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trajectoires de recherche actuelles en Italie

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# Reframing History through Discourse: A French Discourse Analysis of Vox's Political Language\*

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## ABSTRACT

This article investigates the epistemological convergence between French historiography and French Discourse Analysis (FDA), emphasizing their shared focus on language as a vehicle for historical meaning and ideological formation. Tracing the evolution from the *Annales* School to post-structuralist thinkers such as Foucault and LaCapra, the study highlights how history has increasingly embraced discourse as both a methodological tool and an object of analysis. Through a case study of Santiago Abascal, leader of Spain's far-right party Vox, the article illustrates how FDA concepts – such as lexical worlds, interdiscursivity, and discursive ethos – can be applied to political rhetoric in the digital age. Using lexicometric methods (IraMuTeQ, SketchEngine) and qualitative interpretation, the study analyzes a corpus of Abascal's tweets (2019-2022), focusing particularly on the term *golpista* as a strategic signifier of ideological antagonism. The findings show how far-right discourse reactivates historically loaded terms to construct binary oppositions and mobilize collective memory. Ultimately, the article argues that FDA offers historians a powerful framework to interrogate the linguistic production of identity, power, and historical continuity in contemporary political narratives.

*Keywords:* Annales school; extremist narratives; French discourse analysis; historiography; ideological framing; lexicometry; linguistic turn; political rhetoric; post-structuralism.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, historical research has undergone profound methodological transformation, shifting from a positivist focus on events and actors to an approach that acknowledges the role of language, symbols, and ideology in shaping historical narratives. This shift, largely influenced by the *Annales* School and the ‘linguistic turn’, has progressively blurred the boundaries between historiography and discourse analysis, leading to an increasingly interdisciplinary framework in historical studies (Guilhaumou 2007). The French historiographical tradition, with its emphasis on long-term structures (*longue durée*) and *mentalités*, has played a crucial role in this evolution. Scholars such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, and later, Fernand Braudel argued that history should not be limited to political events but should instead analyze deeper, underlying forces such as language, culture, and collective imaginaries. This perspective later converged with the post-structuralist insights of Michel Foucault, who demonstrated that discourse is not merely a reflection of historical reality but an active force that constructs knowledge and power relations. At the same time, French Discourse Analysis (FDA) emerged in the late 1960s as an intellectual response to these transformations. Inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, and structuralist linguistics, FDA sought to reveal the hidden ideological structures embedded in texts. The works of Michel Pêcheux, Régine Robin, and Pierre Bourdieu further developed this approach, bridging the gap between historical inquiry and discourse analysis. This article examines how these two traditions have converged in their methodological and epistemological concerns. The first part of the study traces the evolution of this interdisciplinary dialogue. The second part presents a case study on the rhetoric of Vox, Spain’s far-right party, to illustrate how key analytical categories from FDA – such as interdiscursivity<sup>1</sup> (Pêcheux 1975), discursive ethos<sup>2</sup> (Amossy 1999), and lexical worlds<sup>3</sup> (Reinert 1993) –

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<sup>1</sup> By this term, we refer to the implicit or explicit relationships a discourse maintains with other discourses, whether through genre blending, style borrowing, or the reactivation of previous ideological formations.

<sup>2</sup> This expression refers to the self-image that a speaker constructs through discourse in order to gain credibility and authority, both by direct self-presentation and by the way others are represented.

<sup>3</sup> By this concept, we mean structured lexical fields identified within a corpus that reveal dominant semantic and ideological clusters, often analyzed through lexicometric methods.

can contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of political language within historical research. Ultimately, this research highlights the epistemological potential of discourse analysis for historiography, arguing that language should not be viewed as an external object of study but as a constitutive element of historical reality itself.

## 2. FRENCH HISTORIOGRAPHY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: AN OVERVIEW

The evolution of French historiography has played a pivotal role in shaping the theoretical foundations of discourse analysis. The shift initiated by the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in the late 1920s. Bloch and Febvre's approach emphasized what is known as the *longue durée*, an emphasis on the deeper, long-term forces shaping history, such as geography, social structures, and economic systems, rather than focusing on political events or the lives of notable individuals (Braudel 1958). In Bloch's seminal work *Les rois thaumaturges* (1939), he explored the idea of the "miraculous power" attributed to kings in medieval France, illustrating how certain enduring beliefs and institutions, rather than individual revolutions, contributed to shaping the political order. By examining the role of symbolic authority and the long-term evolution of political power, Bloch laid the groundwork for understanding history not just as a series of events, but as a continuum of interconnected phenomena (*ibid.*). Lucien Febvre also contributed to this shift in his work *La terre et l'évolution humaine* (1946), where he studied the interaction between humans and their environment, emphasizing how geography and physical space influence historical outcomes. Febvre argued that historical events should be studied not in isolation but as part of larger, often invisible structural changes that could take centuries to unfold (*ibid.*). The approach of the two French historians has indirectly encouraged the study of linguistic and semiotic structures that persist over time, offering Discourse Analysis a vast field of investigation for its research. The persistence of linguistic structures, which often conceal collective ways of thinking stratified over time and not always conscious, is at the core of studies on *mentalités*<sup>4</sup>. These studies were taken up by Foucault in

