Labour, workers and work: sociological and linguistic analysis of political discourse

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The paper discusses the early findings of ongoing research on the representation of labour, workers, industrial relations and their context in Argentine political discourse. Argentine Presidents' first addresses to Congress from 1983 to 2010 are examined from the standpoint of Sociological and Linguistic Discourse Analysis. The linguistic resources used by the speakers are explored, as well as their relation to the argumentative strategies through which proposals are justified.

Keywords: interdisciplinary approach; labour; political discourse; Sociological and Linguistic Discourse Analysis; work; workers

Goals and corpus

The present sociological, legal and linguistic inquiry focuses on the representation of labour, workers, industrial relations and their context in the discourse of Argentine Presidents between 1983 and 2010. It seeks to determine its characteristics, the linguistic resources used by speakers and the links between such resources and the underlying societal and labour relations models. We also intend to establish the connection between language choices and political strategies and point to the main similarities and differences between the texts. Our investigation is part of a larger project covering the representation of workers in the written press as well as in political and judicial discourse (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 1997, 2007a).[1]

We have followed the interpretive paradigm, which is based on the need to understand the meaning of social action in the context of the participants' life-world (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 1992, p. 43; 2006a, p. 474). Through the inductive method, and without any theoretical assumptions, we have examined the texts to establish the predominant discursive strategies and resources, as well as the underlying interpretive models. Our starting point was not a theory, based on which we expected to find certain linguistic resources, but rather the texts themselves.

The corpus includes nine texts. We began by examining six presidential addresses to the Legislative Assembly:[2] (a) President Alfonsín's of 10 December 1983 (text no. 1[3]); (b) President Menem's of 1 May 1990 (text no. 2); (c) President De la Rúa's of 1 March 2000 (text no. 4); (d) President Duhalde's of 1 March 2002 (text no. 5); (e) President Néstor Kirchner's of 25 May 2003 (text no. 6); and (f) President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's of 1 March 2008 (text no. 9). We then decided to add three complementary texts to enhance our understanding of the research subject: (g) President De la Rúa's report to Congress on his government's labour law reform bill (text no. 3); (h) the report attached to President Kirchner's labour law reform bill (text no. 7); and (i) President Fernández de Kirchner's inaugural address to Congress, delivered on 10 December 2007 (text no. 8).

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Speeches given by Argentine Presidents in front of the joint assembly are closely followed by the media. The claims, categorisations, evaluations and promises quoted in them are in turn incorporated into the life-world. This horizon enables understanding by providing social actors with resources for the definition of situations and for action, as well as with interpretive patterns and models (Husserl, 1975, p. 93; Schutz & Luckmann, 1977; Habermas, 1987, p. 104; 1990, p. 87).

Methodological strategy: Sociological and Linguistic Discourse Analysis

Our inquiry has been conducted from the special perspective (Weber,1971, p. 36) of what we call Sociological and Linguistic Discourse Analysis (SLDA). This examines the links between discourse and society from the standpoint of the latter, drawing on sociology's epistemological, methodological and theoretical contributions (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 1997, 2007a, 2007b).

The interest of our interdisciplinary contribution lies in its linguistic exploration of the resources and strategies used to impose, maintain, justify or propose certain models in order to interpret social reality. It analyses linguistic forms in order to determine the relation between speakers' choices and their advocacy of certain types of society. At the cognitive level, such interpretive models are largely grounded in different epistemological paradigms, or theoretical and methodological frameworks within which researchers interpret social phenomena in certain societal contexts (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 1992).

Thus, the theoretical assumptions of these models underpin textual representations of society, societal relations and their legitimacy, individual as well as collective identities, and the scope for individual autonomous development. Social representations, as individual or collective symbolic constructions, serve to interpret the world, reflect on both one's own and other people's situation, and assess the possibilities of historical action (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 1997, 2003).

Interpretive models are seldom explicit, manifesting themselves through the linguistic resources and argumentative strategies that speakers deploy to represent social reality. They presuppose: (a) a certain type of society and social organisation; (b) a hierarchy of its members; (c) a dominant social relation; and (d) more or fewer opportunities to take part in the construction of that society as well as in the transformation of the systems through which social goods are distributed. These goods can be material, symbolic, spiritual or transcendent in nature (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2003, pp. 266–267).

We are particularly interested in the interpretive models underlying the legal regulation of work. These involve: (a) the encouragement of a certain type of industrial relation; (b) a definition of the capacity of the individuals concerned and its limits within the sphere of historical action; (c) a view of the role of labour law and law in general in the social control of such relations; and (d) a mechanism to deal with the tension between facticity and validity (Habermas, 1997), which is present at every stage of the law-making process. At the root of these assumptions is a notion of the workers' identity and of the extent to which their dignity must be legally protected.

