

Evaluation of “Status” as a Persuasive Tool in Spanish and American Pre-electoral Debates in Times of Crisis

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The evaluative function of language is explored from the point of view of the expression of “status,” or how the world is presented, and its persuasive potential in pre-electoral debates in the US and Spain. The types of statements used in two comparable corpora in Spanish and English are examined using Hunston’s model (2000; 2008) for the evaluation of “status”—the degree of alignment of a proposition and the world—to discover similarities and differences between them. The results show that, in general, all politicians prefer to use statements that refer to the actual world—“world-reflecting statements” in Hunston’s classification—rather than “world-creating propositions” in an attempt to be seen as objective candidates. However, each language group behaves differently: Americans seem to prefer a more rational stance and Spaniards favor opinions and value judgments in the samples analyzed. The correspondence found in the results between certain rhetorical strategies and success in the post-debate elections may be an indicator of using effective discursive strategies by winners as opposed to losers. In our corpus, election winners used more objective propositions in the debate than losers—the ethos of the former may, thus, be more reliable—which may, in turn, imply that this strategy contributes to persuading the audience. If this is so, adopting a negative stance of facts attributed to the opponent seems to contribute to persuasion more than a positive stance of ideal intentions and suggestions attributed to oneself, which means that the audience gives more credibility to negatively-depicted actions than to positively-charged intentions. This conclusion may be self-evident somehow, but this study provides empirical quantitative evidence to support it.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; evaluation; status; persuasion; political discourse; pre-electoral debates

Evaluación del “estatus” como herramienta persuasiva en debates preelectorales españoles y norteamericanos en tiempos de crisis

En este estudio se explora la función evaluativa del lenguaje desde el punto de vista de la expresión del “estatus”—es decir, cómo se presenta el mundo—y su potencial persuasivo en los debates preelectorales en Estados Unidos y España. Para ello, se contrastan los tipos de proposiciones utilizadas en dos corpus equivalentes en español e inglés para así estudiar las similitudes y diferencias, conforme al modelo de evaluación de Hunston (2000; 2008) y su concepto de “estatus”: el grado de convergencia entre una proposición y la realidad que representa. Los resultados obtenidos indican que, en general, los políticos analizados prefieren proposiciones que reflejan el mundo actual más que aquellas que lo crean, en un intento por ser vistos como candidatos objetivos. Sin embargo, hay diferencias entre los dos debates: en el debate americano parece haber una preferencia por la evaluación racional mientras que en el español encontramos más opiniones y juicios de valor. Los resultados de este trabajo indican, además, que podría haber una correspondencia entre el éxito político y las estrategias retóricas utilizadas. Asimismo, los ganadores de las elecciones que nos ocupan utilizan proposiciones que reflejan mayor objetividad que los perdedores (es decir, los primeros presentan un *ethos* más fiable), lo que, a su vez, puede contribuir a persuadir a la audiencia. Si esto es así, adoptar una postura negativa hacia el oponente sería más persuasivo que una postura propia de intenciones y sugerencias positivas. En conclusión, la persuasión parece presentarse más a través de la evaluación negativa del mundo factual que a través de la evaluación positiva de una realidad utópica. Esta conclusión, que, en cierta medida, podría parecer evidente viene avalada por la investigación empírica en este trabajo.

Palabras clave: Análisis Crítico del Discurso; evaluación; estatus; persuasión; discurso político; debates preelectorales

I. INTRODUCTION

A rich wealth of literature—see, among others, White (2002), Hunston and Thompson ([2000] 2003), Martin ([2000] 2003), Martin and White (2005), Simon-Vandenberg, White and Aijmer (2007), Simon-Vandenberg (2008) and Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados (2014)—has attempted to analyze the linguistic mechanisms that speakers and writers use to convey their personal attitudes and assessments and how various genres differ in terms of such mechanisms.¹ There are several lines of research, which differ in the approach taken and methodology used, and these include consideration of “evidentiality” (Chafe 1986), “affect” (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989), “evaluation” (Thompson and Hunston 2000), “appraisal” (Martin [2000] 2003) and “stance” (Biber and Finegan 1989)—see Thompson and Hunston (2000) for a review of other terms. Despite their differences, all of them focus on the meaning of the speaker’s assessment, the linguistic realizations of stance and the function of evaluation in building and maintaining relations between writer/speaker and reader/listener—i.e., the so-called interactional-nature of stancetaking (Englebretson 2007, 16). “Evidentiality”—the assessment of the status of knowledge—and “affect”—the assessment of personal feelings, emotions and attitudes—lie at the heart of the modern conceptions of evaluation.

There is no doubt that evaluation plays an important role in persuasion (Bamford 2007). Political language in general, and pre-election debates in particular, is a type of persuasive discourse that is especially suited for the expression of evaluation, since politicians need to create a distinct profile for themselves in order to persuade their audience to vote for them. In doing so, they present their viewpoints and those of the opposing candidates (and of the parties that they each represent) and evaluate these viewpoints and their opponents’ actions—i.e., they criticize their opponents and put themselves in a positive light. The final purpose of the discourse is to convince and appeal to the public, something that seems unlikely to happen without an expression of a particular stance. While the idea of “faceless stance” exists—“the relative absence of all affective and evidential stance features” (Biber and Finegan 1989, 108)—and there are cases where stance is more implied than explicit, it is hard to imagine that politicians would fall into this case.

The evaluative uses of journalistic, academic and political discourse have been studied by a number of researchers (Simon-Vandenberg, White and Aijmer 2007; Simon-Vandenberg 2008). In previous publications (Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados 2014; Cabrejas-Peñuelas 2015; Díez-Prados 2016; Cabrejas-Peñuelas, forthcoming) diverse discourse strategies—positive and negative evaluation, fallacies

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or metaphorical mappings—have been tackled from a contrastive English-Spanish perspective in pre-election and other types of debate, with the final aim of discovering how these devices may contribute to persuasion in texts. The objective of the present study is to expand on our previous work on evaluation (Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados 2014), which applied Martin and White’s categorization of “affect” (2005). We now test a different evaluation model, proposed by Susan Hunston (2000; 2008; 2011) which focuses on the evaluation of status by comparing the results from a Spanish pre-electoral debate (Rajoy vs. Rubalcaba in 2011) with those from a debate in English (Obama vs. McCain in 2008); the characteristics of the two debates being equitable in that both were held during the worldwide financial crisis and both Rajoy and Obama managed to attract a massive vote through their respective political campaigns. In order to gain insight into Obama’s and Rajoy’s messages and those of their opponents—McCain and Rubalcaba, respectively—the research questions that we attempt to answer here are the following:

- RQ1. What are the similarities or differences in the expression of evaluation of status—i.e., the degree of alignment between a proposition and the world (Hunston 2008, 65)—between Spanish and American politicians in the economy section of both debates?
- RQ2. To what extent do the candidates’ evaluations of status contribute to the persuasive power of their interventions?
- RQ3. Taking into account that pre-electoral debates attempt to gain swing or undecided voters, what is it that the election winners, as opposed to the losers, do that may contribute to winning the elections?