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<sup>4</sup> Among the most important historians of *mentalités*, it is worth mentioning Philippe Ariès as well as Jacques Le Goff.

relation to what the French philosopher calls *épistémès*, that is, systems of thought and knowledge that structure discourse in a given historical period (Foucault 1966). After Bloch and Febvre, language can no longer be seen merely as an individual expression but as a product of social and historical structures, an idea that has significantly influenced the linguistic work of Émile Benveniste<sup>5</sup> (1966) and Antoine Culioli<sup>6</sup> (1990), as well as the sociological studies of Pierre Bourdieu<sup>7</sup> (1982). Therefore, the *Annales* expanded view of events has had a lasting impact on the study of History, offering a more nuanced and broader interpretation of how and why societal changes occur over time. From that moment on, as David Armitage and Jo Guldi suggest, historians increasingly became like “wandering creatures”, constantly on the move in search of new perspectives and approaches (Armitage and Guldi 2015). In recent decades, historiography has undergone significant transformations, among which the “social turn” stands out for shifting attention away from elites toward the lives of ordinary people. While this shift enriched historical research with more inclusive perspectives, its relevance to the present study lies in how it paved the way for a deeper engagement with the linguistic and narrative dimensions of history. Works such as Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976) and Michel de Certeau’s *The Writing of History* (1975) foregrounded the role of language and narrative in shaping historical knowledge. Ginzburg’s microhistorical approach emphasized the individual’s voice and the textual traces of subaltern worldviews, while De Certeau critically examined the historiographical act itself, exposing its discursive and ideological operations.

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<sup>5</sup> In the collection of essays titled *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, published in 1966 by the Parisian publisher Gallimard, Benveniste explores the relationship between language and society, analyzing how linguistic structures reflect social and cultural structures.

<sup>6</sup> In his work *Pour une linguistique de l'énonciation* (1990), Culioli’s enunciative linguistics aligns with the *Annales* School’s focus on underlying structures that shape historical and social phenomena. His approach considers language as an evolving system, influenced by long-term historical and cultural contexts, rather than merely as a set of synchronic rules. This perspective echoes the *longue durée* concept, emphasizing the persistence of linguistic patterns across time.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu’s sociological analysis of language, particularly in *Ce que parler veut dire* (1982), draws on the *Annales* School’s methodological framework, focusing on the long-term reproduction of social structures through discourse. His concept of linguistic *habitus*, which highlights how language reflects and reinforces power relations over time, parallels the *Annales* tradition’s emphasis on deep-seated mental structures (*mentalités*) and their historical continuity.

These contributions anticipated key premises of French Discourse Analysis: that historical writing is not merely descriptive but constitutive, and that discourse plays an active role in constructing historical meaning. Another important work of the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ comes from a U.S. professor at Cornell University, Dominick LaCapra, who in 1983 published his *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*. Dominick LaCapra’s book played a pivotal role in integrating the insights of the ‘linguistic turn’ into intellectual history. Challenging traditional approaches that treated ideas as autonomous entities, LaCapra emphasized the centrality of language, rhetoric, and textuality in historical analysis. Influenced by post-structuralist thought, particularly Derrida and Foucault, he argued that historical texts are not mere reflections of reality but discursive constructs shaped by linguistic and ideological frameworks. By encouraging historians to engage with literary theory and critical interpretation, LaCapra helped redefine intellectual history as a field that examines not only the transmission of ideas but also the ways in which language structures historical meaning itself.

### 3. THE INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF FRENCH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The impact of the ‘linguistic turn’ extended beyond historiography, fundamentally reshaping the study of discourse by foregrounding the relationship between language, power, and ideology. This shift paved the way for new approaches that no longer viewed language as a neutral medium but as an active force in shaping social structures and historical consciousness. Nowhere was this transformation more evident than in France, where the intellectual climate of the late 1960s fostered a growing skepticism toward traditional authority and a renewed interest in the mechanisms through which discourse constructs subjectivity and social reality. The emergence of French Discourse Analysis (FDA) in the late 1960s stemmed from the convergence of a politically charged climate and the influence of post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The May 1968 protests in France (Morin 2018) – sparked by student unrest and culminating in a nationwide general strike<sup>8</sup> – challenged traditional power structures (Singer 1970) and catalyzed a broader cultural and

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<sup>8</sup> The government’s response included negotiations and political manoeuvres, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the National Assembly and new elections.