The semantic content of words may vary according to the interpretive model assumed by the speaker, which therefore provides the meaning context. In the texts studied, for example, the term 'crisis' is textually constructed in such a way that future-oriented present action appears as an unavoidable consequence of the past.

The interpretive models underpinning the discursive representation of reality cannot be detected without a good grasp of the theories formulated in the social sciences. According to Lyotard (1991, p. 29), we might distinguish, in an attempt at extreme simplification, between two ways of representing contemporary society: as a functional whole and as divided in two. This methodological opposition, dating from the nineteenth century, determines two main types of discourse about society: functionalism and Marxism, both of which can be found in the texts analysed. President Alfonsín challenges the latter by rejecting all violence and stressing

that 'the end never justifies the means' (T1, u6). Mr Kirchner, on the other hand, sees himself as a member of 'a decimated generation' (T6, u104), thus referring to the young victims of the military repression of the 1970s, many of whom are believed to have held Marxian views. Ms Fernández de Kirchner shares her husband's 'convictions' (T8, u3), although systemic functionalism underpins their discourse as well as that of all the other presidents. According to this model, society is an organic system that is preserved by the spontaneous tendency of its components to keep it functioning as a whole. Deviance is the tendency to contravene institutionalised rules, which is checked by control; the more potentially violent and divisive the possible conflicts, the greater the functional need for control (Parsons, 1966, pp. 260, 176). This perspective stresses legality and the irreversibility of unicausal processes.

The use of inductive procedures (Creswell, 1998, p. 24) and qualitative methodology entails the substitution of theory creation for theory verification (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 1992, p. 61; 2006b, p. 33, Flick, 1998, p. 2). The development of theory from empirical research data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994) is, in our view, significantly linked to the emergence of alternative interpretive models.

Qualitative research approaches existing literature not as an *authority* to be deferred to, but as a useful albeit fallible source of *ideas* about what is going on that allows for alternative ways of framing the issues (Maxwell, 1996, p. 26, 27). In our attempt to unravel the relationship between discourse and power, considering language as a reality-creating social practice (Fowler,1985, p. 62; 1996, p. 40; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258; Van Dijk, 1993), we have been inspired by a variety of theoretical contributions. We have mainly drawn from: (a) argumentation theory (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1989; Perelman, 1979); (b) speech act theory (Austin, 1982; Searle, 1986; Habermas, 1990); (c) membership categorisation analysis (Sacks, 1992; Jayyusi,1984; Eglin, 2002; Leudar, Marsland, & Nekvapil, 2004; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, 2009); (d) narrative conceptualisation analysis (Shenhav, 2004, 2006); and (e) studies of metaphor in general (Lakoff & Johnson, 1995; Blasko,1999; Giora, 1999; Glucksberg & McGlone,1999) and its role in political discourse (Lakoff, 1995, Chilton & Schäffner,1997, 2002; Wodak & de Cillia, 2007).

The main features of qualitative inquiry are: (a) interest in meaning and interpretation; (b) stress on context and processes; and (c) inductive and hermeneutic strategies (Maxwell, 2004, p. 36). Qualitative researchers, following the interpretive paradigm, describe the social world and try to understand it by focusing on the meaning of words and actions as conveyed by language (Silverman,1994; Mason, 1996, p. 4).

The SLDA approach we have put forward: (1) places social theory at the basis of interpretive models; (2) considers social theories as discursive ways of representing social reality; (3) highlights the role of linguistic analysis in qualitative data analysis and, therefore, in the creation of theory and concepts; (4) acknowledges the risks inherent in the tendency to verify or use theories uncritically, instead of analysing both the dominant and alternative interpretive models; and (5) stresses, therefore, the need to study the discursive practices that tend to reproduce and produce the social world. Thus, it aims at detecting the actions and processes that preserve and strengthen the current social order, as well as those that oppose and resist it, challenging the ways in which social goods and resources are distributed.

We will show the argumentative strategies used in the texts as well as the ways in which Argentine heads of state represent labour, workers and industrial relations, pointing to the underlying interpretive models.[4]

President Alfonsín's discourse

As Raúl Alfonsín, from the Radical Party, was the first head of state of the democratic era that began in 1983, we thought it appropriate to start with his text. A bloody military dictatorship had ruled the

country since 1976, characterised by the systematic violation of the most basic human rights. This was carried out with absolute impunity and justified by the National Security doctrine. During that period, state-sponsored terrorism led to the disappearance of some 30,000 people.