In the next section we present an overview of evaluation as used in political discourse and section three provides background information on the pre-electoral debate between Rajoy and Rubalcaba, on the one hand, and Obama and McCain, on the other. Section four introduces the framework that we use to analyze evaluation, while section five discusses the methodology employed as well as the methodological decisions made. Section six gives the results of the analysis of evaluation and an analysis of the way in which evaluation of status can be used as a persuasive tool. Finally, section seven provides the conclusions to the present study.

2. EVALUATION IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

The language of evaluation has been studied by a number of researchers—see, among others, White (2002), Martin ([2000] 2003), Martin and White (2005) and

Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados (2014)—who have concluded that politicians often depict themselves and others subjectively and evaluate issues, such as the healthcare system, unemployment benefits, social benefits, either positively or negatively. To this end, they use positive and negative attitude markers to praise themselves and their deeds, and thus convince the electorate of their good qualities, while at the same time emphasizing the negative qualities of their opponents. More specifically, politicians use affect to evaluate people's emotions (e.g., *happy*, *angry*) and judgment to praise a person's capacity and propriety (e.g., *skilled*, *fair*) and to criticize a person's incapacity and impropriety (e.g., *incapable*, *intolerant*). They also use appreciation to evaluate issues positively or negatively (e.g., *employment*, *unemployment*). Evaluation of people's emotions is not common in political debates, which instead are used to "assess things, processes and human behavior" (Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados 2014, 15). Political texts, in addition, show high rates of judgment and appreciation in relation to the topic of the text and the content (Simon-Vandenberg 2008, 58; Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados 2014, 171). Negative judgment is often directed at the opposing candidate and their administration (i.e., *the other*), while positive judgment is employed towards themselves. Also, positive appreciation markers are used with respect to the politician's own plans and negative ones for their opponent's agendas. Some differences in the issues being evaluated by politicians from different countries may be explained by their belonging to different traditions. For example, in the American speech tradition, there tends to be references to the greatness of America and its people by using a combination of positive attitude markers, references to historical figures, American history and anecdotes (Simon-Vandenberg 2008, 97).

Politicians' use of evaluative markers has been studied further to include various lexical and grammatical expressions of the speakers' attitudes towards the content of their propositions within the notion of modality (Harris 1991; Simon-Vandenberg, White and Aijmer 2007). This might include "evidentials, hedges, concession, negation and others" (Simon-Vandenberg et al. 2007, 34), and there is increasing evidence that politicians use rhetorical strategies to reach their rhetorical goal of persuading the audience (Simon-Vandenberg 1996; Simon-Vandenberg, White and Aijmer 2007; Díez-Prados 2016). One such strategy is the use of expressions to indicate cognitive certainty (e.g., "we had very detailed evidence," "we have no evidence at all"), emotional commitment (e.g., "I certainly think") and social commitment (e.g., "which commands the strong enthusiasm of the overwhelming majority") (Simon-Vandenberg 1996, 392-408), although there is also evidence that politicians' responses are frequently evasive (Harris 1991). Similarly, certainty adjectives and adverbs (e.g., "clear," "obvious," "of course," "obviously") serve to convince the audience of the politician's ideas by presenting the addressee as inevitably sharing his/her point of view, thus placing those who disagree in an awkward

position (Simon-Vandenberg, White and Aijmer 2007). While such adjectives and adverbs are evaluations attributed to the speaker/writer, they are presented as facts, presuming an implied consensus (Koutsantoni 2005, 133), and, thus, “their strategic power lies [...] in the strategic manipulation of power and solidarity and their complex dynamics” (131). Expressions of certainty undoubtedly impose views on readers/listeners by controlling their inferences, although they are, at the same time, addressed as knowledgeable readers/listeners who are able to follow the writer’s/speaker’s reasoning (Hyland 1998). This is the case for pre-electoral debates.

3. THE RAJOY-RUBALCABA AND OBAMA-MCCAIN DEBATES

Pre-electoral debates are direct confrontations in front of an audience—television viewers, but also on occasions a stage audience and a journalist panel, as in American debates—where two political candidates compete dialogically. In Spain, the 2011 General Elections were preceded by an almost eight-year period of Socialist government. The president at the time of the debate under analysis, Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (born 1960), called early General Elections for November 20th, 2011, mostly due to public unhappiness over economy and the defeat of the Socialists in regional and local elections in May 2011, which had weakened the government. Various opinion polls predicted an absolute majority for the Popular Party (henceforth, PP). Within this context, the two main parties agreed to hold a single debate on November 7th, 2011 in the Spanish TV Academy between Mariano Rajoy (born 1955) for the PP and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (born 1951)—widely known as Rubalcaba—for the Socialists, who had been the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs in Zapatero’s government.

Unlike American debates, where candidates are often standing at podiums or seated at a table with a moderator, the format of Spanish pre-electoral debates is a face-to-face confrontation between the candidates, which is favored by them facing each other at the table. The 2011 debate lasted for ninety minutes and was divided into sections—a forty-minute section dealing with economy and employment, a thirty-minute section about social policy and a twenty-minute section about foreign policy and other topics—without subtopics as in 2008, which made it more fluid. Each section was divided into interventions, which were largely monological. This favored preparing the interventions before the debate without much fear of being interrupted. The debate started with an opening and finished with a closure made by the moderator and had an introduction and a conclusion by the interlocutors. However, in 2011, for the sake of flexibility in the debate, the candidates were given a set amount time for each section, which they could manage as they wished and, thus, the different interventions in each section could have different lengths. The candidates still had a fixed number of interventions, which did not contribute to

flexibility, although the format favored refuting the arguments presented by the opposing party. The debate was opened by Mariano Rajoy and was closed by Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, which had been decided by a draw.

The American presidential debate of September 26th, 2008 took place at the University of Mississippi's Gertrude C. Ford Center (Oxford, Mississippi) and was the first of three debates that happened in the course of a few days. The two candidates were Democrat Barack Obama (born 1961) and Republican John McCain (1936-2018). While the debate had been originally planned to focus on foreign policy and national security, the major cracks appeared in the American financial system in September 2008, which made economic issues move to the forefront of the debate. Indeed, a considerable amount of time was spent on discussing economic issues and this was followed by foreign policy and national security. Analysts agreed that Obama had won on economy, while McCain had done better in foreign policy. CNN opinion poll declared a draw between both candidates, which contributed to raising expectations for the second debate.