intellectual rethinking. This upheaval opened new spaces for critical reflection, paving the way for discourse-focused approaches to language, power, and ideology (Seidman 2004). Two years earlier, in 1966, two foundational texts for FDA were published: *Écrits* by Jacques Lacan and *Les mots et les choses* by Michel Foucault. In *Écrits*, Lacan articulated his groundbreaking idea that the unconscious is structured like a language<sup>9</sup> (Lacan 1966, 444), emphasizing how discourse shapes identity and the perception of subjectivity. Meanwhile, Foucault, drawing inspiration from the works of J.L. Borges, redefined discourse as the fundamental element shaping the relationship between language, knowledge, and power (Foucault 1966). Together, Lacan's focus on the decentralization of the subject through language and Foucault's emphasis on enunciative modes provided the intellectual foundation for the development of FDA. The formal recognition of FDA as a distinct approach occurred in 1969, marked by two pivotal publications. That year, the prominent French linguistics journal *Langages* dedicated an issue to the topic, titled *Analyse du discours*. Concurrently, Michel Pêcheux published his seminal work, *Analyse automatique du discours*, which laid out his methodological framework for the discipline. Pêcheux also contributed to the *Langages* issue with an article titled *L'étrange miroir de l'analyse de discours*, where he advocated for a deeper exploration of fragmented and marginalized narratives to uncover the contradictions that shape history. Modeled on psychoanalytic methods, his approach treated texts as misleading unities that required deconstruction to reveal hidden, unconscious meanings. Analysts would identify subtle textual breaks, such as isolated words or syntactic patterns, and reinterpret these elements through the lens of class struggle<sup>10</sup>. In such a conception of discourse analysis, scientific investigation and militant concerns could not be separated. Analyzing the ideological processes embedded in texts became a tool not only for understanding society but also for transforming it. Born from a context of political upheaval and demands for systemic change, FDA emerged as a discipline inherently tied to the struggle for social and political emancipation.

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<sup>9</sup> The original quote is: "Le symptôme psychanalysable, qu'il soit normal ou pathologique, se distingue non seulement de l'indice diagnostique, mais de toute forme saisissable de pure expressivité, en ceci qu'il est soutenu par une structure qui est identique à la structure du langage" (Lacan 1966, 444).

<sup>10</sup> This approach shares a few features with contemporary Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The French school, however, was deeply influenced by psychoanalysis and Marxism whereas most research in CDA has recourse to socio-cognitive theories and is concerned with gender or ethnic prejudice.

#### 4. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CENTRE DE LEXICOLOGIE POLITIQUE DE SAINT-CLOUD

Founded in 1964, the Centre de Lexicologie Politique de Saint-Cloud played a pivotal role in formalizing the connection between discourse analysis and historical research, promoting a linguistic and sociological approach to the study of political language. Among its early contributions, Annie Geffroy's work on Saint-Just demonstrated how revolutionary rhetoric functioned as an active tool in consolidating political authority (Geffroy 1966). Similarly, Robert Arnault and Liliane Cavaciuti examined Robespierre's vocabulary, offering ideological and quantitative analyses that revealed how language shaped revolutionary identity and political strategy (Arnault 1967; Cavaciuti 1967). Under the direction of Robert León Wagner from 1968, the Centre embraced computational tools and fostered international collaboration. The first colloquium on political lexicology, held at the École Normale Supérieure in Saint-Cloud that same year, marked a turning point by emphasizing both manual and mechanized approaches to political vocabulary. The Centre's pioneering use of data-driven methods established a foundation for subsequent research in historical discourse studies. In 1973, two landmark texts were published in France, just a few kilometers apart. The first, *Le territoire de l'historien* by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and the second, *Histoire et linguistique* by Régine Robin. In his work, the renowned French medievalist devoted two paragraphs to the quantitative revolution in the study of history (Le Roy Ladurie 1973). Drawing on Ernest Labrousse's work on the French economy during the Revolution, Le Roy Ladurie highlighted how French historiography began adopting quantitative techniques and methodologies. According to the medievalist, this methodological shift stemmed indirectly from the paradigm change brought about by the *Annales* School. Le Roy Ladurie wrote:

Clio, elle, se détourne maintenant des “longues chaînes d'événements tout simples et tout faciles” dont se gargarisaient les historiens d'ancien type. Elle s'oriente, on le sait, vers l'étude des structures; des permanences de longue durée; des collections de données susceptibles d'une exploitation sérielle ou quantitative. (1972, 72)

The French historian also noted that historians must embrace programming to remain relevant. He recounts the use of computers by a German historian to analyze Kaiser Wilhelm II's entourage, which led to new insights into the aristocratic composition of the court. In Le Roy

Ladurie's opinion what matters is not the machine but the problem. The machine is interesting only to the extent that it allows us to address new questions. While Le Roy Ladurie underscored the reliance of a generation of historians on quantitative data in economics, demography, cartography, and more, Régine Robin explored the adoption of quantitative methodology for studying political discourse. The questions underpinning her work can be summarized as follows:

1. What kind of hermeneutic contribution can linguistic theory offer historians?
2. Can lexicometry be a useful analytical tool for them?
3. Is it possible to find common ground between historians and linguists?
4. How should the results of a quantitative approach to texts be interpreted?

