

# Original Research

## The phenomenon of fascination in political discourse (by Italian examples)

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*The article presents a study of the phenomenon of fascination as a functional effect of the text, or particular units of the text, in political discourse. Fascination is the highest point and a part of the communicative impact which a politician exerts on the mass addressee. Fascination characterises the integrative impression that the text and its particular units provide in their formal aspect – an expressive or a conceptual one. Fascination is treated as a complex and multilevel textual phenomenon. Poetic, rhetoric and figurative lexical levels are distinguished where a fascinative effect can be rendered. Fascination is totally communicative, but at the same time it belongs to discourse. The essence of the fascination consists in iteration, intra-textual or external, coming from discourse. A speech unit which produces a fascinative effect (text utterance or lexical nominative unit) evokes a conceptual or expressive association with something said before, i.e. said before in this text or kept in the cultural and expressive memory of the discourse. Fascination represents the effect of identification of what comes from the cultural experience of the language and what then virtually or otherwise reappears in the new speech conditions. The iteration means reassessment and conceptual regeneration of what is recalled. Fascination in its conceptual status stands above the pragmatics, it crowns the semiotic growth of the sign in speech. But in political discourse, fascination does not bear its own conceptual function, being subject to pragmatics, where the main role is given to the evaluation (axiology of the sign). The effect of fascination in political discourse reinforces the evaluative meaning of the sign and consequently its pragmatics as a whole. Special attention must be paid to the lexical level of fascination which, more than other levels, correlates with axiology. At the lexical level the effect of fascination appears when a pragmatic evaluation is substituted by a nomination bearing a supreme conceptual value. In Italian political discourse, the clearest examples of it can be the official names that some political parties choose to denominate themselves. These political parties' names include figurative lexical elements referring to cultural associations. Such names may be used for the purposes of political manipulation. The article may be of interest to specialists in general linguistics, text linguistics, the theory of communication and to anyone investigating the discursive reality of a language.*

**KEYWORDS:** *fascination, political discourse, communicative impact, fascinative effect, evaluation, manipulation, Italian, interpretation*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Fascination is a word of broad abstract semantics. Etymologically, it comes from the Latin *fascinatō*, derived from the verb *fascinare*, which translates as 'to bewitch', 'to charm', 'to captivate', as well as 'to put the evil eye on'. Almost unchanged in semantics, the word entered the Romance languages, as well as other European languages, where a more literal meaning 'to dazzle' was added to it, particularly in Italian. *Fascination* as a lexeme concentrates in itself many of the attributes that are commonly distinguished in philosophical aesthetics when characterising folklore-symbolic and artistic forms as the criteria of their poetic impact. *Fascination* crowns catharsis (Omelchenko, 2016, p. 179).

Not surprisingly, this word has come at the right time in the subject of psychological, literary and art semiotics studies, and subsequently philology and text linguistics, quickly becoming a term used to denote the totality of features of pragmatic and cultural perception of any work of art, verbal work or text in social communication. In modern studies this notion has been extensively applied not only to verbal textual forms, but also to a large variety of works of art, creolised text production or cinema (Omelchenko, 2015).

Fascination is commonly treated as a psychological phenomenon in all varieties of human communicative conduct and artistic forms (Sokovnin, 2005) combining cultural paradox and cultural habit, where paradox breaks or in some way modifies the habit (Omelchenko, 2013b, p. 239). For us, fascination is a useful term to cover a large variety of text expressive phenomena – from the poetic and rhetorical form of the text up to verbal nominations in it – making them subject to one principle of inner semantic organisation and to one method of analysis from the point of view of language cultural experience in discourse.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Fascination is the effect usually attributed to a text, referring to its holistic perception by the addressee in terms of form. The qualities of holistic perception are transposed into the particular com-

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ponents of the text – its individual units and elements, utterances and verbal denotations. *Fascination* has both a sensual and rational nature. In terms of cognitive interpretation, it is a rational meaning which leads to an emotional reaction after being understood. In psychological terms, it is a general impression that may mean interest, amazement, surprise, charm, satisfaction, dislike, indignation, fright, etc. Sensual semantics of *fascination* is unlimited.