The format of the American debate was divided into time segments and the candidates were allowed to address each other directly, answer the moderator's follow-ups and, on occasions, answer the audience's questions, contributing this way to a less rigid, more dialogical format. The 2008 ninety-minute Obama-McCain debate dealt with economic issues, foreign policy and national security, which were further divided into eight nine-minute segments, where each candidate had two minutes to speak and five minutes for debate. The issue segments were preceded by an opening to the debate made by the moderator and finished with a conclusion by the two interlocutors and a closure by the moderator. One may presume that there should be more evaluation in the parts where there is more dialogical battle, that is, in the central parts, than in the introduction and conclusion to the debate.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF STATUS: STATUS AND VALUE

In a previous study (Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados 2014), the Spanish Rajoy-Rubalcaba debate was analyzed applying the Appraisal model developed by Martin and White (2005). Of all types—"graduation," "engagement" and "attitude"—only "attitude" was analyzed (subdivided into "affect," "judgment" and "appreciation"), because the focus then was on the "expression of evaluation itself, rather than on the source (i.e., 'engagement') or on the intensification of the expression of evaluation (i.e., 'graduation')" (Cabrejas-Peñuelas and Díez-Prados 2014, 164). What is at stake now is in the domain of "engagement." However, rather than using Martin and White's sense of dealing "with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse" (2005, 35), our interest is in the source of evaluation and,

particularly, in discovering how the world is depicted by the politicians in their claims (i.e., the “status” assigned by the addressees to their propositions). Thus, instead of studying devices, “such as projection, modality, polarity, concession, and various comment adverbials” (Martin and White 2005, 35) that take into account the audience’s potential reactions as regards the value positions advanced by the addressor, we analyze the types of statements uttered by the participants in the interactions, since our interest is in the propositional content of the utterances rather than in their lexico-grammatical realizations. Notwithstanding, Susan Hunston’s model of evaluation (2000; 2008; 2011) also includes explicit mention to the source of the proposition (*self* vs. *other*), as will be explained below. All in all, the present study advances on our previous one by providing a different perspective on evaluation (i.e., the evaluation of “status”) and by, concurrently, introducing a contrastive analysis with an American debate of the same period.

Hunston presents a theoretical framework of evaluation based on the concepts of “status” and “value” (2000). Hunston defines “status” as “the degree of alignment, or correspondence, between a proposition and the world,” which is averred by the speaker/writer in every single act of communication (2008, 65). For example, a text may be assigned a status of a fact or a hypothesis; a book, a status of fiction or non-fiction; a proposition, a status of interpretation, etc. Thus, all propositions in a text fulfill an evaluative function in the sense that they are all intrinsically provided with a given status as to how the world is presented—as a fact, as an opinion, as fictional, and so on. Hunston further explains that she regards the identification of status as evaluation, because both concepts share three properties: (1) being subjective, (2) being attitudinal and (3) being set within a context of social values (2008, 66).

No doubt, the status of the propositions in a text may be derived from the language used and, thus, the text is subjective. For instance, within the same text, some propositions may be assigned a status of suggestion and others a status of proof in an attempt to convince the audience; this way, the author maintains an apparently objective stance. When a status is assigned to various propositions, it also offers judgments as to how credible they are and, hence, the text is also attitudinal: stating that a proposition has been proved has more credibility than stating that a proposition has been suggested. Finally, the propositions that are aligned with the world may be more highly valued—i.e., they are seen as more reliable—than those that are less aligned with the world and, thus, the text shows social values (Hunston 2008, 67).

According to Hunston, status is “intrinsically linked to evaluations of ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ especially in [...] texts which seek to influence actions using rationality as a means of persuasion” (2011, 26). This is the case of pre-election debates, the type of political discourse selected for analysis. The notion of status allows the classification of statements into the following types—see table 1, where excerpts taken from our own corpus are included as way of illustration.

TABLE 1. Hunston’s classification of statements

Theoretical framework for the evaluation of status: status and value (Hunston 2000, 187-189)				
CATEGORY	TYPE	SUBTYPE	DEFINITION	REALIZATION
INFORMING	WORLD-CREATING	ASSUMPTION	The addresser asserts that something should be taken as an assumption.	(1) “I think that <u>the fundamentals of the economy have to be measured by whether or not the middle class is getting a fair share.</u> ” (Obama)
		HYPOTHESIS	Opinionated guess that needs to be justified (close to interpretation, but in the realm of non-existent yet).	(2) “ <u>Probablemente compartamos</u> con muchos de ustedes los problemas fundamentales que tienen los españoles.” (Rubalcaba) [“ <u>It is possible/probable that we share/We probably share</u> with many of you [formal] the fundamental problems Spaniards have”].
		RECOMMENDATION	Directive speech act like giving advice, rather than assertive, i.e., informing.	(3) “ <u>You’ve got to look at our record. You’ve got to look at our records.</u> That’s the important thing. Who fought against wasteful and earmark spending?” (McCain) ²
	WORLD-REFLECTING	FACT/EVENT	Verifiable; denial of the truth is not an option for the reader (“what is”).	(4) “And, yes, <u>I went back to Washington, and I met with my Republicans in the House of Representatives. And they weren’t part of the negotiations.</u> ” (McCain)
		INTERPRETATION	Statements that are evaluated by the writer as possibly true (“what might be” or “what is said to be”).	(5) “ <u>Es la excusa de siempre, ¿no? La crisis la ha provocado el mundo, pero parece que el Gobierno no tiene ninguna responsabilidad.</u> ” (Rajoy) [“ <u>It is the usual excuse, isn’t it? The crisis has been provoked by the world, but it seems that the Government has no responsibility</u> ”].
		ASSESSMENT	The reader is free to disagree with the writer; they may be evaluated for their truth value. These are often supported by evidence (“what we think is”).	(6) “ <u>We haven’t seen the language yet. And I do think that there’s constructive work being done out there.</u> ” (Obama)
	FOCUSING		Description of the current text (aims and organization), e.g., “This point will be discussed again in Chapter 8; this chapter is divided into two sections.”	(7) “ <u>Lo que vamos a debatir aquí esta noche ...</u> ” (Rajoy) [“ <u>What we are going to debate here tonight ...</u> ”].

² “Earmark spending” is defined as “funding inserted into the annual federal budget by individual legislators in the US Congress for special projects or purposes of interest to their constituents” (Longley 2017). Notice that McCain, in this example, recommends a course of action using an impersonal verb to confer the rank of objective obligation to his subjective statements in an attempt to distinguish himself from Obama. Indeed, he presents himself as a reformer who focuses on reining in government spending, while Obama is a big spending liberal.

Hunston (2000, 190-192) also distinguishes two different sources for any given averral (see table 2).

TABLE 2. Types of averral

Statement sources (Hunston 2000)				
CATEGORY	TYPE	SUBTYPE	DEFINITION	REALIZATION
SELF	Averred (attribution to the speaker/writer and, thus, s/he “assumes responsibility for what is averred,” [Hunston 2000, 178]).	Sourced	The averral is expressed as deriving from a source.	(8) “ <u>Senator McCain</u> is absolutely right that...” (Obama)
		Non-sourced	Presented as averred facts.	(9) “And, yes, <u>I went back to Washington, and I met with my Republicans in the House of Representatives. And they weren’t part of the negotiations.</u> ” (McCain)
	Emphasized	Attribution to self		(10) “ <u>I can’t think</u> of a more important...” (Obama)
	Hidden (when the attribution is disguised, although the writer may be responsible for the assertion).	Attribution to text		(11) “ <u>This package has</u> transparency in it.” (McCain)
General attribution			(12) “ <u>It</u> hasn’t worked.” (Obama)	
OTHER	Attribution, responsibility delegated		The attributee is a specific person, a group or a speech act.	(13) “And <u>you’re</u> wondering...” (Obama)
	Attribution, responsibility reclaimed		The writer reclaims responsibility for the statement, choosing a verb such as to prove, to point out, to show, and others.	(14) “Now, <u>we also have to recognize</u> that...” (Obama)

This classification of statements was applied to categorize the propositions made by the politicians that are being compared.