Robin's goal was to avoid, on one hand, the methodological paralysis caused by the "déalage" between the two disciplines and, on the other, a naïve and unrigorous use of quantitative methodologies (Robin 1973). Building on these theoretical foundations, the following case study applies them to the analysis of contemporary political rhetoric, illustrating how discourse analysis can shed light on power structures in the digital age. While French Discourse Analysis (FDA) was developed in a specific intellectual and political context, its core epistemological assumptions and analytical categories have proven adaptable to other socio-political settings. In this article, the Spanish case of Vox serves not as an incidental shift, but as a test field for FDA's transnational applicability. The aim is not to draw a direct parallel between the two contexts, but to explore how a methodology shaped by French intellectual traditions can shed light on contemporary far-right discourse in Spain.

## 5. FROM THEORY TO METHOD: A CASE STUDY

As discussed in the previous sections, the relationship between historiography and discourse analysis has long been shaped by methodological tensions between quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as between structuralist and post-structuralist paradigms. Whereas traditional historiography has tended to emphasize events, actors, and institutions, the rise of discourse analysis, especially following the 'linguistic turn', has foregrounded the symbolic and rhetorical dimensions of historical narratives. This section reflects on those debates through

the lens of my doctoral research (2019-2023), which applied FDA techniques to the political rhetoric of Vox, a far-right party whose emergence in Spain has drawn increasing scholarly attention amid broader concerns over the rise of radical right movements across Europe and beyond<sup>11</sup>. The following section offers a brief contextualization of Vox's political emergence, and outlines the process of digital corpus construction along with the analytical methodology employed.

### 5.1. *The rise of Vox*

The emergence of Vox in the late 2010s marked a turning point in Spanish politics, challenging the long-held notion of *Spanish exceptionalism* regarding the absence of a successful populist radical right (González Enriquez 2017). For decades, scholars argued that the legacy of Francoism and the strength of center-right parties like the Partido Popular (PP) had created a hostile environment for the far right in post-transitional Spain (Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). Vox's breakthrough in the 2018 Andalusian regional elections, followed by its rise at the national level, marked the end of Spain's so-called exceptionalism and aligned the country with broader European trends of nationalist-populist growth. This shift unfolded amid a major political crisis, sparked by corruption scandals that undermined the PP<sup>12</sup>. In 2018, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy was removed from office after a no-confidence vote linked to the *Gürtel* case, leading to a Socialist minority government under Pedro Sánchez (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – PSOE). As the traditional bipartisan system collapsed, polarization intensified around issues like Catalan independence, immigration, and gender equality, creating space for new political actors across the spectrum<sup>13</sup>. The traditional right found itself divided and challenged, not only by Ciudadanos, a centrist-liberal formation, but increasingly by Vox, which positioned itself as a radical alternative claiming to defend Spain's unity and cultural values

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<sup>11</sup> On the growing academic attention to Vox within the broader context of far-right movements in Europe, see for example Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Casals 2018; Turnbull-Dugarte 2019.

<sup>12</sup> According to CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas) data, in December 2012 only 6.1% of Spaniards identified corruption as the country's main problem; by February 2013, that figure had risen to 13.3%. See *Barómetro CIS*, December 2012, no. 2972, and February 2013, no. 2978.

<sup>13</sup> See Blanco Valdés 2017 and Frosina 2019.

(Turnbull-Dugarte 2019). Vox was founded in December 2013 by a group of former members of PP, most notably Santiago Abascal, Iván Espinosa de los Monteros, and José Antonio Ortega Lara<sup>14</sup>. These figures had deep roots within the traditional Spanish right: Abascal had held various positions within the PP in the Basque Country, and Ortega Lara was a former prison official kidnapped by ETA in the 1990s. Their political trajectory reflects a growing dissatisfaction with what they perceived as the PP's ideological drift and its inability to defend Spanish national interests. The Catalan independence crisis of 2017 represented a decisive turning point: by framing itself as the only political actor willing to confront secessionism without compromise, Vox gained significant visibility and legitimacy in national debates. The party's legal actions against Catalan leaders, its vocal defence of the 1978 Constitution, and its appeal to symbols of Spanish unity allowed it to occupy a space previously unclaimed in the democratic political spectrum. This strategic focus on territorial unity also provided a discursive gateway to broader themes such as anti-immigration, anti-feminism, and cultural nationalism, consolidating Vox identity as both a reactionary and insurgent force. To better understand how these ideological positions are articulated and disseminated in the public sphere, particularly through digital platforms, this study turns to the analysis of the party's discourse as expressed by its most prominent figure.