*Fascination* is often associated with something unforeseen, unexpected in the text (Omelchenko, 2016, p. 179). Contrast and paradox are considered the main features of *fascination*, which is especially characteristic of the fiction literature (Omelchenko, 2012, p. 20). But occasionality is not quite sufficient to explain *fascination* in full. The *fascinative* effect is precedential (Omelchenko, 2012) and potentially iterative and may be perceived as an expected phenomenon. In political discourse, the audience often wants to hear some familiar words, concepts and speech formulae from a politician again and again, which coincide with their heartfelt aspirations and assessments. Of course, this must be a prepared audience. Politicians in their rhetoric are sharply oriented towards the impulses of the 'crowd', of the common opinion. For this reason, we do not separate the unexpected *fascination* from the expected one with reference to political discourse.

First of all, *fascination* is the highest point of communicative influence that a text has on the addressee, the highest point of the perception of the meaning of a speech unit in its integrity and at the same time the initial point of its interpretation by the addressee or other actors in the discourse. *Fascination* is perlocutionary in its functional status.

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Together with other semantic factors in the text, it provokes a communicative reaction by the addressee, transforming perception into *'an active source of interpretation and a part of the very process of text production'* (Eco, 2005, p. 14). The addressee gives a semantic 'verdict' (positive or negative) on the speech, 'usurping' the author's right to its ultimate interpretation. The author is powerless before the addressee's interpretative verdict (Ivanov, 2014, p. 125-126). Trying to anticipate this, authors strive to produce their speech so that it would not be rejected by the addressee, i.e. making it convincing in content and acceptable in form. The 'hypothesis of perception', focusing on the foreseen perlocutionary effect, becomes a fundamental prerequisite of utterance production in communication (Frank, 1999; Sidorov, 2011). Fascination is the highest form and order of expressive presentation of the thought in text, which the speaker focuses on and aspires to, 'inviting' the addressee to communicative 'cooperation'.

However, a pragmatic understanding of fascination alone is not enough. Fascination is not only a communicative, but also a discursive phenomenon. More precisely, one is inconceivable without the other. The pragmatics of the speech act and the discourse condition each other. It is possible to speak of a mutually generative relationship between speech pragmatics and discourse (Fedulova, 2020, p. 271). The discourse accumulates the cultural-expressive memory of a language, being the integral space of this memory. The speech act reproduces and renovates the experience accumulated in discourse representing an extension and further development of this experience. Phenomenology is defective when disconnected from its historical premise, limited to actual pragmatics

alone. Thus, Heidegger (2014) talks about the historical dimension of the being in its existential sense.

The present article will examine and analyse some speech facts of Italian political discourse, in which the appeal to historical memory, to socio-cultural background information becomes an important resource of semantic fascinative influence on the public audience. In particular, we will consider the area of fascination created by means of figurative nominations in a political text. In addition, principles of manipulative application of linguistic imagery resources in Italian political discourse will be touched upon.

The method applied to the material in this article comprises discursive (with reference to cultural associations), communicative (based on pragmatics) and cognitive semantic (confronting axiological and cultural connotations present in speech sign) aspects of analysis.

These aspects are especially valid in their application to political discourse where they clearly explain and demonstrate the regulatory function of the text.

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 3.1. Fascination as a communicative phenomenon in political discourse

Political communication stands out among other types of communication due to its pronounced pragmatic orientation. Its main goal is to influence the consciousness of the addressee, to create a system of socio-political beliefs and to form a way of thinking. Political communication unfolds in the socio-cultural space of political discourse.

It is worth noting that in recent years political discourse has significantly expanded the boundaries of its speech usage due to media space, which is actively developing and has already become an integral part of political communication. Political discourse is a conceptual condition of the phenomenology of the speech act, of any communicative event.

Scholars have interpreted political discourse as broadly as possible, bearing in mind its relation to language. Discourse is *'language used effectively*

*'The pragmatics of political discourse is characterised by an increased function of communicative regulation, a purposeful semantic influence on the addressee'*

*in specific situations to achieve goals; it is a structure and at the same time a process'* (Santulli, 2005, p. 13).

The pragmatics of political discourse is characterised by an increased function of communicative regulation, a purposeful semantic influence on the addressee. The addressee of political discourse has a dual nature. On the one hand, it is the mass audience, the people, the electorate, whom the politician has to attract to his or her side. On the other hand, it is the political opponent, the adversary, whose arguments need to be rebutted, overcome through counter-argumentation (Belykh, 2019, p. 75). A similar duality of the addressee is typical in judicial legal discourse, where the appeal to the judge and the appeal to the opposite side of the process (for example, the defence to the prosecution) differ significantly in their pragmatic orientation (Fedulova, 2020, p. 190). There does not seem to be a similar duality of the addressee in colloquial and literary, as well as scientific types of discourse. In these types of discourse the functions of the 'positive' addressee (the people, the judge) and the 'negative' addressee (the political opponent, the opposite side in the trial) are not distinguished.