The evaluation of status is, according to Hunston, “crucial to the epistemology of any society,” since “the way that propositions are evaluated for status sets up a hierarchy of evidence-sources and establishes a world-view common to that society against which future propositions will in turn be evaluated” (2008, 69). Thus, the concept of status helps reveal persuasive strategies because the way politicians present the world has

the aim of influencing the electorate's value system or faltering beliefs in order to win votes (Jaffe 2007). This is particularly true in the case of swing voters, if we understand persuasion as "any process that creates a new belief or changes your level of commitment to an existing one" (Pullman 2013, xx). In the following section, the details of the analytical methodology will be explained.

5. METHODOLOGY

To carry out the present study two corpora were selected: the Economy and Employment section of the Spanish Rajoy-Rubalcaba debate (7,775 words), which is compared with the Economy Issues section from the first Obama-McCain pre-electoral debate (6,421 words).³ The two extracts can be considered of equivalent size and, thus, comparable. They were selected for analysis because they were regarded as a turning point in Spanish and American pre-electoral debates, since the elected candidates represented hope and change after a serious financial worldwide crisis. Also, both were reelected for a second term, despite losing a large section of the voters that had propelled them to strong wins in the previous elections, mostly due to dissatisfaction with the economy. This produced disappointment in the American and Spanish electorate, which led to distrust in mainstream political parties and, eventually, to a new discursive sphere, that of "populism" (Breeze 2018, 2).

This study focuses on the verbal content of the debates, based on transcriptions, as if they had been produced as written text. This means that no indication of oral linguistic features or other multimodal features are included, since what is under investigation here is the propositional content of the message and not the actual performance of the respective politicians. Both debates were uploaded in text format into a freeware program called *UAM Corpus Tool*, developed by Mick O'Donnell (2012). This software is, in fact, a set of tools to annotate text after making a search of the corpus and then run descriptive and inferential statistics. For the present study of evaluation, we inserted Hunston's coding scheme in the program before carrying out the analysis (2000). The unit of analysis for status was generally the orthographical sentence (from capital letter to full stop), although some statements extended over stretches of language which were longer or shorter than the sentence. See (15), which has been taken from one of McCain's interventions:

(15) And we've got a lot of work to do. And we've got to create jobs. And one of the areas, of course, is to eliminate our dependence on foreign oil (McCain).

³ The debates and the transcripts can be consulted on "Elecciones Generales 2011. Debates" ["2011 General Elections. Pre-electoral debates"] *Radio y Televisión Española*, Nov. 20, 2011 and "The First Presidential Debate Election 2008" *The New York Times*, May 23, 2012.

This whole extract, transcribed as three orthographical sentences, is considered one single recommendation because they represent a general recommendation (“work to do”) with two specific examples of that task: “to create jobs” and “to eliminate our dependence on foreign oil.”

Since fragmenting the debates into analytical units was problematic, the propositional statements were identified manually by the two researchers, who worked collaboratively, and then every statement was analyzed individually by one of the researchers. One researcher analyzed the whole corpus, while the second analyzed 30% to check reliability of the analysis, with the two researchers reaching 95.68% agreement for those sections that were analyzed by both. In the following section the results obtained are presented and discussed.

6. RESULTS

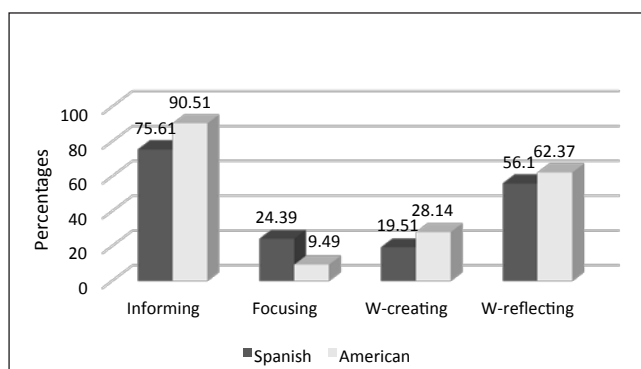
This section is divided into two subsections. The first one tries to answer RQ1 through the description and interpretation of the quantitative results derived from the study of evaluation in the Economy section of the Spanish and the American debates. On the other hand, the second section reflects on the persuasive power of statements used by all four candidates, thus providing an answer for RQ2 and RQ3.

6.1. Results from the contrastive analysis of evaluation between the Spanish and the American debates

Significant differences were found between the Spanish and American debates for most types of statements—see table 3 for a summary of results. As can be seen in figure 1, although politicians from both countries favor INFORMING over FOCUSING, the Americans do so to a far greater extent—90.51% vs. 9.49% in the American debate ($p < 0.02$) and 75.61% vs. 24.39% in the Spanish ($p < 0.02$). This indicates that the Spanish debaters lay greater emphasis on challenging their opponent’s interventions or refer more often to the debate itself, mainly to talk about its purpose, as if this had not been decided beforehand—see example (7). Their American counterparts, on the other hand, prefer to focus on the content of their propositions by reflecting the world or creating it for the audience. Within INFORMING, all politicians use more WORLD-REFLECTING statements than WORLD-CREATING ones, since they need to sound convincing by presenting their propositions as related to the real world rather than by making up a world with their words. However, the American debaters significantly surpass the Spanish in terms of world-creating statements: 28.14% of 267 INFORMING statements vs. 19.51% of 155 such statements, respectively, ($p < .05$). The apparent higher frequency of WORLD-REFLECTING statements by Americans (62.37% of 267 statements vs. 56.10% of 155, respectively) is not so, since this difference is not statistically significant, showing an equivalent realistic

stance when WORLD-REFLECTING statements are observed as a whole. However, when dealing with the individual specific types (i.e., FACT/EVENT, INTERPRETATION, and ASSESSMENT), significant differences are evident, as will be discussed below.

