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## The Rhetoric of Alterity in the Contemporary French Political Discourse

Eleonora MIHAILA<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

*The political argumentation, born in reaction to the difference of opinions (ex superficie) and interests (ex profundis) in the fields of politics, is of dialogical nature by its essence. The alterity is a discursive product, as it is constructed and deconstructed by means of the language. Which are the ways of discursive representation of The Other – the political opponent, along with its system of ideas, values, objectives, strategies – throughout the act of argumentation in the political discourse? Given the dialogical nature of the argumentation, the alterity finds its expression depending on the pragmatic roles it assumes in the process of argumentation, such as: subject, object, recipient. In order to understand the ways of discursive expression of the alterity, we hereby propose an interdisciplinary research – positioned at the crossroads of the theory of argumentation and semiotics with elements of anthropological study. The empirical part consists in the application of a bi-model treatment pattern so as to identify and analyse the discursive forms of alterity in two speeches delivered by Emmanuel Macron and Marine le Pen during the French presidential election campaign 2017. Understanding the discursive essence of the alterity and of the ways of expression of such conceptual disjunction stands as a guarantor for the understanding of the roots of the political dissent and the canalization of such dissent towards a constructive path in a climate of clarity, transparency, tolerance and willingness to identify solutions.*

**Keywords:** *Political discourse, argumentation, alterity, opponent, difference.*

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## 1. Introduction

Starting from an insight into the essence and forms of materialisation of the alterity in the field of political communication, this article pursues the final aim to contribute procedurally to the adequate interpretation of the political dissent based on the application of a bi-modal treatment pattern to the discursive expressions of alterity in the political discourse. The importance of such treatment consists in the possibility to dismantle piece by piece the components of the alterity and to formulate responses to *The Other* in a constructive and transparent dialogue.

The process of globalisation, which triggered the generalisation of far-reaching phenomena such as free circulation and multiculturalism – the latter mostly ending up in interculturalism – has reduced the gaps in the communication between *The Self* and *The Other*. In spite of the optimistic first-sight reaction, such development entails a double impact: on one hand, the identity has been gaining more substance, credit and appreciation and thus fuels the difference against the alterity, while, on the other hand, efforts are being made in order to merge (or reconcile) alterity into the identity for the noble civilizational concept of *vivre ensemble* (living together). The alterity, in other words the identity of *The Other*, defines the identity of *The Self*, and vice versa, in a process of delimitation which oftentimes gives rise to communication deadlocks and even more critical situations.

## 2. Problem Statement

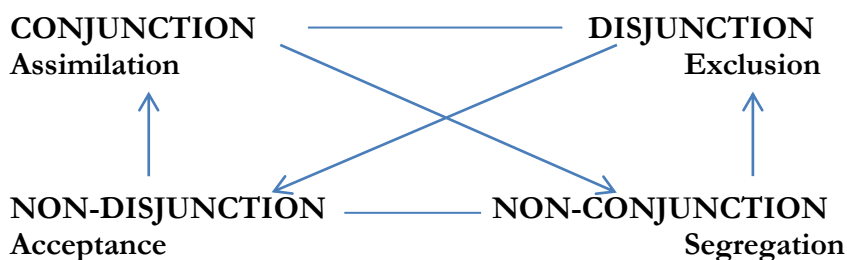
The political communication is the stage of the fiercest verbal and behavioural combats ignited by the difference of views and interests among the political opponents. However, thinking differently is a normal practice for a democratic society. Christian Plantin highlights that the trend of the post-persuasion age is the normalisation, i.e. the de-diabolisation, of the dissent:

“Tout débat argumentatif un peu sérieux contient des éléments de radicalité, et cette radicalité est normale, nullement dramatique, ni du point de vue social, ni du point de vue moral. L’appréciation exacte d’une situation argumentative demande une réévaluation du rôle des participants tiers ratifiés dotés du pouvoir de trancher, et par-dessus tout, une dé-diabolisation du dissensus” (All argumentative debates, even those showing little gravity, contain some elements of radicality, which is normal and by no means appalling from either the social or moral point of view. To assess precisely

an argumentative situation, one needs to reassess the role of the accepted third-parties endowed with decision-making power and, above all, to de-demonize the dissent) [1].