Argumentative strategies

In this context, the President makes frequent references to democracy, promising to establish it 'definitively in Argentina' (T1, u32) and characterising it as an 'order grounded in something deeper than citizens' fear or silence' (T1, u43). The term 'democracy' may be viewed as one of the nodes of the semantic network underlying the text as a semantic unit (Halliday & Hassan, 1977, p. 2). These signs or marks guide our analysis, being at the very core of the speakers' interpretive models (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 1997, p. 300).

Argentine society is personified (Semino, 2002, p. 114) in this text: its potential, 'stifled' for so long, needs to be 'revived', and *democratic* Argentina 'is taking its first steps today' (T1, u90). Thus, the body politic is viewed by this and other Presidents as a child, of whom the speakers act as parents (Wodak & de Cillia, 2007, p. 350). Metaphors are fundamental to the structuring of conceptual knowledge (Blasko, 1999, p. 1677; Chilton & Schäffner, 2002, p. 28), encouraging certain kinds of explanation and controlling inferences (Potter, 1996, pp. 182–183).

The textual construction of the past figures prominently throughout the corpus: through it the Presidents position themselves in the present and argumentatively project the future. According to Davies and Harre (1990, pp. 2–3), the constitutive force of discursive practice lies precisely in the vantage point from which subjects see the world, which may lead to the dramatic variation of discursive stories in terms of language, concepts, topics and moral judgments.

Mr Alfonsín describes the past in terms of the negative paradigm, with words such as 'decadence', 'disintegration' and 'emergency', depicting the future as desirable (Lavandera & Pardo, 1987, p. 10) by focusing on 'progress', 'welfare' and 'opportunity'. Oppositions constitute his main argumentative strategy: 'immorality' vs 'decency' (T1, u4), 'totalitarianism' vs '*democracy*' (T1, u8), 'violence' vs '*legitimacy*' (T1, u15), 'force' vs 'reason' (T1, u42), 'lies' vs 'truth' (T1, u57).

From these contrasts, the speaker, intent on social approval (Brown & Levinson, 1978, pp. 66–67), constructs a positive image of himself embodying the values officially sanctioned by society (Goffman, 1959, pp. 47–48). Such image is also built, as in the other texts, by means of promises (Austin, 1982, pp. 53, 205; Searle,1986, p. 69), linked with the future and contrasted with that of 'others'(Leudar et al., 2004, p. 245). These are not named but characterised and blamed for the totalitarianism of the past. Step by step the President distinguishes himself from them, appearing as a democrat (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 377).

Representation of workers and labour relations

The speaker points to the need to 'increase productivity and production' (T1, u137) and associates it with the level 'of employment and remuneration' (T1, u134). Workers, however, are mentioned only 10 times in the text, which contains 24,827 words. They play, generally, a passive role, with allusions to the defense of their 'interests' (T1, u93), or the commitment to 'safeguard their rights' (T1, u90) as well as to provide them with a 'roof and job' (T1, u101) and 'adequate pay' (T1, u109, 189). No reference is made to workers' actions or to their struggle and contribution to the democratisation process.

According to Mr Alfonsín, 'There can be no *democracy* without *democratically* functioning and established, strong and representative trade unions' (T1, u92). Using the war metaphor, he talks of the need to immediately 'combat' workers' impoverishment. Trade unions play an important role in 'coming to an agreement with the business sector' (T1, u93).

Only in a few utterances is the subject 'workers' accompanied by a finite verb. One of them refers to a mental process (Halliday, 1985, p. 107): 'Argentine workers consider that the certified union system is the most appropriate instrument to defend their job-related interests'. The President shares that view, listing the requirements a trade union must meet to qualify as the workers' bargaining representative: (a) 'it must be economically powerful and institutionally organic'; (b) 'it must be non-partisan' (T1, u95); (c) 'it must have, fundamentally, human content' (T1, u96); and (d) 'it must be organised from the bottom up' (T1, u97). Through the reiteration of the deontic modal auxiliary 'must', which involves the idea of necessity, the speaker argumentatively stresses the certainty of his statement (Lo Cascio, 1991, p. 153), making the proposed solution appear as the only possible one (Toulmin, 1983, pp. 18–20). This strategy paves the way for a threat (Searle, 1986, p. 66): 'Trade unions engaging in party politics shall not be certified' (T1, u98).

