace process and its meaning as a "new" (Trimble, 1998) beginning which shall be contrasted to previous negatively evaluated attempts to restore peace in Northern Ireland, such as the Anglo-Irish or Sunningdale Agreements. By means of the same "journey" metaphorical conceptualisation employed by Adams, this document is presented as a "settlement" (Trimble, 1998), that is, it is the end of a completed process, an idea which is highlighted through the employment of the passive voice and the past perfect tense (Kress and Hodge, 1979, p. 129). That completion implicitly neglects the slightest possibility of future negotiations about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Agreement is legitimised by highlighting its role as a guarantor of the Union, and by stressing unionist achievements in the document, amongst these is the "restoration of democracy" (Trimble, 1998) via the creation of a new Northern Ireland Assembly and the devolution of powers from Westminster can be underlined.

This image of the Agreement is contrasted by the one presented by Paisley, for whom this document presents a threat to one of the pillars of unionism – the existence of the Union because it "would place the Province on the road to" (Paisley, 1998) a united Ireland. It shall be noted that the same metaphorical expression employed by Adams – and Trimble – reappears with a change in the ideological value. The "threat" strategy is also

important as we can see that this speech is permeated by the "negative stance" (Aughey, 1996, p. 76) that characterises the DUP, and which is based on their saying no to a united Ireland.

Socio-political elements connected to the Agreement – such as prisoners, decommissioning or policing – are also employed by both politicians in different ways. Trimble tries to downplay unionist fears about the Agreement, and worries about the disbandment of "the RUC" (ibid) are rejected by presenting it as an impossible event in an unreal and impossible world – indexed by means of negative modality indicators such as "cannot" or "will not" (Chilton, 2004, p. 60) –, and also by showing the necessary defensive role of the RUC against the threat from "Republican terrorists" (Trimble, 1998). Likewise, other controversial aspects such as the "early release of prisoners" (Trimble, 1998) or the possible involvement of paramilitary-related parties in government are presented as necessary steps for the return of peace to Northern Ireland, but ones whose implementation will be partly determined by the unionist behaviour.

On the contrary, Paisley relies on these elements, together with conflict and war metaphors to delegitimise the Agreement, which has been "enthusiastically endorsed" and "warmly welcomed", with a subsequent "dilution and diminution of the "Union" (Paisley, 1998). First of all this document is presented as having a perceived nationalist historical origin, which is placed on the Hume/Adams talks, and which can be seen in the name given to it by Paisley: "the Hume/Adams Agreement" (Paisley, 1998). Furthermore, those aspects of the Agreement which are negative for the unionist community are portrayed as part of the real world, and are presented as completed actions, two traits which are recalled through the uses of the verbs "will" and "can" (Chilton, 2004, p. 60). We can see this, for examples in Paisley's (1998) references to the legal historical origin of Northern Ireland as "our 1920 Act", his insistence of referring to the republican political party as "IRA/Sinn Féin", his description of "terrorist prisoners",,and his condemnation of the "sacrifice" of the Royal Ulster Constrabulary. All those aspects contribute to promoting an image of the Agreement as an anti-peace accord which is immoral because of what Paisley (1998) views as republicans' merely strategic (and therefore uncertain) commitment to peace, dishonesty in the negotiations, and the Northern Ireland Office's "black propaganda" campaign aimed at its endorsement.

Finally, we can see that both speeches legitimise different socio-political aspects. Trimble tries to justify his role as leader of the UUP and within the negotiation of the Agreement, a role criticised by some within his

party. This is achieved mainly by the constant employment of a "presidential I" (Blas Arroyo, 2000, p. 7) and by placing himself as part of a historical unionist tradition, in such a way that his political actions are linked to those of his predecessor, Lord Molyneaux.

On the contrary, Paisley does not focus on his role as leader but he legitimises the uttering of the statement, which is presented as a necessary event in order to clarify the Agreement to the Northern Ireland people. Thus, the role of the DUP is justified because it is presented as the only source of morality and, consequently, as the party to be trusted. The positive function of the self in the "No" campaign is contrasted to the negative depiction of the Northern Ireland Office, which is presented as "bribing and browbeating" (Paisley, 1998) the Northern Ireland people. Thus, the DUP's political performance at this time is justified as a necessary challenge to the "deception and duplicity" (ibid) of the others.

Conclusion

We have seen in this article that political discourse has a legitimising function which is aimed at justifying specific discourse worlds in which social elements and political actions are included and linked to a given ideology. This has been proved in the Northern Ireland context, where the Agreement – and the reality surrounding it – is discursively portrayed in different ways by each of the political representatives, in such a way that it results in the creation of a paradoxical reality. Besides, we have seen how a linguistic analysis of political speeches becomes a useful tool for uncovering legitimising strategies, as they allow us to see how language is used with certain political and discursive objectives. The inextricable connection that exists between language and peace (or conflict) is evident (Wright, 1998; Schäffner and Wenden, 1995). In fact, in Northern Ireland that relationship becomes clear if we take into account that pre-Agreement overt physical conflict is transferred to political discourse after this document is signed, when the political arena – and discourse, which is its explicit manifestation – becomes the site for political struggle.

The analysis of the linguistic strategies – or linguistic weapons, to continue with the conflict conceptualisation - employed to fulfil that legitimising function shows that the four Northern Ireland political parties tend to resort to the same strategies. All of them employ deictics, referential expressions and metaphors, and frequently they do so in the same way. In fact, a comparison of the obtained results shows that they may even draw on the same linguistic forms, as we have seen, for example, in the case of the

'journey' metaphorical expression used by Gerry Adams, David Trimble and Ian Paisley to portray the Agreement. It can also been seen in the use of the first person plural pronoun "we" by the four political leaders with different social referents, depending on the actual needs of the speaker. How those linguistic structures are interpreted depends on the common knowledge shared between communicators; a knowledge which is similar if the audience belongs to the same ideological community, but which differs when they belong to an opposed one. It is because of this ideological opposition, and the impact it has in the interpretation of language, that discourse analysis becomes even more interesting because it helps to explain socio-political events and processes by relying on the analysis of language at different historical times.

Thus, the analysis of post-Agreement language shows that the conflict pattern has been transposed to the political arena, where we can find discursively-created oppositions that reproduce the ones that had previously caused physical conflict – such as republicans opposed to the British government and the unionist community, or unionists opposed to republicans – although sometimes they also replicate political oppositions – as we have seen in the case of the division within unionism. Hence, we may argue that discourse reflects socio-political oppositions, which are, in turn, related to the legitimising function of political discourse, in as much as each political representative needs to justify different social elements. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that discourse changes may result in socio-political changes (Filardo, 2008) because if discourse stops reproducing socio-political oppositions, that may result in a dilution of those oppositions in "real" life. Consequently, it can be claimed that the ambiguity of the language of the Agreement has allowed the creation of a discursively paradoxical reality which is manifested through different nuances of discourse, which lie, in turn, at the heart of the success of the peace process as we know it today.

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