The concept of *The Other* encompasses all that sets a difference against *The Self*. The former can take various shapes of alterity, such as a personality, a community, a concept, an event, which is in a relationship of disjunction (exclusion), non-disjunction (acceptance) or non-conjunction (segregation) with *the Self*. These are the types of relationships that form, along with the relationship of conjunction (assimilation) the semiotic model of the alterity proposed by Eric Landowski [2]:

**Table 1.** The semiotic model of the alterity proposed by Eric Landowski



The Romanian researcher Florinela Floria proposes the division of the categories of alterity based on the chronotopic theory of alterity, which encompasses the following four chronotopies: ethnicity, corporateness (belonging to a group / social unit), corporality (differences determined by cultural practices at corporal level) and communicative interaction (defining *The Other* through the protocols of the communicative interaction) [3].

Pragmatic research into the realm of identity and alterity in political discourse confirms the power of language in addressing *The Other* [4]. Going further in this respect, we consider that the core of the problem does not lie in changing *The Other* by the force of persuasion, but in establishing a dialectical relationship with its forms of expression, that is, to outweigh the challenges of *The Other* with the help of viable counter-solutions in a continuous open dialogue in the best interest of the society. Our position is that the key to this dilemma consists in the adjustment of the approach: the alterity should be treated more extensively at the discourse (text+context) level as outlined by Patrick Charaudeau [5], using the tools and patterns offered by the semiotics and argumentation theories in order to be understood and exploited in the most efficient way and in the best interest of a society.

### 3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

This article is a research into the essence and ways of analysing the components of the alterity in the selected two speeches of 2017 French election campaign. The final aim of this research is to prove the adequacy and productiveness of a bi-modal treatment pattern – inspired from the semiotic model of Eric Landowski and the chronotopic theory of alterity of Florinela Floria – as applied to the expressions of alterity in the contemporary French political discourse. In this way, we hope to contribute to the facilitation of the process of understanding and reacting constructively to the challenges put forward by *The Other*.

### 4. Research Methods

This research was conducted based on the semiotic approach and the qualitative interpretation of the data obtained from the application of a bi-modal treatment pattern. The object of the empirical part of this article includes two speeches delivered by Emmanuel Macron, the candidate of the French party *La République en marche!* (The Republic Onwards!) in Nantes [6] and Marine Le Pen [7] the candidate of the *Front National* (National Front) in Marseille, in full election campaign, on the same day – April 19<sup>th</sup> 2017.

### 5. Findings

In the field of political communication, *The Other* is regarded as a semantic construct created at the level of the utterer / recipient. The most reasonable solution in treating *The Other* is to understand its challenges and react constructively. How can such understanding be achieved in a most productive way? The answer that we propose is to apply a bi-modal treatment patterns inspired from the semiotic model of Eric Landowski and the chronotopic theory of alterity authored by Florinela Floria. In what follows, I shall present the results obtained from the application of such pattern to the two speeches selected from 2017 French presidential election campaign.

#### ***5.1. Rhetoric of alterity in the speech delivered by Marine Le Pen in Marseille on 19 April 2017***

Marine Le Pen addresses directly her campaigners using the personal pronoun 'we', which shows their joint identity, while reaching indirectly two other recipients: "*le peuple français*" (the French people) and "*les autres candidats*"

à la présidentielle” (the other presidential candidates). Thus, the FN candidate builds her *Self* in **complete conjunction** (relationship of assimilation) with the French people, based on the following chronotopies:

- ethnic alterity (“*les français de filiation*” (the French by filiation), “*les français de désir*” (the French by choice), “*les français d’adoption*”(the French by adoption));
- corporate alterity (“*nos compatriotes les plus modestes*” (our most humble countrymen), “*la France laborieuse*” (the laborious France), “*nos petits commerces*” (our small businesses), “*nos paysans*” (our farmers), “*petits artisans*” (small-scale artisans), “*postiers*” (postal workers), “*cheminots*” (railwaymen), “*instituteurs*” (teachers));
- corporal alterity (“*nos compatriotes d’origine étrangère*” (our compatriots of non-French origin), “*nos territoires loin des métropoles*” (our territories far from the metropolises));
- targeted interactional-participatory alterity (“*projet collectif*” (collective project), “*tous ensemble*” (together), “*la France réunie sûre d’elle-même*” (the reunited and self-confident France)).

The relationship of **non-disjunction** (acceptance) concerns the peoples around the world, which Le Pen respects for the diversity and wealth they contribute at global level.