FIGURE 1. Significant differences in statement types (Spanish vs. American)



Of the three WORLD-CREATING statement types (see figure 2), RECOMMENDATION is the most frequent, which is to be expected since candidates present their intended courses of action in pre-electoral debates, their proposals for the prospective government:

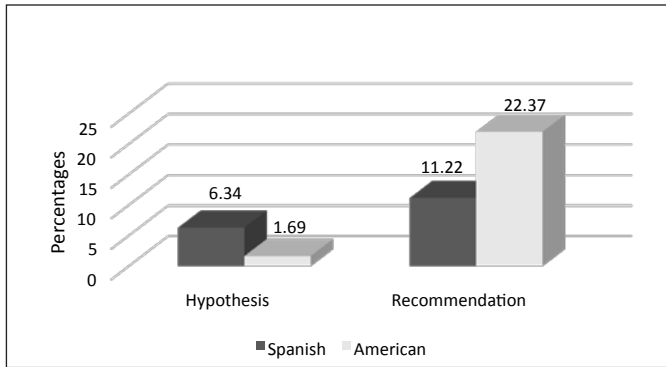
(16) It [a package] has to have accountability and oversight. It has to have options for loans to failing businesses, rather than the government taking over those loans. We have to—it has to have a package with a number of other essential elements to it (McCain). [RECOMMENDATION]

However, the results show that the Americans use more RECOMMENDATIONS—22.37% vs. 11.22%, respectively ($p < 0.02$)—but less hypothetical statements than Spaniards—1.36% vs. 6.34% ($p < 0.02$)—while differences for ASSUMPTIONS are not statistically significant: Spanish 1.95% vs. American 4.41%. That is, the Americans adopted a more practical stance and the Spaniards a more theoretical one, since RECOMMENDATIONS imply presenting courses of action as favorable or suitable, while HYPOTHESES are ideas put forth as conjectures:

(17) Usted va a bajar las prestaciones por desempleo. Yo creo que va a ser así. Y lo creo por las citas que le he dado y por lo que pone en su programa (Rubalcaba). [HYPOTHESIS] [“You [formal] are going to reduce unemployment benefits. I believe so. And I believe so because of the quotations I’ve told you and what your electoral program says.”]

In (17), Rubalcaba hypothesizes and, thus, he is in the realm of non-existent.

FIGURE 2. Differences in WORLD-CREATING statement subtypes
(Spanish vs. American)



In the case of WORLD-REFLECTING mechanisms, there is no single preferred device (see figure 3): the Americans mainly resort to factual information (FACTS/EVENTS) with 26.78% of all their statements ($p < 0.02$), while the Spaniards favor ASSESSMENTS (31.17%) ($p < 0.02$). This implies that the American politicians adopt a more rational affect when discussing economic issues, while the Spanish representatives produce more opinionated statements:

(18) There's no doubt about that (Obama). [FACT]

(19) Pero lo más importante es que de que se apliquen unas ideas u otras depende el futuro del país. No es lo mismo que sea de una forma o que sea de otra (Rubalcaba). [ASSESSMENT]
[“But the most important thing is that the country's future depends on which ideas are applied. One way is not the same as the other”].

Obama resorts to FACTS, as in (18), when explaining the state of the current American economy and the recovery plan necessary to solve the crisis, which he presents as the result of the policies of the Bush administration, supported by McCain. In (19), Rubalcaba attempts to undermine his opponent's credibility by using ASSESSMENTS from Rajoy's manifesto, which, however, have no effect since “para Rajoy era fácil descalificar esas denuncias como simples juicios de intención, imposibles de probar” [“for Rajoy it was easy to disqualify those accusations as simple opinions, which were impossible to prove”] (Santamaría 2012, 42). Regarding INTERPRETATION (i.e., statements that are evaluated by the writer/speaker as possibly true), the Americans use this device almost three times as often as Spaniards—17.29% vs. 6.34% ($p < 0.02$)—in many cases with the final aim of interpreting accounted events—see example (20)—or re-interpreting

their opponent’s INTERPRETATIONS, as in example (21). In the case of Rubalcaba, most of his INTERPRETATIONS are related to Rajoy’s intentions, were he to become President, mainly included in his agenda; in turn, most of Rajoy’s INTERPRETATIONS are used to re-conduct Rubalcaba’s INTERPRETATIONS of his intentions and thus turn the argument on his opponent—see example (22)

(20) We did not set up a twenty-first century regulatory framework to deal with these problems (McCain).

(21) Well, I think Senator McCain’s absolutely right that we need more responsibility, but we needed it not just when there’s a crisis (Obama).

(22) En sus Comunidades Autónomas empieza a haber derivación de los enfermos más costosos hacia la sanidad pública para mantener el negocio de la sanidad privada, señor Rajoy, y eso es gravísimo (Rubalcaba).

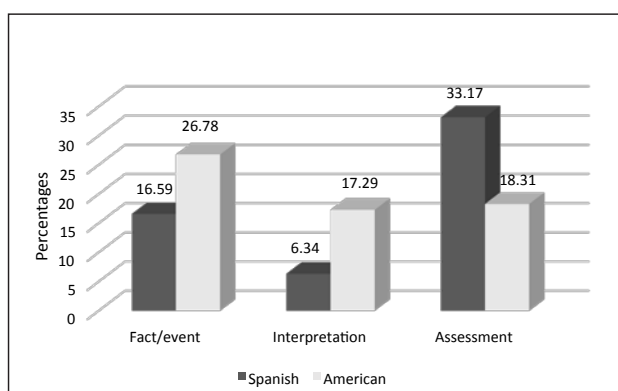
[“In your autonomous communities the sick, whose treatments are the most expensive, are started to be derived to the public health system to support the business of the private health system, Mr. Rajoy, and that’s very serious”].

[...]

Eso es una insidia suya y si no, deme los datos, en qué hospitales y en qué Comunidades (Rajoy). [INTERPRETATION]

[“That’s your malicious act; and, if it is not, give me data, in which hospitals, in which regions”].

FIGURE 3. Significant differences in WORLD-REFLECTING statement subtypes (Spanish vs. American)

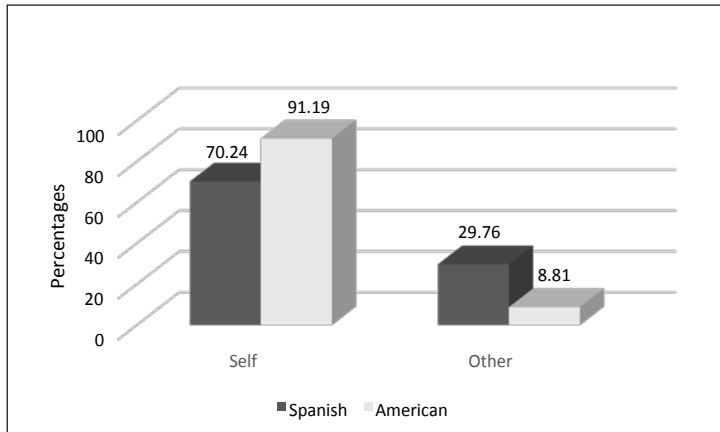


Statistically significant differences are found not only in the subtypes of the statements uttered but also in the source to which the statement is attributed: while

Americans claim themselves responsible for most of their utterances (91.19%) ($p < 0.02$), Spaniards delegate this responsibility in 29.76% of cases ($p < 0.02$)—see figure 4 and examples (23) and (24):

- (23) And I think that the fundamentals of the economy have to be measured by whether or not the middle class is getting a fair share (Obama). [EMPHASIZED SELF]
- (24) Señor Rajoy, ustedes llevan tres años diciendo que el único problema de la economía española es el Gobierno. Sugieren [...] (Rubalcaba). [RESPONSIBILITY-DELEGATED]
[“Mr. Rajoy, you (plural, formal) have been saying for three years that the only problem in the Spanish economy is the Government. You (plural, formal) suggest (...)”]