In political discourse, the main addressee, i.e. the highest and ultimate goal of the regulatory communicative influence, is the people, the mass audience. The objective of political discourse is to influence the behaviour and beliefs of a targeted constituency (Bebbington, 2018). One can hardly assume the same regulatory orientation of a political text towards a political opponent (unless, of course, there is some kind of political alliance with him or her on the basis of some kind of mutual concessions). In the latter case, the politicians share the regulatory function to the extent of their alliance relationship.

The pinnacle of the regulatory function of communicative pragmatics in political discourse is evaluation (Belykh, 2019, p. 8-9). Evaluation in all cases is the ultimate achievement of political communication. Politicians seek to arouse sympathy, to gain support for their position by the mass audience. The criterion of evaluation ultimately is the voter's attitude to the theses, actions and socio-political position of the politician. The most important tool for expressing public appreciation is elections, or other form of mass support for a politician. The evaluation performs an interpretative function in the structure of the political communicative act (Belykh, 2019, p. 66): *'evaluation, as a part of pragmatic meaning, brings to the fore the problem of interpretation'* (Arutyunova, 1988, p. 8). Communicative regulation in political discourse is primarily aimed at provoking an appropriate axiological orientation of the addressee's interpretative response from the point of view of perception and understanding.

Communicative regulation in political discourse is total. It targets both the rational and sensual spheres of the addressee's consciousness. Communicative nature of evaluation is stressed by researchers. Dialogism, dynamism, expressiveness are main functional features of evaluation (Panina & Amerkhanova, 2018, p. 87). Reactive communicative evaluation in political discourse can be evoked by a variety of means. In addition to social and political action, the verbal element plays an important role in the political impact on the audience – both the rhetoric of a single political speech or the process of sustained argumentation in an on-going political debate. Speech impact is a constant factor accompanying political action, fulfilling a crucial, one might say paramount, axiological role in any political process. The political addressee is primarily oriented towards the politician's word. Aware of this, the politician carefully selects the linguistic means of influence, while relying on the conceptual and expressive speech factors of discourse. *'The modern politician has to master the system of figurative and expressive means in order to influence the audience, to have an impact on it; to count on a response in the*

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evaluation’ (Tsutsieva, 2014, p. 140). Each politician creates and accumulates his or her own set of communicative influence techniques.

Under these conditions, the function of the text – any speech unit in discourse (text, utterance, word) – is multifacetedly conditioned by the speech culture of discourse. Any speech act is a part and a continuation of the discourse. Only in scientific abstraction can one imagine a speech act without any reference to discourse. *Ergon* (ἔργον) and *energy* (ἐνέργεια) come together in the pragmatics of the speech act. At the apex of semiosis, the sign, reaching the edge of its semantic and expressive form of being, reveals something existing beyond this form – a chain of external connotations, further semantic infinity, new distinguishability inherent in it as a phenomenon of our life. The sign acquires discursive properties, enters a new interpretative dimension, revealing the nature of discourse as *‘speech immersed in life’* (Arunyova, 1990, p. 136).

The boundaries of understanding and the perspectives of further understanding, the finite and the potentially infinite, pragmatics, and external socio-cultural associations (image, stylistic colouring) are inextricably linked to each other, and, at the same time, confront each other in the speech reality of the sign. Regarding the figurative means of language, researchers note the coincidence and struggle between the two semantic levels of the understanding-perceptual complex – the internal endogenous rational and the external exogenous irrational (Shnyakina, 2010, p. 90-94). In a communication study of political or other types of discourse, a similar unity and contrast of the two functional aspects can be seen in almost any speech sign. The pragmatics of a sign is measured

by its appeal to the addressee. The appeal to discourse (to background knowledge, to history, to socio-cultural experience, etc.) and the scale and depth of immersion into discourse measure its fascinative potential. Pragmatics is the rational apex of the sign. Fascination stands beyond pragmatics. As such, it is a factor of irrational impact.

In political discourse, fascination has a rather ‘complex’ relationship with argumentation – the rational side of communicative influence. The rational side is intended for both the *positive* (mass) and the *negative* (political opponent) addressees. Fascination, as a communicative phenomenon, is intended primarily for the mass addressee.