Interpretive models

The meaning of Mr Alfonsín's utterances becomes clearer when the interpretive model underpinning them is made explicit:

> *Democracy* aims at the *coexistence* of the different social classes and sectors, of different ideologies and of different worldviews. It is pluralist, which entails accepting a *system* that leaves room for each factor, thus enabling government renewal, party renewal and the *progressive transformation* of society. (T1, u22)

His view of society is, therefore, systemic: transformations are progressive and class coexistence constitutes a goal of democracy. *Popular vote* sets limits to the privileged, and thus 'tends to achieve more distributive justice' (T1, u24) and 'makes possible the peaceful resolution of controversies in society' (T1, u25). The speaker calls for 'dialogue' (T1, u44–46) as well as for 'a horizontal and vertical *democratisation crusade*' in which political parties, intermediate organisations and citizens should take part. This would 'enable the *systems of forces* within Argentine society to live together peacefully and creatively'. It is, therefore, such 'systems of forces' that make peace possible, and not the historical social action of people or groups.

President Menem's discourse

Carlos Menem, a Peronist, was elected President twice, being in office from 1989 to 1999. His two terms were dominated by the neoliberal ideology. Workers' rights, legally recognised after a long and hard struggle, were curtailed or suppressed. The policies applied during the 1990s, including industrial modernisation, deregulation and the abrupt opening of the country's economy, resulted in the widespread loss of permanent jobs. The rise in open unemployment brought about a feeling of uncertainty in those still employed and an increase in the number of precarious jobs (Beccaria & López, 1997, pp. 10–11).

Argumentative strategies

Like his predecessor, Mr Menem uses personification to refer to Argentina as a 'dying country' (T2, u69), a nation that is 'undergoing a terminal process' (T2, u168), a 'sick country' that 'will not get cured with old remedies' (T1, u70). The opposition between sickness and health allows him to claim for himself a fundamental role in the nation's recovery (T2, u22).

The text contains other oppositions, with whose positive terms the speaker constructs his image and outlines a certain societal, economic and state model, seeking to persuade the audience to accept it. He suggests that the state should be '*popular* but not populist, *national* but not

chauvinistic' and '*free* but not anarchic' (T2, u215). 'Nation' is contrasted with 'nationalisms', (T2, u226), 'integration' with 'exclusion', (T2, 237), and 'protagonism' with 'isolation' (T238).

Representation of workers and labour relations

Workers are named four times in this 7784-word text. No actions are attributed to them: they play a passive role, as receivers of state protection. Their action is objectified through the nominalisation 'work', which prevents them from being viewed as social actors (Wodak & Cillia, 2007, p. 347; Van Leeuwen, 1995, p. 9).

In spite of the deregulation he proposes, the President defines work as 'a fundamental human right' (T2, u325). 'Work is not a mere commodity' (T2, u326), he declares, but 'a tool for man to be happier, to transcend and fulfil himself' (T2, u327). Since 'to govern is to create jobs' (T2, u328), he puts forward a National Employment Bill, whose main goals are: (a) the legalisation of illegal jobs; (b) the inclusion of new types of contract; (c) the reintegration of unemployed workers into the workforce; (d) the protection of unemployed workers; and (e) the combination of technological, educational and employment policies to tackle unemployment and underemployment (T2, u338). In order to shed light on the semantic content of these aims, we need to examine the underlying interpretive model.

Interpretive models

Mr Menem suggests a '*new, transformative and revolutionary political, economic and social system*' (T2, u73), a '*new model*' based on 'foundational laws' such as the 'State Reform' and 'Economic Emergency' (T2, u111) bills he expects Congress to enact. His proposal is aimed at 'constructing a *humanised, decent, efficient, competitive capitalism: a true capitalism*' (T2, u114–118).

The speaker advocates '*popular market economics*' (T2, u207), rejecting the notion of a 'totalitarian state' (T2, u209) and favouring a '*state that guarantees the common good, social harmony, economic growth and a balanced distribution of wealth*' (T2, u211). All this can be achieved in a context of dialogue and participation (T2, u320), by virtue of the '*dynamic engine*' of 'national unity' (T2, u54), a mechanistic metaphor that reinforces his systemic perspective. This approach can be seen in the following utterances, which are also influenced by organicism, evolutionism and functionalism:

> A country cannot remain static (T2, u316).
>   If it does not go forward, it goes back (T2, u317).
>   If it does not *evolve*, it grows old (T2, u318).
>   If it does not *develop*, it dies (T2, u319).

President De la Rúa's discourse

The Radical head of state Fernando De la Rúa was sworn in on 10 December 1999 and resigned on 20 December 2001.