FIGURE 4. Significant differences in SOURCE
(Spanish vs. American)



Within the SELF and OTHER types, statistically significant differences are also found between the American and Spanish debaters. Americans use the three types more evenly—AVERRED, 27.80% ($p < 0.02$), EMPHASIZED SELF, 31.86% ($p < 0.10$) and HIDDEN SELF, 31.53% ($p < 0.02$)—whereas Spaniards notably prefer the AVERRED type (43.90%) and almost totally avoid the HIDDEN type (2.44%), the EMPHASIZED-SELF category being used in a quarter of their self-attributed statements (23.90%) (see figure 5). This suggests that the Spanish politicians are interested in demonstrating their responsibility for their statements and, thus, sound straightforward to the audience rather than disguising their own opinions. American politicians, however, not only attribute their statements to themselves but also to people in general in an attempt to “set up an ‘in-group’ of like-minded people to which the [audience] is positioned as belonging, and thus to construct consensus” (Hunston 2000, 191).

FIGURE 5. Significant differences in SELF SOURCE type (Spanish vs. American)

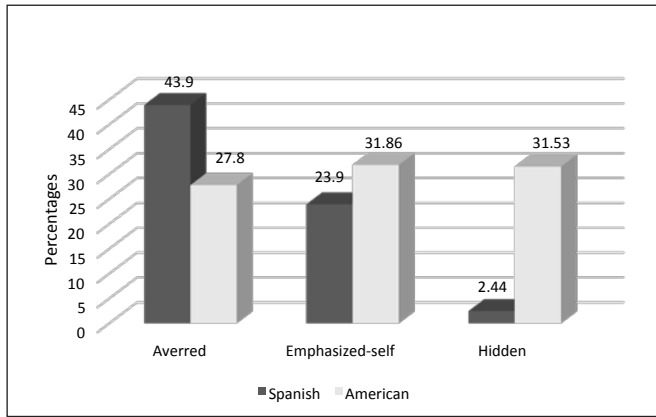
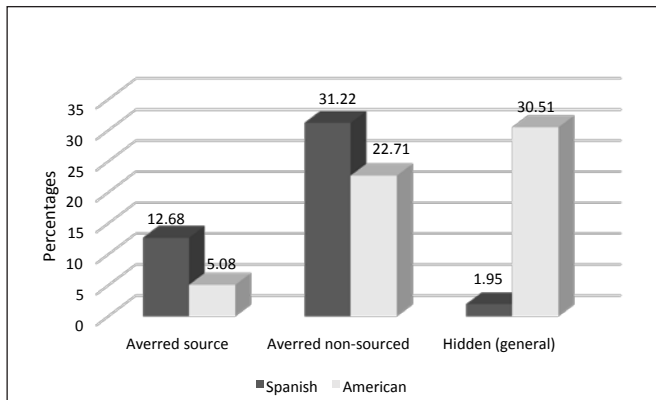


FIGURE 6. Significant differences in sub-categories of SELF (Spanish vs. American)



As figure 6 shows, in the Spanish debate the most frequent subcategory of SELF-AVERRED source is that in which statements are presented as FACTS (NON-SOURCED, 31.22%, $p < 0.05$), while in the American debate the most used type is HIDDEN/GENERAL ATTRIBUTION—i.e., when the attribution is disguised, making the general public responsible for the averred statement (30.51%, $p < .02$), as in (16) and (18) above, where the politicians use the impersonal expressions such as “[i]t has (got) to (be)” and “[t]here’s no doubt that.” These and other impersonal expressions, such as “we’ve got to,” “that kind of thing is not the way to,” etc. are devices to aver statements believed to be quasi-universal truths or obligations that no one would deny, when, in fact, it is the speaker who holds the proposition. Both presenting NON-SOURCED averrals and HIDDEN statements attributed to the general public

TABLE 3. Percentages of evaluation types in the Spanish and American debates

Feature	SPANISH		AMERICAN		STATISTICS			
	N	Percent	N	Percent	ChiSq	Significance	T Sta	Significance
STATEMENT TYPE	N=205		N=295					
Informing	155	75.61%	267	90.51%	20.39	+++	4.60	+++
Focusing	50	24.39%	28	9.49%	20.39	+++	4.60	+++
INFORMING-TYPE	N=205		N=295					
World-creating	40	19.51%	83	28.14%	4.85	++	2.21	++
World-reflecting	115	56.10%	184	62.37%	1.98	Not signif.	1.41	+
WORLD CREATING-TYPE	N=205		N=295					
Assumption	4	1.95%	13	4.41%	2.22	Not signif.	1.49	
Hypothesis	13	6.34%	4	1.36%	9.15	+++	3.05	+++
Recommendation	23	11.22%	66	22.37%	10.28	+++	3.23	+++
WORLD REFLECTING-TYPE	N=205		N=295					
Fact/event	34	16.59%	79	26.78%	7.19	+++	2.69	+++
Interpretation	13	6.34%	51	17.29%	12.99	+++	3.64	+++
Assessment	68	33.17%	54	18.31%	14.49	+++	3.86	+++
SOURCE	N=205		N=295					
Self	144	70.24%	269	91.19%	36.91	+++	6.30	+++
Other	61	29.76%	26	8.81%	36.91	+++	6.30	+++
SELF-TYPE	N=205		N=295					
Averred	90	43.90%	82	27.80%	13.90	+++	3.77	+++
Emphasized (attribution-to-self)	49	23.90%	94	31.86%	3.75	+	1.94	+
Hidden	5	2.44%	93	31.53%	64.93	+++	8.62	+++
AVERRED-TYPE	N=205		N=295					
Sourced	26	12.68%	15	5.08%	9.28	+++	3.07	+++
Non-sourced	64	31.22%	67	22.71%	4.53	++	2.13	++
HIDDEN-TYPE	N=205		N=295					
Attribution-to-text	1	0.49%	3	1.02%	0.43	Not signif.	0.65	Not signif.
General-attribution	4	1.95%	90	30.51%	64.61	+++	8.60	+++
OTHER-TYPE	N=205		N=295					
Attribution responsibility-delegated	58	28.29%	10	3.39%	63.83	+++	8.54	+++
Attribution responsibility-reclaimed	3	1.46%	16	5.42%	5.19	++	2.29	++

+ = weak significance (90%) ++ = medium significance (95%) +++ = high significance (98%)

imply taking for granted a reality without providing proof of its truthfulness, which can incur in an overgeneralization fallacy. Table 3 summarizes all comparative results between the Spanish and American debates.

Table 3 and statistics are generated by the annotating tool used for the analysis, *UAM Corpus Tool* (O'Donnell 2012). Percentages are obtained taking as reference the total number of statements, signaled in table 3 as N—e.g., the 19.51% of *WORLD-CREATING* statements is calculated in relation to the 205 total statements in the Spanish debate, not in reference to the total number of informing statements, which is 155. That is why in all cases N equals the total number of tokens found in the corpus: 205 in the Spanish case and 295 in the American.