Of course, a politician cannot rely solely on the fascinative effect in his or her speech strategies, as far as communication with the mass addressee is concerned. In political communication, the fascinative effect must ultimately be subordinated to the pragmatic task of the sign. Fascination is not semantically independent in political discourse, it only enhances the function of the pragmatic effect. With all that, at some moments, the function of fascination in political communication can expand, ‘eclipsing’ the internal rational functionality of the sign. This leads to what can be described as a functional substitution of pragmatics for external expressive effects. On this basis (in addition to the cases of outright lies and deception, which are frequent in politics) chances appear and grow for political manipulation.

### 3.2. Levels of fascination in political text

Fascination is a complex phenomenon, which is generated at the totality of levels where text is conditioned by discourse, among which we distinguish the parameters of poetic, rhetorical and nominative verbal levels.

At every level we see what could be called the ‘phenomenon of recognition’, which means awareness of previous cultural or contextual experience that a speech sign integrates. One suddenly recognises in a sign something that happens to be in a way already well known, has long ago or just been seen, and now reveals itself different in a new context. Philosophers, referring to such situa-

tions, use the term *anamnesis (recall)*. In the phenomenon of recalling we see simultaneously repetition, continuation and negation of the previous experience of the sign. The previous life of the sign experiences a new birth. The connection with previous experience decisively influences the form of the sign, determining its semantic and expressive orientation. Iteration as a method of fascination is underscored by scientists (Povarnitsyna, 2016, p. 121; Omelchenko, 2013a, p. 138).

The transition from one sign to another, from one speech fact to another, from a previous expressive experience to a subsequent one that continues it, generates a figure. The transition from discourse to text generates the *figure of discourse* (Ivanov & Fedulova, 2019, p. 16). This transitivity means duplication, substitution and interpretation of one part of the figure by another (Ivanov & Fedulova, 2019, p. 11-12). It can be a transition from direct meaning to figurative meaning in metaphor, from topic to rhema in the utterance (Kurochkina, 2006, p. 3), from utterance to utterance in a text, or from text to text in discourse, etc. (Ivanov & Fedulova, 2019, p. 9-10). Fascination uncovers the properties of communication – whether at the level of a single utterance (topic – rhema), a text (where a generalisation, a vivid conclusion or other substantive culmination occurs as the text unfolds), or in a prolonged discussion on the discourse level (when an active discourse actor uses a strong counterargument, a bright metaphor or apt aphorism that ‘overshadows’ the arguments of the opponent in the eyes of the mass addressee). The figure creates the form of any speech product (text, utterance, word), marking its relative semantic and expressive completeness, in which it, as an integral speech sign, can be presented to the addressee. Fascination ‘crowns’ the figurative form of a speech sign (text, utterance, word) in the aspect of its pragmatic perception.

Fascination is inherent in various speech forms at all textual levels. Political communication makes use of all possible resources of fascination: poetic, rhetorical and verbal (figurative). Poetic fascination works primarily as an expressive phenomenon. We can distinguish the intra-textual im-

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mediate scale of poetic association and the external discursive scale of association. The first one can be called poetic proper, the second one – compositional. The first one is revealed at the level of intra-textual poetic repetition of rhymed, rhythmically or otherwise structurally correlated parts of the text. Internal expressive association based on the principle of structural or sound similarity is an important resource of the poetics of the text.

The second dimension of poetic fascination has to do with the holistic structure of the text. Here poetics is interpreted broadly as the genre and stylistic form of a text, its composition in a holistic sense (novel, novella, newspaper article, essay, public speech, memo, some kind of official document, etc.). The linear length (volume) and the inner architecture of a text (its genre and compositional structure) are important for external poetics. The genre form of the text controls its content. The speaker must stay within the time (the prescribed length) and follow the commonly used style of composition. This creates a genre or poetic normativity, a certain canon which the communicators are supposed to follow. Thus, in public communication, the volume – the length of the speech the speaker counts on – is of great importance. As a rule, the desire for brevity, the desire to keep to time (of course, not to the detriment of the content) is more positively perceived by the mass audience.

There is an interesting example of a memorable short speech by Silvio Berlusconi during the election campaign in 1994 – the famous ‘*discesa in campo*’ speech. The speech lasted nine minutes, and the politician clearly did not want to bore his audience with his arguments. Conciseness, brevity

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is a characteristic fascinative reinforcement that is perceived as an indicator of the clarity and certainty of the politician's thought.