Argumentative strategies

Like the previous and next speakers (T1, u163; T5, u28) Mr De la Rúa starts with a reference to 'the seriousness of [the country's] predicament', which is followed by a series of oppositions. He contrasts the past with the present and future, stressing his optimism about the latter in an attempt to project a positive image. Thus, 'stagnation' and 'recession' are opposed to 'social development' and '*sustained growth*' (T4, u 3–4), and 'deficit' to 'progress' and '*growth*' (T4, u27).

The terms 'growing', 'growth', 'competitiveness' and 'productivity' constitute the nodes of the semantic network underlying his texts.

Representation of workers and labour relations

The speaker mentions workers nine times in his 4085-word State of the Nation address, and only in order to describe their situation, without alluding to their action. Most of his references to workers and industrial relations concern his labour law reform bill (T 3).

'Workers have never been worse' (T4, u61), he conclusively states, making it clear that he is not 'against workers' or the 'working family' (T4, u63). The proposed reform 'is not going to flexibilise anyone [i.e. anyone's employment contract]' but rather 'will encourage stable jobs and act against illegal market practices' (T4, u64). The market is thus represented as an active agent, whereas workers are either elided or subject to other people's actions.

The bill seeks to 'increase the creation of quality jobs' and 'improve the *productivity* of labour' (T3, u12). Job quality and stability are not defined in terms of working conditions, but linked with productivity and 'business *competitiveness*' (T3, u18).

The proposed legislation also aims at 'upgrading people's working skills and adjust them to the demand for labour' (T3, u12), and thus its ultimate beneficiary is the business sector. Vocational training is not a workers' right, but part of a strategy to boost competitiveness, to which they have to adapt: education must 'teach how to work' (T4, u74) and be in touch with 'the world of work and *production*' (T2, u351). In this respect, an alternative interpretive model might, for example, associate education with freedom, narrowing the field of shared understandings by expressing dissent (Habermas, 1990, p. 88).

Interpretive models

The President looks forward to a '*new politics of dialogue*' (T4, u56), which must be grounded in the 'mutual understanding and respect' on which the 'democratic system' (T4, u55) is based, as opposed to 'antagonism'. He contrasts '*cooperation*' with 'confrontation' (T4, u84) and talks of the possibility of '*consensus*' (T4, u85).

Both the interpretive model and the nodes of the semantic network underlying his texts are made explicit in this passage:

> The ultimate solution will only be achieved if we transform a useless state into a state that is capable of promoting a *competitive economy* that enables us to take advantage of our opportunities. If we can *compete*, the sustained *growth* of our economy is guaranteed (T4, u65).

The justice system, in turn, 'provides predictability, certainty to relations, improves *competitiveness* and encourages investment' (T4, u69). The '*competitive economy*' he advocates 'needs a framework of legal certainty' (T4, u72). To sum up, the speaker aspires to a '*modern, just and sustainable competitive*' society (T3, u12).

President Duhalde's discourse

The Peronist Senator Eduardo Duhalde was elected to the Presidency by Congress in January 2002, in order to complete Mr De la Rúa's term. He handed over power in May 2003.

Argumentative strategies

The term '*crisis*' is one of the nodes of the semantic network underlying Mr Duhalde's text. It is a crisis of 'representativeness' (T5, u6) as well as 'of confidence' (T5, u40), which is not

'only economic, social or political, but basically spiritual' (T4, u173) and must be 'battled' (T5, u82).

The President seeks to rebuild the country's 'social capital' (T5, u65) as well as to 'put an end to a socially somber stage and recover faith in a just future' (T5, u67). He personifies the nation and opposes 'death' to 'life' in order to describe the past and project a brighter future: 'Death throes', he remarks, 'are not the same as the hopeful labour pains attending the birth of a *new nation*' (T5, u68).

The model that has only just been 'left behind' is characterised as 'perverse'. It has destroyed the 'productive system' (T5, u87, 91), resulting in the 'disappearance of businesses and entire branches of industry, unemployment' (T5, u91), indebtedness, poverty and the 'unfair distribution of wealth' (T5, u93). The negative construction of the past strengthens the speaker's image as pointing to a '*new path*' for the future (T5, u85), at the helm of a 'transitional' government (T5, u167). This transition is, in turn, defined as 'a historical turnaround in the face of the complete breakdown of a failed model' (T5, u169). As such, it constitutes a 'hinge between a humiliated Argentina and a *new one* that is struggling to its feet' (T5, u170).