## 5.2. *Corpus construction and methodological positioning*

The empirical analysis focuses on a digital corpus composed of all tweets originally published by Santiago Abascal, leader of Vox, between January 2019 and December 2022<sup>15</sup>. A total of 2.148 tweets were collected using Twitter's API<sup>16</sup>, filtered for original content (i.e., excluding retweets), and preprocessed to remove non-linguistic elements (URLs,

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<sup>14</sup> See Carmen Remírez de Ganuza, "Vox nace pidiendo la eliminación de los parlamentos regionales", *El Mundo*, January 17, 2014; Editorial staff, "El Partido de Ortega Lara propone acabar con las Autonomías", *ABC*, January 17, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> A preliminary analysis of Abascal's discourse during the 2019 electoral campaign was presented in Riccardi 2023. By contrast, the present article does not aim to provide a political study of Vox; rather, it uses Vox merely as a case study to illustrate the heuristic potential of lexicometric tools within FDA and historiographical traditions.

<sup>16</sup> At the time of data collection the platform was still known as Twitter. In 2023, it was rebranded as "X" following its acquisition by Elon Musk. For consistency and

hashtags, emojis), while preserving key rhetorical markers such as repetition, emphasis, and quoted speech<sup>17</sup>. The corpus was examined using IraMuTeQ<sup>18</sup>, a textual analysis software based on the R language, through Factorial Correspondence Analysis (FCA)<sup>19</sup> and frequency distributions to identify lexical clusters and salient terms. Additionally, SketchEngine<sup>20</sup> was employed for concordance analysis and keyword comparison with tweets from other Spanish political leaders, such as Pedro Sánchez and Pablo Iglesias, to provide contrastive contextualization. To ensure methodological consistency, comparable corpora were compiled for each of these figures, covering the same time span as the Abascal dataset (January 2019 - December 2022), and processed using identical criteria. Given my training as a historian rather than a linguist, this study approaches French Discourse Analysis (FDA) not through exhaustive theoretical application, but as a gradual and pragmatic engagement with selected analytical categories. Rather than attempting to deploy FDA as a comprehensive system, this work adopts a heuristic use of its key concepts, such as *lexical worlds*, *interdiscursivity*, and *discursive ethos*, to shed light on the ideological structures embedded in Abascal's political rhetoric<sup>21</sup>. *Figure 1*, presented below, visually illustrates one of the outputs of this approach: the results of the FCA based on the lexical distribution across the Twitter corpora of five Spanish political leaders<sup>22</sup>.

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clarity, the name “Twitter” is retained throughout this article when referring to the platform during the analyzed period.

<sup>17</sup> On the notion of discourse in the digital world of Twitter, see also Longhi 2013.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.iramuteq.org> [02/07/2025].

<sup>19</sup> FCA allows texts to be associated with variables, enabling a comparison of corpora and highlighting which ones are more lexically similar or not. This analysis considers the relative frequencies of lemmas in different texts and compares them. The statistical indicator that measures the degree of difference is the Chi-square, which is calculated by summing the square of the difference in relative frequencies. For more information see [https://www.jmp.com/it\\_it/statistics-knowledge-portal/chi-square-test.html](https://www.jmp.com/it_it/statistics-knowledge-portal/chi-square-test.html). Once the Chi-square value is obtained, IraMuteQ processes the results using the Hypergeometrical Law. For more information see <https://www.pnw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Lecture-Notes-5.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> See SketchEngine, <https://www.sketchengine.eu> [02/07/2025] and Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014.

<sup>21</sup> This way, the analysis remains rooted in historiographical practice but is informed and enriched by the interpretive strategies of FDA.

<sup>22</sup> The profiles considered correspond to the main party leaders of the five most voted parties in the 2019 general elections – PSOE, PP, Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox – which also held the largest parliamentary representation during the period under study.

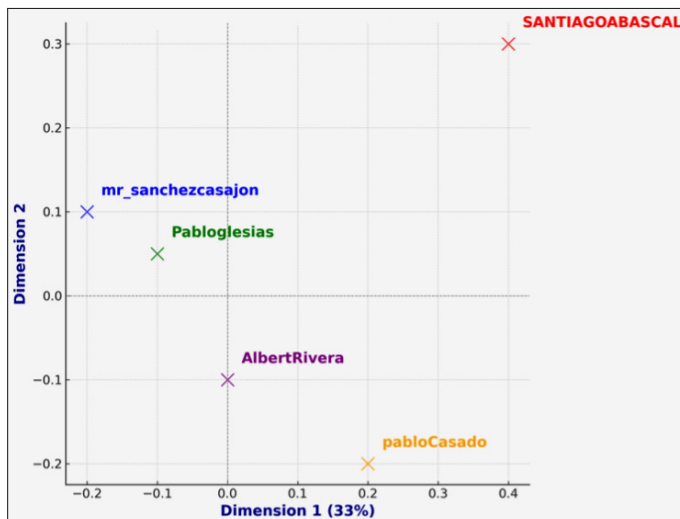


Figure 1. – Results of the factorial correspondence analysis of the different Twitter corpora. Software used: IraMuteQ.