The rhetorical form is based on the phenomenon of transition from thought to thought, from statement to statement (Ivanov, 2010, p. 20). Each act of transition characterises the dynamics of a thought's semantic development at the given moment of its expressive deployment. Here, more than anywhere else, emotional expression manifests itself, which intensifies the axiological assignment of the element within the thought or of the thought as a whole.

At the rhetorical level, fascination is created either by enhancing the expressive dynamics of the thought, or by stopping its intensional development and focusing the attention on a single moment without moving on to the next. In the first case, we have various forms of predicative development from topic to rhema in an utterance (in particular, increasing the strength of the predicative assertion of the rhema against the topic), from premise to conclusion in logical induction, from argument to conclusion (or other kind of meaningful culmination) in larger text structures. The two correlative parts of an utterance or text duplicate each other, which can be understood as a kind of predicative progress (from what to what the thought moves).

In the second case, we have an expressive stopping of the thought in its intensional development, which takes the form of periphrastic repetition by means of climax or some other type of structural parallelism. Stereotyping of the speech form is one of the indicators of increased emotional expression. Osgood (1960) identifies stereotyping, along

with the destruction of rhetorical structure, as a formal indicator of the speaker's heightened emotional state. Other researchers see a reinforced evaluation behind it and consider it an important signal of the 'conceptual strength' of the thought in understanding the object: '*strong emotion can promote both stereotyping of the text structure, i.e. anaphora, epiphora, climax, etc., or lead to its destruction, i.e. to ellipsis, anacoluthon, parcelling, exclamation, rhetorical question*' (Ivanov, 2010, p. 31). A predicative assertion in a proposition is a figure of a developmental type, which can be reinforced in its expressive dynamics. In periphrastic figures there is no transition to another thought: the speaker, through expressive iteration, concentrates attention on a single significant point of the thought, temporarily stopping its development.

It is important to note that at the rhetorical level, fascination is not separated from pragmatics, but rather is combined with it. It is a kind of emotional fascination that is based on evaluation. It is as if the speaker seeks to 'infect' the listener with his or her emotion, by using an expressive style of speech. The rhetorical level has to do with how an idea reaches its culmination, its conclusion, and the expressive form it takes in the end.

The most interesting for linguistic analysis is the nominative discursive-linguistic level of fascination. This type of fascination occurs in the word, in a single word's denotative operation. On the one hand, as at the other higher textual levels, verbal fascination is auxiliary, since it relies on connotations of a figurative and stylistic type. On the other hand, in its pragmatic aspect, verbal fascination tends to be culminant in context. Words with this kind of connotation are most often thought of as the brightest axiologically marked denotations, occupying a central position in the context. These words attract most attention and are the most memorable and, therefore, have a strong prospect of being repeated in further speech usage. All this determines the relevant *discursogenic* role of such nominations, which is especially important in political discourse, where a bright word, an apt description or a slogan can decisively change the direction of the entire political communication.

#### 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

The word as an element of the text in its expressive communicative presentation is capable of implementing poetic, rhetorical and discursive features of fascination. Poetic and rhetorical fascination are produced by the word within the text. They appear through intra-textual expressive or semantic correlations, namely, through a casual expressive or structural anaphoric coincidence, which refers to what has been already said in the text. We are primarily interested in the external associative transitivity that occurs between the word as a text element and the discourse. In such a transition, the level and scale of discursive interpretation is extremely important.

In all cases of fascination there is a moment of intra-textual or external discursive iteration, an implicit or explicit return to what has been said before. On the scale of discourse, one can understand it as a kind of external semantic and/or expressive *attraction* with reference to previous cultural and expressive experience, background knowledge. This kind of attraction can be considered the strongest and most sustainable in terms of the fascinative effect it creates. The speaker evokes the 'authority' of the cultural and expressive experience of language.

At the verbal level, discursive fascination correlates with the so-called 'internal semantic form' of the word, which is the product and resource of its effective speech implementation. The internal semantic form is the necessary interpretative capacity of the word which serves to achieve a pragmatic communicative impact. Coming from the inner semantic potential of the word in the culture, it features the form of the thought in a word (Shpet, 1996, p. 62). External associations enhance the pragmatic effect of the 'internal semantic form', expanding the space of the socio-cultural interpretation, conceptualising understanding. In political discourse, in the rhetoric of political speech, external fascinative amplification as such is redundant. It gains a functional status only when it rests on an internal, necessary interpretative resource, '*in which evaluation plays the key role*' (Arutyunova, 1988, p. 5). The virtual figurative content based on

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external discursive associations strengthens the evaluative weight of the politician's speech and gives it a feature of socio-cultural significance.