Representation of workers and labour relations

The goal of 'decent jobs and fair wages' for 'all' is associated with the increase in consumption and production, in what Mr Duhalde calls the *virtuous circle of social progress* (T5, u64). 'Industry, farming, labour and the domestic market are the pillars of a country's power and wealth as well as of its presence in the world' (T5, 129). In this passage 'labour' means Argentina's 'domestic industry' (T5, u128): workers are only mentioned once in this 4978-word text and no actions are ascribed to them. In outlining his 'production scheme' (T5, u138), the President prefers to talk of reconstructing 'the alliance with production and labour' (T5, u140). He aims at '*sustained growth*, a fair distribution of wealth and job creation', in a country 'where living, working and making progress in peace are once more considered an inalienable right' (T5, u136).

The speaker advocates '*Argentina's rebirth*' (T5, u142). To justify his proposal and persuade the audience to accept it, he reminds them of the opposition between 'liberation' and 'dependency':

> Either we all fight for this *sovereign nation* or we resign ourselves to being no more than a prosperous factory. (T5, u143).

Interpretive models

Mr Duhalde's goal is not only to 'overcome this serious state of affairs' but also to 'lay the first foundations for true *sustainable human development*, with inclusion and equity' (T5, u63, 84, 104). This requires a 'profound cultural change' in order to implement a '*new economic model*' (T5, u125). It is necessary to 'reclaim the best Argentine productive tradition, which consists in turning work culture into a *driving force* for development' (T5, u126), 'work' being synonymous with the country's industry.

Personifying the nation again, the speaker declares: '*Productive Argentina* must be once more the great protagonist of transformation'. He adds, elaborating on the societal model he has put forward:

> If our goal is to change history, we must be capable of developing our own *productive identity* and redefining the relationship between market, state and civil society from the standpoint of our institutions, production and cultural values. (T5, u131)

President Kirchner's discourse

Néstor Kirchner, one of three Peronist candidates, was elected President in the general elections of 2003, 'taking office' (T6, u1) on 25 May, whereupon he delivered a speech to the Legislative Assembly.

Argumentative strategies

Mr Kirchner starts by opposing the negative past to the present and future, which are associated with change and with his own ability to lead the country through it. The terms 'change' and 'new' constitute the nodes of the semantic network underlying his text. 'Our past has been fraught with failure, pain, antagonism, energy misspent on sterile confrontation', he states, 'in these circumstances . . . in order to have a future and avoid repeating the past, we need fully to face the challenge of *change*' (T6, u6, 7). This necessary '*change*' is then contrasted with 'immobilism' (T6, u20).

The speaker stresses his identity as a member of the 'new generation of Argentines' that 'call on society as a whole to come together, not to divide, to move forward, not back' (T6, u102). He is 'part of a decimated generation', believes in 'values' and holds 'convictions' he is 'not willing to give up' (T6, u104). He intends to 'start a *new time*', referring to a historical 'hinge' (T6, u106).

In spite of the different circumstances in which they have to rule the country, Mr Kirchner and his predecessor coincide in the way in which they present their proposals and in the role they claim for themselves. Mr Duhalde also talks of beginning a 'new cycle' (T5, u168), defining the transition as a 'hinge' (T5, u170), an *in vivo* (Strauss & Corbin,1990, p. 69) term used by both presidents. Both position themselves between the past and the future, representing themselves as the only legitimate route to the latter, through what I call *'hinge' utterances*. By means of them, speakers situate themselves temporally, politically and socially, stressing the necessity of their presence and action. A particular moment in a personal biography is represented as key, decisive, indispensable for the positive development of society, while the meaning of the country's history is transformed. Individual trajectory is enhanced through the personalisation of history.

Representation of workers and labour relations

Workers are mentioned only twice in Mr Kirchner's 5816-word speech, being considered as passive receivers of protection. They are one of 'the most vulnerable sectors of society' (T6, u27), the others being consumers and pensioners. 'Work' is related to the 'model of production, work and *sustainable development*' (T6, u83) the President advocates, which reminds us of Mr Duhalde's 'sustainable development' (T5, u104).

Mr Kirchner, like Mr De la Rúa (T3, u6), maintains the existence of a causal connection between unemployment and poverty, but differs from the latter in that he also associates poverty with crime. He points to the need to 'take into account the economic and social circumstances that have led to a rise in crime directly proportional to the growth of exclusion and marginalisation' (T6, u46). The report attached to his labour law reform bill (T7) lists, among its goals, 'to benefit workers' (T7, u44), to encourage 'the creation of decent jobs' and 'collective bargaining' as well as to re-establish the principle of 'the law more favourable to workers' (T7, u8). As in the previous cases, in order to shed light on the semantic content of these terms we must look into the interpretive models underpinning the texts.