The spatial distance between points reflects the degree of lexical differentiation: the farther apart two points are, the less overlap exists in their dominant lexical fields. Notably, Santiago Abascal's discourse (top-right quadrant, red) is positioned at a significant distance from all other political figures, especially Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) and Pablo Iglesias (Unidas Podemos – UP), who cluster in the opposite quadrant. This suggests a strong lexical polarization that reinforces the ideological distinctiveness of Vox's rhetoric. Leaders like Pablo Casado (PP) and Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) appear closer to the center of the graph, indicating overlapping lexical zones with one another. This visualization provides a preliminary indication of how Abascal's rhetorical choices diverge systematically from those of his political counterparts. The analysis also suggested that Abascal's rhetoric is marked by a distinct and internally coherent lexical profile, which emerges not only from its divergence from other political leaders (as illustrated in *Fig. 1*), but also from the internal structuring of its dominant thematic areas. As shown in *Figure 2*, the Hierarchical Descending Classification (HDC)<sup>23</sup> identified several dis-

<sup>23</sup> The HDC is a statistical method implemented in IRaMuTeQ, originally developed by Max Reinert. It divides the corpus into context units and classifies them based

crete lexical clusters within Abascal's corpus, each associated with a specific semantic and ideological domain. These clusters have been interpreted as *lexical worlds*<sup>24</sup> – that is, structured lexical repertoires used for thematic classification, following the concept theorized by Max Reinert (1993)<sup>25</sup>. Among these clusters, two major discursive axes stand out: the first revolves around immigration and national security, populated by terms such as *inmigración*, *ilegal*, *efecto llamada*, and *frontera* (cluster 6), framing immigration as an existential threat for Spain. The second centers on Catalan separatism and national unity, with frequent references to *golpista*, *Torra*<sup>26</sup>, *traidor*, and *unidad* (cluster 4), portraying secessionist actors as enemies of the nation. Other clusters reflect complementary themes in Abascal's rhetoric, including institutional distrust (*congreso*, *dictadura*, *progre* – cluster 1), appeals to law enforcement and order (*guardia civil*, *policía*, *delincuencia* – cluster 3). Cluster 5 (blue) gathers terms related to party events and campaign activities, accounting for 27% of the corpus<sup>27</sup>. While these quantitative findings offered a useful roadmap to identify macro-discursive structures, they alone could not account for the full ideological work performed by the language. Rather than being endpoints, they served as an entry point into a deeper interpretive reading, oriented by analytical categories from FDA. This step allowed for a more nuanced exploration of how meaning is constructed rhetorically and historically across Abascal's digital discourse.

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on the co-occurrence of lexical forms, grouping similar segments into distinct clusters. See Reinert 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Lexical worlds have been understood as lexical repertoires for thematic classification and were theorized by Max Reinert (1993).

<sup>25</sup> This approach builds on a broader tradition of lexicometric analysis that goes beyond mere frequency counts, seeking instead to uncover the ideological meanings that emerge through lexical co-occurrence and association (Tournier 1980; Lebart and Salem 1994). Far from being a purely statistical tool, lexicometry aims to trace how semantic structures are inscribed in discourse, making visible the symbolic alignments and oppositions that structure political rhetoric (Bonnafous and Tournier 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Joaquim Torra i Pla was President of the Generalitat of Catalonia from May 2018 to September 2020. A prominent figure within the pro-independence movement, Torra was known for his hardline stance on Catalan sovereignty and succeeded Carles Puigdemont following the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution.

<sup>27</sup> This reflects the strategic use of Twitter to mobilize supporters, especially during the 2019 election campaigns. Terms like *acto* (55 occurrences) and *mitin* (23) suggest an emphasis on promoting participation, while their co-occurrence with *desbordar* and *multitudinario* indicates the use of rallies both as organizing tools and as content for digital amplification.