Word fascination necessarily serves the evaluation. There are two sides of evaluation: the relative subjective and the absolute conceptual. The relative subjective evaluation provides an immediate pragmatic comprehension of the denotatum (the object that the sign designates) which can be challenged in its interpretative status. Absolute conceptual evaluation appeals to higher moral criteria associated with the conceptual foundations of discourse and, as such, cannot be challenged. The functional duality of evaluation in its reference to the designated subject of speech and its appeal to the conceptual foundations of discourse is noted by researchers (Wolf, 1985, p. 13-14; Arutyunova, 1988, p. 9-11; Fedulova, 2020, p. 226-227). The pragmatic side, in which the evaluation refers to the object, can be defined as explicit. The conceptual side is most frequently virtual and implicit.

The relative subjective and absolute conceptual sides of evaluation presuppose and support each other in the speech dynamics of discourse. They can be called the two dimensions of evaluation, which infinitely influence each other. Any evaluation in speech has a double verification. The objective designation verifies the evaluation objectively on its factual side. It constitutes the evidence of it being real and true. The conceptual side, in which the evaluation is legitimised by gaining social status, serves as its ultimate moral justification. The subjective side deals with the applicability of

the assessment to an object or event, whether the designated object or reality and their assessment are sufficiently adequate for each other. The conceptual aspect deals with the socio-cultural adequacy of the evaluation. In this aspect, the speaker seeks a social sanction for the application of the evaluation. Evaluation requires constant reliance on an external motivation in both semantic and sociocultural aspects. It always looks to justify itself, otherwise it is in danger of losing its truthful foundations and of becoming socio-culturally isolated.

In common usage, the two sides of evaluation in a speech sign are represented syncretically, indistinguishably. Nevertheless, despite the stable inseparable connection, in some types of discourse the two functional sides of evaluation (pragmatic and conceptual) may come into conflict, sometimes in a rather striking way. This is quite prominent in judicial legal discourse (Fedulova, 2020, p. 166-167), as well as in political discourse, which is of great scientific interest in terms of opening up opportunities to identify the manipulative axiological potential in these types of discourse.

Human social behaviour is often contradictory. Personal gain comes into conflict with higher social values. Inconsistencies between what I want and what I should do, between the pragmatic and deontic sides of evaluation, have long been part of the field of discursive linguistic and cultural studies, in which they are referred to as '*axiological enantiosemia*' (Melnichuk, 2018, p. 4-6; Sinyachkin, 2011, p. 12; Fedulova, 2020, p. 166). Arutyunova (1988, p. 6) refers to such enantiosemia, postulating an inherent internal conflict within the evaluation, arising from the opposition of what is absolute and what is relative in it.

Axiological enantiosemia is an extreme case of the internal opposition between the relative and conceptual sides of evaluation in a speech sign. On this basis, characteristic facts of asymmetry appear in the speech sign dynamics in discourse. This asymmetry is not something spontaneously arising in the sign with no regard to human will, but a purposeful speech technique deliberately used by

the speaker (in our case it is a politician) in order to effectively deliver the communicative impact to the addressee (Fedulova, 2020, p. 246) for the purpose of provoking an appropriate semantic response by the addressee.

We distinguish two interrelated levels of evaluative asymmetry that could appear in a speech sign: factual (endogenous, relative and pragmatic, focused on the object) and virtual (exogenous, focused on the concept that dominates discourse). The first is analysed and described in linguistic studies by Fedulova (2020) and Melnichuk (2018). Cases of judicial rhetoric are described where the implicit lack of factual corroboration is compensated for an explicit reinforcement of evaluation (through euphemisms or dysphemisms). Such evaluation is clearly disproportionate to its object.

As to political discourse, we are interested in demonstrating the conceptual side of axiological asymmetry in speech signs, where the highest discursive conceptual association compensates for the insufficiency and lack of factual corroboration of the pragmatic side of evaluation. The highest and superior fascinates the inferior. Thus, fascination in the choice of words means replacing the endogenous subject-axiology by the exogenous concept-axiology, which is assumed to be absolute and undisputable.