Interpretive models

The President invites all citizens to share 'the broad common ground of a national undertaking' (T6, u21). Elaborating on it, he declares: 'We focus on the idea of reconstructing a *national*

capitalism that will create the conditions for the restoration of upward social mobility' (T6, u22).

In another speech delivered in 2003, on Industry Day, he urges his audience to start 'a *new virtuous circle* by building a *serious capitalism*'. This should 'respect democratic institutions, human rights and human dignity' and make it 'worthwhile to make an effort, take risks, venture and gain' (u 39). Mr Kirchner concludes by remarking: 'We believe in *national capitalism*' (u 47).

His economic policy seeks to 'ensure a *stable growth* that will enable the expansion of [economic] activity and permanent employment' (T6, u56). He contrasts the 'constant adjustment model' with a 'constant consumption' one (T6, u72) aimed at creating a '*virtuous circle*' in which the *growth* of economic resources will be linked to that of production (T6, u73). In this respect he shares his predecessor's views on the 'virtuous circle of social progress' (T5, u64). Along the same lines, Mr Alfonsín holds that 'without wages there is no consumption, and without consumption there can be no prosperous business' (T1, u167) and Mr De la Rúa relates a rise in wages to an increase in consumption (T3, u28).

The protection of workers and their rights, then, would take place within the framework of 'national capitalism' and productivity policies (T7, u42, 43), which differs from the view of work as a fundamental human right. The semantic content of the term 'protection' will vary accordingly.

President Fernández de Kirchner's discourse

Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Néstor Kirchner's wife and a 'Front for Victory' candidate of Peronist background, won the 2007 presidential elections, succeeding her husband. She was sworn in on 10 December, whereupon she addressed the joint assembly of the two chambers of Congress.

Argumentative strategies

Mrs Fernández de Kirchner differs from the previous speakers in that she does not advocate a break with the past. The key date in her time construction is that of her husband's inauguration (25 May 2003): what happened before belongs to the distant past, and the recent past coincides with Mr Kirchner's tenure. Her identification with his 'convictions' (T8, u3) marks the continuity of the recent past and the present. She uses the inclusive 'we' to refer to 'the process we started on 25 May 2003' (T8, u12), and to certain achievements for which she demands 'recognition' (T8, u27). These are associated with '5 years of uninterrupted *economic growth*' (T9, u5, 24) and attempts to solve social problems: unemployment, poverty (T9, u10), housing (T9, u30) and education (T9, u50).

The President describes the distant past in negative terms, talking of 'frustration', 'failure' and 'not being able' (T8, u7). It was her husband who, by contrast 'was able' to reverse this trend and 'avert a destiny that looked uncertain' (T8, u17). The distant past is opposed to the recent past and present through terms such as 'crisis' and 'recession' (T9, u4, 15) and '*growth*' (T9, u5, 6, 24), '*accumulation*' (T9, u6) and '*competitiveness*' (T9, u21). The last three constitute the nodes of the semantic network underlying the texts.

Mrs Fernández de Kirchner defines herself as a 'President of modernity', identifies with the audience by reminding them of her parliamentary background (T8, u13, 12), and stresses her 'contribution to the construction of the democratic system' (T8, u23). Like her husband, she is a member 'of a generation that believed in ideals' (T8, u50): Eva Perón and the 'Mothers of Plaza de Mayo'[5] (T8, u53) are the examples that will guide her action.

Representation of workers and labour relations

The President is one of those who think 'that it is <u>work</u>, effort and production that must be the backbone of *growth* and social development' (T9, u7). She reminds listeners that 'almost 5 years ago' she proposed 'fighting for <u>work</u>', in order to 'reach one-digit unemployment' figures (T9, u10) and achieve 'full employment' (T9, u11).

Far from equating the 'economic agreement' she puts forward with the 'stabilisation of prices and wages', she suggests 'sector agreements' per economic activity (T9, u20). She intends to 'work' with businessmen and producers on value chains and price formation, since 'we all have to help uphold and sustain' this 'economic process' (T9, u57). Thus, support for such process is discursively presented as a collective duty.

Although Mrs Fernández de Kirchner talks of 'work', she mentions 'workers' only five times in her two speeches, which together contain 13,376 words. Three of these references are linked to her family position as a child of <u>working</u> parents, which her husband shares (T8, u35, 39; T9, u43, 73).

She expresses concern for the 'generations of children who have never seen their parents work' (T9, u72, 74), which, taking a systemic view, she relates to the 'desocialisation' processes (T9, u74) triggered by unemployment.