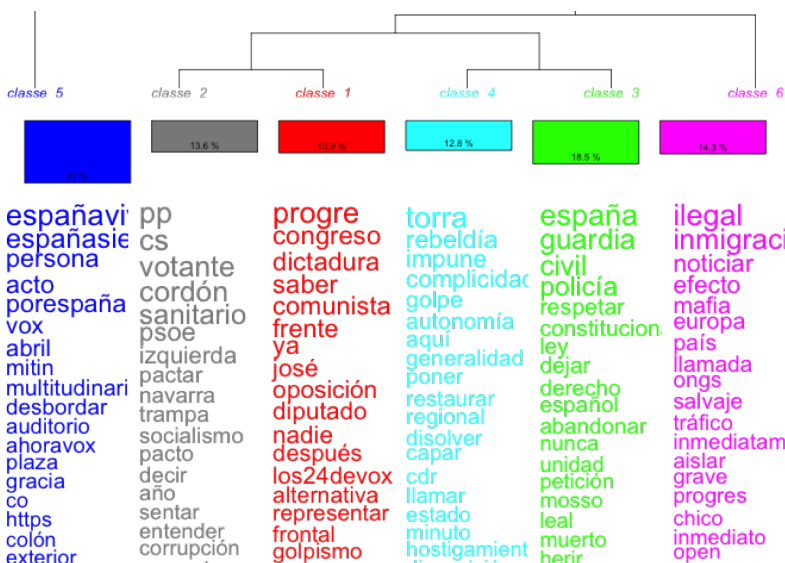


Figure 2. – Dendrogram displaying reference lexemes used for cluster identification in Abascal Corpus through IraMuTeQ.

In the process of naming political phenomena and adversaries<sup>28</sup>, Vox adopts a markedly hyperbolic approach, which becomes evident through its use of striking, emotionally charged lexical choices. For example, one of the most revealing findings from the analysis was the systematic use of associative word pairings such as *golpistas catalanes*<sup>29</sup> in reference to Torra and Puidgemont, *traidor de la patria* directed at both PP and PSOE, and *mafia migratoria* when referring to NGOs. These co-occurrences, when comparatively interpreted, reveal a discursive construction of reality that distances itself radically from political opponents (Fig. 3). Each issue – be it territorial conflict, party politics, or immigration – is framed through the lens of an existential threat to the nation. In this discursive universe, adversaries are not simply rivals within a democratic framework, but actors accused of facilitating national collapse.

<sup>28</sup> In the FDA's theoretical framework, the act of naming is never ideologically neutral. As Pêcheux (1975) suggests, to name a phenomenon is to inscribe it within a pre-existing discursive memory shaped by power relations and ideological formations.

<sup>29</sup> In the Spanish political context, the term *golpista* carries a strong historical connotation, evoking past coup attempts, the Francoist dictatorship, and the failed 1981 military uprising (Fernández López 2003).

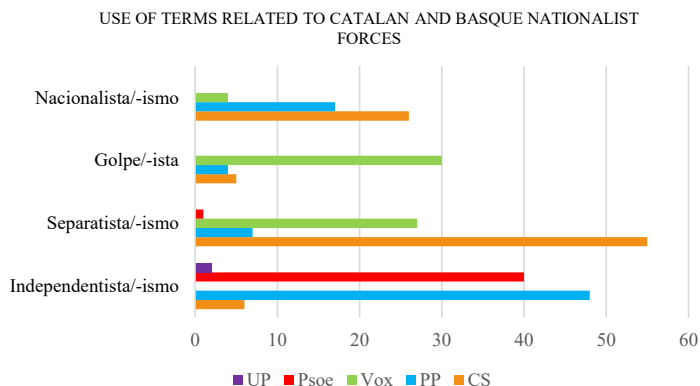


Figure 3. – Number of occurrences of the words in the different party communication on Twitter. Created by the author of this article.

This rhetorical strategy aligns with Manichean political framing, constructing a binary opposition between “defenders of the nation” and “traitorous enemies”. The analysis of Santiago Abascal’s Twitter discourse, in fact, reveals a strategically constructed *discursive ethos* (Amossy 2014; Maingueneau 2019), closely aligned with his self-presentation as a staunch defender of Spain’s national unity and traditional values in the face of multiple perceived threats. Drawing on Aristotle’s classical triad of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), *areté* (virtue), and *eunoia* (goodwill), Abascal projects an image of principled leadership, patriotic resilience, and moral clarity. However, as Ruth Amossy reminds us, *ethos* is never a transparent reflection of the speaker’s inner self; rather, it is a rhetorical and interactional construct – a persuasive image of self that must resonate with audience expectations and shared ideological frameworks (Amossy 2014). In the context of the resurgence of peripheral nationalisms, Abascal seizes the opportunity to construct an ethos of direct confrontation. He positions himself not merely as a critic of separatism, but as its most unyielding adversary. This combative self-image is reinforced by his repeated accusations against Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and the so-called *derechista cobarde* (the “cowardly right” of the PP), whom he denounces as complicit in the betrayal of Spain’s unity. By framing the Catalan leaders as *golpistas* and presenting mainstream parties as enablers of national disintegration, Abascal elevates his own political persona to that of the sole, uncompromising defender of the patria. Significantly, this ethos draws authority not only from Abascal’s words but also from his biographical narrative. As the son and grandson of conservative