In making this distinction, we rely on Arutyunova's (1988) theory of language evaluation, which distinguishes between the axiological (pragmatic) and normative-deontic spheres of evaluation and, following this, identifies the proper evaluative and deontic predicates belonging to each of these spheres. Based on Arutyunova's (1988, p. 9-11) terms, we can formulate the idea of verbal fascination as '*a substitution of the pragmatic evaluative predicate by the deontic value predicate*'. Clearly, there is no strict or fixed distinction between the two types of predicates in language. The distinction we make can only be relative and conventional. Potentially, any lexeme denoting something socially significant and culturally undeniable can play the role of a superior deontic predicate and serve as a substitute for the nearest pragmatic evaluation, which often lacks factual corroboration. Any fact of

*'As to political discourse, we are interested in demonstrating the conceptual side of axiological asymmetry in speech signs, where the highest discursive conceptual association compensates for the insufficiency and lack of factual corroboration of the pragmatic side of evaluation. The highest and superior fascinates the inferior'*

history, national or world culture that evokes a certain emotional attitude of the mass recipient can be chosen as a deontic predicate. Superior deontic predicates are archetypical, while inferior subjective predicates are relative and pragmatic.

Interesting cases in this regard can be noted in Italian political discourse, in particular in the names of political parties. By the end of the 20th century, the Italian voter had become increasingly tired of the familiar historical names of political parties. Parties using traditional ideological terminology in their names (socialist, liberal, democratic, conservative, Christian, etc.) are losing popularity. New parties are being formed, which by their very names appeal not to the possible political position of the voter, with regard to his or her rational political choice, but to the social emotion, trying to arouse the voter's sympathy. For example, Silvio Berlusconi's national-conservative party is called *Forza, Italia!* ('Forward, Italy!'). *Forza, Italia!* was the slogan of the Italian national team in the 1982 FIFA World Cup, where the team won the world title. Understandably, the name evokes the most positive emotions in Italians. The voter no longer thinks about the political content, but is attracted by the external connotation, which appeals to Italy's sporting glory and is transferred to the current political situation.

In previous Italian political discourse, the old rational names of parties (communist, national, democratic, etc.) were also perceived in their own way at the evaluative level (people were quite emotionally defending their political beliefs). But

these were all relative evaluative predicates (or rather, political terms elevated to the rank of evaluative predicates) which could be challenged on a rational level. *Forza, Italia!* is an irrational party name in which to challenge the connotation associated with it (the greatness and glory of Italy) is impossible, unacceptable. Of course, little by little, even the most exalted political names are relativised in political discourse. But they still maintain their external appeal for a long time, appealing to the voter's sensibility.

Here are some other similar names for Italy's regional and national parties: *Polo della Libertà* ('Pole of Freedoms'), *Casa della Libertà* ('House of Freedoms'), *Realtà Italia* ('Reality Italy'), *Fermare il Declino* ('Stop the Decline'), *Alto Adige nel Cuore* ('Alto Adige in the Heart'), *Io Sud* ('I the South'), *Forza Nuova* ('New Force'), *Grande Sud* ('The Great South'). Some parties choose mixed rational-irrational names: *Fratelli d'Italia – Centrodestra Nazionale* ('Brothers of Italy – National Centre-right Party'), *Movimento Sociale – Fiamma Tricolore* ('Social Movement – Tricolour Flame'). Irrational names with a vague positive cultural association include: *L'Ulivo* ('The Olive Tree'), *Partito Pirata* ('Pirate Party'), *Movimento Cinque Stelle* ('Five Star Movement'), *La Lega Nord* ('Northern League'), *Lega d'Azione Meridionale* ('Southern Action League'), *Rosa per l'Italia* ('Rose for Italy').

Similar techniques are effectively used in other situations, for example, to attract sympathy of a wide audience for certain political, economic or social projects. Thus, the poem *M'illumino d'immenso* (1918) by Giuseppe Ungaretti is widely known in the Italian literary tradition. Critics are still arguing about the meaning of this brief poetic phrase, which generally carries a positive emotional sense and indicates something high and bright. A symbolic periphrasis of this phrase was used by an Italian ministry to name a social project to economise on energy. The element *d'immenso* has been replaced by *di meno: mi illumino di meno*. The very form of the project's name carries a symbolic meaning, as it associatively refers to the form of a poetic work known to all. The pragmatics of the actual nomination of the energy project and

the indirectly recognisable poetics of the original form come into discursive conflict, creating what we call the fascinative effect. What can be called a false poetic re-identification of the form opens up: we associatively recognise what we know well on the rational and sensual levels, and at the same time we do not recognise it in its new pragmatic application.