6.2. Evaluation of status and persuasion

In order to interpret the use of different types of statements from a persuasive perspective, one might wonder what each candidate says to sound more convincing and what distinguishes election winners from election losers that may have contributed to their persuasive power. Close examination of the statements made by the four politicians suggests that their political success to some extent correlates with the rhetorical strategies applied. In this section, we concentrate on the qualitative analysis of the target of the *RECOMMENDATIONS* (suggested courses of action) and the *ASSESSMENTS* (statements of opinion), respectively recommended and assessed by each politician: two strategies widely used in verbal confrontations.

Rajoy's successful rhetorical strategy in the political debate stems from his attempt to be seen by the audience as taking a down-to-earth position and to link his opponent to the unsuccessful policies of the former Prime Minister, Rodríguez Zapatero, and the Socialist party. To this end he makes numerous negative *ASSESSMENTS* of the Socialist party's failing policies as regards the economy, and these are expressed as if they were facts, which may not in fact be the case—see example (25)—and he recommends a change of government:

- (25) Son ustedes unos auténticos maestros, se lo he dicho antes, en decir una cosa y hacer exactamente la contraria (Rajoy). [*ASSESSMENT*]
 ["You are masters, I told you before, in saying something and doing exactly the opposite."]

This, coupled with the fact that the Socialist party had taken the brunt of the blame for Spain's economic problems and Rubalcaba's poor credibility in the eyes of the audience, help Rajoy to meet his objective;⁴ namely, convincing the electorate that

⁴ On the advent of the general election, numerous newspapers commented on the sky-high unemployment rates while Zapatero and the Socialist party were in the government, which many considered "a failure for which the government was to be blamed" (Sánchez-Cuena 2011, n.p.).

he is the best candidate to achieve Spain's economic recovery.⁵ In contrast, Rubalcaba is unsuccessful in his attempt to persuade the audience to vote for him, mainly because he uses the wrong rhetorical strategy: he employs RECOMMENDATIONS (particularly, directive speech acts towards his opponent) as he attempts to reveal the austerity measures that Rajoy would implement if he were to become the new Prime Minister—see example (26):

(26) En resumen, señor Rajoy, le pido: primero, que diga rotundamente si va o no a cambiar el sistema de prestación por desempleo [...] y segundo, que me explique qué reforma laboral tiene en la cabeza (Rubalcaba). [RECOMMENDATION]

["Summing up, Mr. Rajoy, I'm asking you to: first, say definitely whether you are going to make changes in unemployment benefits or not (...) and second to explain to me what labor reforms you have in mind."]

(27) Nosotros efectivamente tardamos mucho en pinchar la burbuja inmobiliaria [...] pero creció con ustedes (Rubalcaba). [ASSESSMENT]

["In fact, it took us too long to prick the housing bubble (...) but it grew with you when the PP was in office."]

Rubalcaba also makes negative ASSESSMENTS of the opposing government—see example (27). However, his strategy fails since Rajoy does not go on to reveal his true intentions and Rubalcaba's ASSESSMENTS sound like empty excuses to cover up for the bad economic results of the Socialist government. Instead, Rubalcaba's intervention only serves to fix in the electorate's mind that Rajoy is the new Prime Minister-to-be.⁶

Obama's success and McCain's defeat in the 2008 elections are also related to the rhetorical strategies employed by the two politicians. Certainly, Obama attempts to tie McCain to the failed policies of the Bush administration in order to undermine his opponent's credibility and he does so by using RECOMMENDATIONS and ASSESSMENTS, both accounting for 19.57% of evaluation types.⁷ Obama's RECOMMENDATIONS are concrete proposals for reforming certain policies that do not work well in the US (healthcare system, infrastructures, energy sources, education) while his ASSESSMENTS are negative evaluations of the Republican government: e.g., "And that in part has to do with an economic philosophy that says that regulation is always bad". In contrast,

⁵ Rubalcaba's lack of credibility with the electorate was due to his position as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs in the Socialist party during the financial crisis.

⁶ Numerous headlines and decks of newspapers in the aftermath of the debate show Rubalcaba's failing strategy, such as "Rajoy presidente. Rubalcaba trató a su rival como futuro inquilino de La Moncloa" ["Rajoy president. Rubalcaba treated his rival as the future occupant of the Moncloa Palace"] (*La Razón* 2011, n.p.).

⁷ Obama's strategy of standing as the anti-Bush candidate and linking McCain to the Bush administration is also commented on in various newspapers after his victory: "He could easily position himself as the anti-Bush candidate in a way Mr. McCain struggled to do. [...] Mr. Obama's relentless campaign message was that John McCain had voted with him 90% of the time" (Lister 2008, n.p.).

McCain mostly uses RECOMMENDATIONS with the following aims: to cut and control the Government’s spending, except in relation to defense; to lower people’s taxes and give them credits; and to maintain the private healthcare system. And yet, McCain’s strategy is not successful, mostly because he is never able to free himself from the grip of the previous Republican government and their failing policies and, thus, his spending control RECOMMENDATIONS ring hollow after an era of Republican deregulation.

Closer examination further reveals that both the American and Spanish debaters use impersonalized statements as a rhetorical strategy to try to beat their opponents. Indeed, all the politicians not only present their statements as FACTS—e.g., “Es evidente que...” [“It’s evident that”] (Rubalcaba)—and as RECOMMENDATIONS that resemble objective duties—“Hay que hacer X...” [“X should be done”] (Rubalcaba)—but they also use AVERRED NON-SOURCED statements: 31.22% in the Spanish debate and 22.71% in the American. These statements are INTERPRETATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS and FACTS that are presented as unquestionable truths, which are not, however, backed up by a credible source since they are averred by the speakers themselves—see example (28):

(28) This isn’t the beginning of the end of this crisis (McCain). [INTERPRETATION: AVERRED/
NON-SOURCED]

Although the Press, both in the US and Spain, point out that there is no undeniable winner in the debates in question, the truth is that both Rajoy and Obama win their respective elections overwhelmingly, and the debate must have contributed to winning over swing voters to their side. What, then, made Obama and Rajoy appear more persuasive than their opponents Rubalcaba and McCain? When comparing either the two election “winners” or the two “losers” (Obama vs. Rajoy or McCain vs. Rubalcaba), the following are the features shared by each pair: the quantitative results that do not differ significantly between winning or losing pairs.⁸

Regarding WORLD-CREATING devices, winners do not show significant differences in their use of HYPOTHETICAL statements (see figure 7), while for losers the feature that they have in common is their use of ASSUMPTIONS (see figure 8). As for WORLD-REFLECTING mechanisms, winners use a similar number of FACTS (see figure 7), while losers behave the same in regard to ASSUMPTIONS (no significant difference is found, see figure 8), and show only a weak difference ($p < 0.10$) in their use of ASSESSMENT. All in all, therefore, winners can be said to coincide in their use of HYPOTHESES and FACTS, while losers make similar use of ASSUMPTIONS and mostly of ASSESSMENT. In general, ASSUMPTIONS are taken-for-granted truth, which is more subjective than HYPOTHESES,

⁸ In statistical terms, the similarities between the winners and losers of the elections should be based on the statements from the respective pairs that are not significantly different: H_0 = same behavior, H_1 = not the same behavior; RH_0 = significant differences; AH_0 = non-significant differences. Moreover, a $p < 0.10$ —i.e., 90% coincidence—is considered weak significance, or even not significant in social science (Dörnyei 2007, 210).

guesses usually based on observation; likewise, ASSESSMENTS (i.e., opinions) are more subjective than FACTS. The ethos of winners thus seems more reliable than that of losers. Concerning SOURCE, both winners and losers present similar rates of emphasized SELF and NON-SOURCED AVERRED statements.