politicians who suffered from ETA's violence<sup>30</sup>, and as a close ally of José Antonio Ortega Lara, Abascal's public image is deeply embedded in a narrative of victimhood and resistance. This personal history is rhetorically mobilized to enhance his credibility in denouncing separatist movements and opposing regional autonomies. His *ethos of sacrifice* thus legitimizes his hardline stance and amplifies his appeal among nationalist-conservative constituencies. From a discourse-analytical perspective, this construction of ethos also operates as a form of *branding*, echoing Amossy's notion of *image de soi* as a consistent, recognizable and persuasive identity projection. Abascal's ethos functions as a political signature that combines symbolic elements (flags, military references, appeals to order) with stylistic markers (short declarative sentences, antagonistic tone, emotional framing). In doing so, it generates a coherent and repeatable rhetorical identity that facilitates both media circulation and voter identification. In sum, Abascal's discursive ethos is not merely rhetorical ornamentation, but an ideological and affective operator – a communicative dispositif that fuses individual biography, collective memory, and political branding. Abascal's rhetoric also exhibits a high degree of interdiscursivity (Pêcheux 1969, 1975), weaving together fragments of nationalist, securitarian, populist, and moralist discourses. This interdiscursive weaving does not simply reflect ideological variety, but functions as a powerful mechanism of meaning production. As Pêcheux theorized (1969, 1975), no discourse emerges in isolation: every utterance is traversed by other discourses, forming a dense network of ideological traces – what he called the *already-said* (*le déjà-dit*) that silently structures the *said* (*le dit*). A striking example is Abascal's tweet posted on 18 November 2020, at the height of political tensions over the Spanish government's handling of the pandemic and ongoing negotiations with Basque and Catalan nationalist parties in Parliament. In the message, he writes: *Gobierno socialcomunistarra. Punto*. The neologism *social-comunistarra* fuses Francoist anti-communist rhetoric with anti-separatist tropes – evoking both the civil war imaginary and the vocabulary historically used to delegitimize Basque nationalism – while the blunt finality of *Punto* performs an illocutionary act of closure, foreclosing debate and asserting ideological certainty. Such utterances do not invent

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<sup>30</sup> Joséan Izarra, “Fallece Santiago Abascal Escuzza, el político alavés al que ETA y la izquierda abertzale no consiguieron callar”, *El Mundo, País Vasco*, July 23, 2017, <https://www.elmundo.es/pais-vasco/2017/07/23/59746c61e5fdea336d8b45cf.html> [02/07/2025].

ideological positions *ex novo* but reactivate sedimented discourses that resonate with the party's nationalist-conservative audience. The power of this rhetoric lies not in semantic novelty but in the strategic rearticulation of historically loaded terms, allowing Vox to insert current political antagonisms into pre-existing frameworks of fear, authority, and moral clarity. His discourse does not create new ideological frameworks but strategically reactivates existing ones, adapting them to the evolving context of Spanish contemporary politics. These elements – though not explored in further detail here due to space constraints – offer valuable tools for historians to examine how ideological meanings are structured, reactivated, and circulated across different discursive and historical contexts.

## 6. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The relationship between historiography and discourse analysis is not merely one of parallel intellectual traditions, but rather a mutually enriching dialogue that continues to shape contemporary research. While this article has offered only a modest contribution to that dialogue, it has sought to show – through the case study of Vox's digital rhetoric – how historical inquiry can benefit from the selective integration of linguistic methodologies. At the same time, it suggests that discourse analysis itself gains depth and precision when grounded in historical contextualization. Rather than proposing a comprehensive model, this work has aimed to explore the potential of cross-disciplinary engagement for refining our understanding of political language and ideological formation. In particular, it has highlighted the heuristic value of selected analytical categories drawn from French Discourse Analysis (FDA):

1. Lexicometry, which provides a quantitative foundation for analyzing lexical patterns and ideological shifts over time.
2. Interdiscursivity, which allows researchers to trace how certain historical narratives are recontextualized across different time periods and political contexts.
3. Discursive ethos, which helps identify how historical actors construct legitimacy, authority, and ideological positioning through language.

Beyond offering technical instruments, drawing on the theoretical reflections of FDA enables historians to resignify sources, read between the lines, and sharpen their interpretive sensibilities. By treating language not simply as a neutral medium but as a site of ideological struggle, historians are better equipped to uncover the implicit frameworks, silences,

and symbolic operations that shape historical meaning. In this perspective, FDA becomes not a substitute for historical method, but a critical companion – a set of lenses through which to reexamine familiar material with renewed depth and awareness. As historiography continues to evolve in dialogue with other disciplines, embracing discourse analysis may foster more reflexive, multilayered, and politically attuned narratives. The hope is that future historical research will increasingly engage with these analytical tools – not as a passing trend, but as part of a broader methodological culture grounded in critical rigor and interdisciplinary openness.

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