The latent manipulative function of figurative fascinative forms in political discourse is noteworthy. Political discourse is mainly public. Any public communication, being evaluative, cannot escape manipulation. Persuasion and manipulation are common functions of any public discourse (Panina & Amerkhanova, 2018, p. 86). Figurative speech means are relevant material for cognitive analysis of manipulation based on its inner contrast. As the analysis of a number of examples shows, manipulation that is so common in political discourse reveals itself at the semantic level as a mechanism of subordination of the superior (aesthetic, poetic or moral concepts) to the inferior (pragmatic, rhetorical, subjectively evaluative sense). In other words, the author engages an external cultural and verbal resource, sometimes even belonging to the sphere of other discourses, in order to help solve a specific pragmatic problem within his discourse. Politicians turn to literature, art, sports, philosophy, religion, history or other cultural archetypes in order to present their political message more vividly and persuasively to the mass audience. Manipulation seeks a conceptual and archetypical support that would not arouse rejection, protest, denial, doubt, irony, or any other negative attitude. The semantic structure of manipulation operates in the speech sign.

Fascination at the lexical level is closely related to figurativeness and produces a symbolic effect. The task of the symbol is to evoke the broadest possible semantic association, affecting the sensual perception in a cumulative way. Thus, for his article on the problem of migrants in Italy, Stella (2002) chooses the title *Bel paese brutta gente*. This title literally repeats the title of the novel by Claus Gatterer, which became famous in Italy and which recounts the hostile attitude of the inhabi-

*'Fascination at the lexical level is closely related to figurativeness and produces a symbolic effect. The task of the symbol is to evoke the broadest possible semantic association, affecting the sensual perception in a cumulative way'*

tants of South Tyrol towards the local Italian population. By the very title the author draws a symbolic parallel between the treatment of migrants from African and Arab countries in contemporary Europe and the treatment of Austrians towards Italians 150 years earlier. Racial animosity is compared to ethnic animosity. It is as though the author offers to see himself in the other's shoes, making it clear that an Italian who has experienced something similar is easier to feel what a modern migrant is experiencing. Already in the very title the article calls for a more tolerant attitude towards migrants.

Various kinds of metaphors, personifications and other figurative nominations in political discourse are most often used to create the fascinative effect. For instance, by naming the foreign minister of the Italian Republic *Fantozzi*, once can emphasise the inactivity and ineffectiveness of the politician with this personification. *Fantozzi* is a well-known loser character from a series of Italian films. Everything beautiful and brilliant that he encounters and where he can prove himself ends up as a total failure. Italians are very familiar with this comic film character.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In all of the above Italian party names and other examples we see one general principle which, as we understand it, characterises all fascination on the axiological level: what is subject to verification from a factual point of view and, therefore, potentially contestable, is replaced by the undeniable from a cultural and moral point of view, for which the requirement of factual corroboration is redundant. The relative is replaced by the absolute, the conditional – by the unconditional.

What attracts attention is what could be called the 'anticipatory' force of axiological fascination in relation to the function of referential or designative semantics. By using the highest valuation, the politician provokes a corresponding subjective factual speculation. A party's beautiful and flamboyant name suggests an association of everything good in terms of its practical actions and attitudes (its programme, political plans, position on important political and other issues). The voter gives his or her support to that party without additional rational checking. Parties exploit the axiological trust placed in them by the voters. Large-scale strategies of political manipulation emerge with the purpose of maintaining their political credibility (or distrust of their opponent). Any kind of manipulation in the political field seeks to create a system of axiological biases, which become the focal points of political discourse and a criterion for considering any event that comes into their field of vision.

Fascination is the highest connotative property that the sign acquires in speech, encompassing the totality of socio-cultural (aesthetic, ethical, stylistic, historical, etc.) symbolisations in discourse. Fascination is a discursive quality of a

speech phenomenon based on figurative or other associative resources evoked by the cultural experience of the language.

In political discourse, fascination has a constant link to evaluation. Fascination serves to reinforce evaluation in speech. As a communicative operation in political discourse, fascination presents the replacement of a rational (pragmatic) connotation by an irrational (socio-cultural) one. This substitution is symbolic and, being culturally undeniable, is manipulative. The phenomenon of fascination presents a cultural view of language in professional and political discourse.

Cognitive-linguistic analysis of the phenomena of fascination and manipulation in the semantic structure of a speech sign is very important, being highly relevant in the context of the modern linguistic and discursive research. Political discourse offers the most characteristic and striking forms of communicative manipulation based on figurative fascination. The verbal level of fascination is an important and characteristic resource of manipulation in political discourse. It rests on a substitution of the pragmatic evaluation for an archetypical (conceptual) one.

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