FIGURE 7. Results of election winners

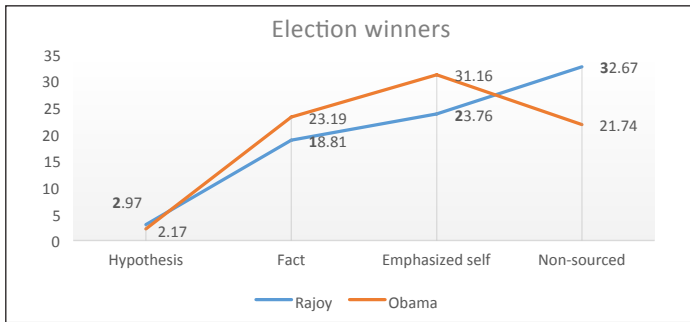
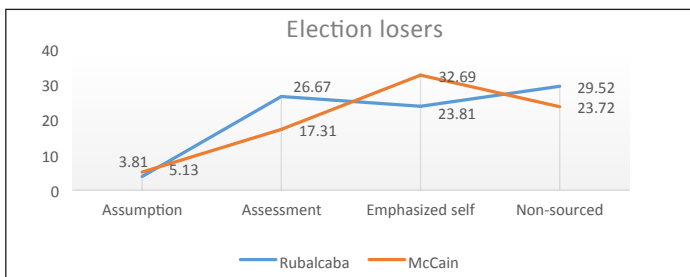


FIGURE 8. Results of election losers



These results suggest that the self-attributed HYPOTHESES and FACTS used by Obama and Rajoy must have sounded more convincing to the audience, than the self-attributed ASSUMPTIONS and ASSESSMENTS of McCain and Rubalcaba, the latter implying more subjectivity than the former. Winners seem to have a more reliable ethos than losers, principally because they mention FACTS regarding incumbent government that the audience is knowledgeable about and HYPOTHESES about situations that cannot be tested unless they themselves become President or Prime Minister. In the case of the election losers, they both make ASSUMPTIONS regarding the prospective positions of President or Prime Minister: McCain makes ASSUMPTIONS about his own presidency, were he to be elected, and Rubalcaba, in the case of his opponent becoming Prime Minister, which contributes to conjuring up an image of Rajoy as the new Spanish Prime Minister. Losers also use ASSESSMENTS, but the Spanish and American candidates use them differently: while McCain often criticizes his own government,

led by President Bush, and implies that he would do things differently, Rubalcaba criticizes his opponent, at the time in opposition, accusing him of a hidden agenda full of unpopular measures, were his party to get into office. All this suggests that the audience is more willing to give credit to an untested candidate representing change than to the "new" candidate of a well-known, unsuccessful government in times of crisis. Thus, the audience believes more in the winners' facts relating to past actions than in the losers' promises or warnings about future actions.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The present study attempts to answer three research questions regarding the evaluation of status—i.e., how the world is presented—in two pre-electoral debates by politicians whose main aim in the texts analyzed is, as is usually the case with politicians, to win voters. A highly influential factor in persuading their audience is how debaters project their ethos, as a result of both their words and their personal circumstances: character, political ideology, the party to which they belong and represent, their public self, among other things. After analyzing and counting examples of the different types of statements identified by Hunston's categorization of status (2000; 2008) for these two debates, the conclusions below can be drawn.

The results indicate that both the Spanish and the American debaters mainly resort to WORLD-REFLECTING statements—FACT/EVENT, INTERPRETATION and ASSESSMENT—rather than WORLD-CREATING ones—ASSUMPTION, HYPOTHESIS and RECOMMENDATION. That is, each of the politicians prefers propositions that fit the world rather than a made-up world in an attempt to be seen by the audience as taking an objective and down-to-earth position, even when it is not backed up with evidence. Close attention reveals different tendencies in the two debates: American politicians adopt a more directive and practical stance (FACTS/EVENTS and RECOMMENDATIONS), while that of the Spanish representatives is more interpretative and theoretical (HYPOTHESES and ASSESSMENTS).

In terms of source, the results suggest that all the candidates, both Americans and Spaniards, are interested in communicating certainty by self-attributing their propositions. However, while the American politicians favor hiding the attribution by mainly using general attributions (i.e., impersonal agency to avoid responsibility), their Spanish counterparts prefer to take responsibility for what is averred.

When dealing with the issue of the persuasive power of their interventions, we find a certain correspondence between political success and rhetorical strategies used by analyzing two frequent types of statements in verbal confrontations between politicians: RECOMMENDATIONS for future courses of action and ASSESSMENTS of what should or should not be done, particularly by their opponent. While each candidate focuses their RECOMMENDATIONS on different issues, there are some common trends: Spanish contenders focus their criticism on each other, while only Obama does so

in the American debate since McCain prefers self-criticism of his own party and a promised redemption if he were to win the presidency. Assuming that winning their respective elections so decisively is partly due to their participation in the debate under study, we examine what it is that Rajoy and Obama do to win over their audience in comparison to their opponents.⁹ The results indicate that statements by Obama and by Rajoy are more objective (HYPOTHESES and FACTS) than those of McCain and Rubalcaba (ASSUMPTIONS and ASSESSMENTS). Thus, the winners' ethos is more reliable than the losers'; no doubt, the subjectivity of the latter's propositions is diminished by the fact that they are each presenting themselves as alternative leaders to replace an unsuccessful incumbent President or Prime Minister from their own party. Most probably, more swing votes are won by reflecting a negative world—criticizing the government in office—than by creating a positive one based on electoral promises. This conclusion may be self-evident and, thus, be an expected outcome; however, this study provides empirical quantitative evidence to support it.

Future studies could determine whether it might be possible to extend these conclusions to more recent elections and populist candidates—Donald Trump in the US, Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in The Netherlands, Nigel Farage in Britain or Pablo Iglesias in Spain. Indeed, one might expect that these politicians would show an interest in WORLD-REFLECTING statements in order to be seen as objective by the audience, who they claim to represent (Breeze 2018, 2). Also, they would show a preference for RECOMMENDATIONS, putting forward proposals for future action that fit, so they would claim, “the people’s will” (Müller 2016, n.p.). Finally, as regards source, such populist candidates might prefer averral over attribution to others, in an attempt to convince voters that they are the only candidates that care for the people since they represent “a political logic that challenges accepted norms” (Breeze 2018, 2).

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⁹ To a certain extent, pragmatically we are here dealing with the illocutionary force of the statements and their perlocutionary effect.

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