Interpretive models

The President advocates an '*economic model of accumulation* with a diversified pattern and social inclusion'. This model, which dates from the recent past (T8, u12, 18; T9, u6), is the 'key' to the future (T8, u30). It involves the '*synergy*' of 'farming and industry' (T8, u31). Labour, production, industry, farming and exports constitute its 'driving force':

> I want to establish this *new diversified economic model of accumulation* with social inclusion that has been implemented as the key to the times to come: a model that recognises <u>labour</u>, production, industry, exports and farming as the *driving force* that has enabled millions of Argentines to recover not only their <u>jobs</u> but also their hopes and expectations of the possibility of a better life (T8, u30).

In the speaker's narrative, the construction of the future is grounded in her assumptions about the recent past and the present (Shenhav, 2004, p. 82) and the three are connected by the accumulation model. Metaphors such as 'synergy' and 'driving force' conjure up the idea of constant movement and feedback aimed at improving Argentines' lives.

The model, also called '*growth model*' (T9, u9) or '*accumulation and growth model*' (T9, u15), is characterised by its 'profound rationality' (T9, u22). It is linked to 'Argentines' agreement about a country model' (T9, u10), which has been reached with the 'participation of the different sectors' of society (T9, u13). The reiteration of the word 'accumulation' goes hand in hand with the absence of the term 'distribution' in the interpretive model underpinning the texts.

Final reflections

Comparison by opposition (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1989, p. 376) constitutes the chief argumentative strategy in the texts analysed. The past is described in lexically or semantically negative terms, whereas the present and the future are depicted positively, which results in a positive representation of the speaker's image.

Except for Mrs Fernández de Kirchner, Argentine Presidents define their identity by contrast with their predecessors. They construct history through their narrative, at the same time highlighting and legitimising their protagonism in it: they build the present in view of the past

(Shenhav, 2006, p. 246). Thus, their personal biographies become fundamental to the transformation of the country's history.

The systemic interpretive model underlies all the texts: society is seen as a united whole (Lyotard, 1991, p. 31). This is reinforced by the use of metaphors through which the country is personified or conceived as a living organism or a machine. No actions are ascribed to workers, who are thus deprived of their capacity for historical action.

Overall, there are more similarities than differences between Mr Alfonsín's goal of class 'coexistence', Mr Menem's 'humanised' or 'true capitalism', Mr De la Rúa's 'sustainable competitive society', Mr Duhalde's 'productive Argentina', Mr Kirchner's 'serious' 'national capitalism' and Mrs Fernández de Kirchner's 'economic model of accumulation'. A revitalised appeal to progress (Fairclough, 2000, p. 148), characteristic of neoliberal discourse, dominates throughout. Change appears inevitable and necessary (Wodak & Van Leeuwen, 2002, p. 348), and a prosperous future is presented as a natural and unavoidable phenomenon, not as the product of individual or collective action.

Without the capacity to act, workers are left voiceless and their ability to respond is undermined (Le Goff, 2002, p. 45). No emphasis is laid on their dignity, autonomy or freedom. Their role in cooperative social relations and democratic practice is not sufficiently acknowledged. There is no institutionalised definition of the types of activity and skill that may be symbolically or materially recognised (Honneth, 2001, pp. 54–55; 2004, p. 363). They are discursively represented as subordinate, unable to take part in social life on equal terms (Fraser, 2001, p. 24). Since politics is the site of the struggle for distribution and recognition (Fraser, 2007, pp. 313–314), obstacles to justice are not only economic or cultural, but also political.

The notions of 'labour' and 'labour relations' or 'industrial relations', assuming the legitimacy of inequality, reproduce the capitalist cosmogony. As a result, work takes place in a context of humiliation, subordination, violence and injustice. This leads to identity degradation, in which discursive representations play an increasingly important role. Based on the essential equality of human beings, we suggest an alternative view of work as a free human activity whose fruits are meant to be shared (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2002).

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Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. Our research has been funded by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research and by the National Agency for the Advancement of Science and Technology of Argentina.

2. The Legislative Assembly is the joint assembly of the two houses that make up the Argentine Congress, the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Senators.
3. In quoting these texts we will use the letter 'T' followed by text number and the letter 'u' followed by utterance number.
4. We have underlined the textual representations of labour, workers and work, using *underlined italics* for the nodes of the semantic network underlying each text, as well as for the interpretive models to which they refer.
5. María Eva Duarte de Perón (1919–1952) was the second wife and political partner of General Juan Perón, the founder of the Justice Party. The 'Mothers of Plaza de Mayo' are the mothers of those disappeared during the 1976–1983 military dictatorship, who pioneered the struggle for human rights in the country.

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