The relationship of **non-conjunction** (segregation) is assigned to “*le prêt à penser médiatique*” (the media ready-made thinking), the media being accused of stereotypy.

The relationship of **disjunction** (exclusion) refers to *The Other* which bears the following 4 chronotopic facets:

- ethnic alterity (“*un autre pays que le nôtre*” (a country other than ours), “*les étrangers*” (the foreign nationals), “*l’immigration clandestine*” (the illegal immigration), “*le terrorisme islamique*” (the Islamic terrorism), “*le tourisme médical*” (the medical tourism), “*le multiculturalisme*” (the multiculturalism));
- corporate alterity (“*le système*” (the system), “*la fraude*” (fraud), “*l’oligarchie*” (the oligarchy), “*esprit ultramercantile libéral*” (liberal mercantile spirit), “*les partis de gouvernement*” (the governing parties));
- corporal alterity (“*la délinquance*” (delinquency), “*les cambrioleurs*” (the burglars), “*les squatteurs*” (the squatters), “*le nocif*” (the harmful), “*l’anormal*” (the abnormal), “*les stupéfiants*” (the narcotic drugs), “*les armes*” (the weapons), “*la France – un gigantesque hall de gare*” (France – a massive railway station));
- interactional-participatory alterity (“*briseurs d’espoir/de vie*” (hope-/life-breakers), “*mes poursuivants*” (my rivals), “*les*

*fossoyeurs de la protection sociale*” (the gravediggers of the social protection), *“Fillon-Sarkozy – duo de choc”* (Fillon-Sarkozy – a shock duo), *“cette gauche – désespoir et misère”* (this left wing means despair and misery), *“cette droite qui n’a jamais défendu notre identité nationale”* (this right wing that has never defended our national identity), *“l’UE – la prison européenne / le paradis de tout genre de trafic / soumission”* (the EU is the European prison / a haven for all kinds of traffic / submissiveness), *“capitulation”* (surrendering), *“humiliation”* (humiliation), *“échec”* (failure), *“les eurolâtres”* (the Europe-worshippers)).

As it appears from the examples above, Marine Le Pen unfolds her discourse using the strategy of building her *Self* in symbiosis with the 4-faceted *Self* of the French people – the supreme recipient, whom the Speaker addresses in order to raise the national consciousness. Even doing so, the discourse of Marine Le Pen abounds in cleavages, which fact is in line with the assertion made by Cécile Alduy and Stéphane Wahnich that the extreme-right-wing discourse of the frontist president has only changed in form but remained the same in terms of substance since the French politician uses euphemisms to disguise her authentic ethos [8]. Marine Le Pen only accepts the alterity of other peoples working on the development of their countries, and segregates the media for its stereotypical activity. Her *Self* is built in a mirror-based manner against the deconstruction of the 4-faceted *Other*, which encompasses the immigrants, the system, the delinquents and the political opponents (both left-wing and right-wing parties).

## ***5.2. Rhetoric of alterity in the speech delivered by Emmanuel Macron in Nantes on 19 April 2017***

On the same day, Emmanuel Macron delivered a speech to his campaigners using a direct style, mainly free of any marks of cleavage. In his speech he addressed, once in a while, his fellow party members and evoked the negative examples of his opponents, with no excess of pathos, unlike Marine Le Pen. It can be inferred that Macron similarly builds his *Self* in **complete conjunction** (relationship of assimilation) with the identity of the French people, but free of any cleavages:

- ethnic alterity (-);
- corporate alterity (-);
- corporal alterity (-);
- targeted interactional-participatory alterity (*“les forces de police”* (the police forces), *“les forces de renseignement”* (the intelligence forces), *“La République”* (The Republic), *“donner une place aux*

*classes moyennes*” (to be oriented on the middle-class), *“aux classes populaires dans le projet qui est le nôtre”* (on the popular classes in this project of ours), *“rassembler et réconcilier”* (to bring together and reconcile), *“nous avons besoin d’être forts”* (we need to be strong), *“réformes économiques et sociales ambitieuses”* (ambitious economic and social reforms), *“refonder ensemble l’Europe”* (to relaunch Europe together), *“une nouvelle Europe”* (a new Europe), *“nous devons transformer et libérer”* (we need to transform and free up), *“transformation par économie/culture/écologie”* (transformation through economy / culture / ecology), *“développer”* (to develop), *“être en capacité de se rassembler, c’est ce que nous sommes”* (being able to come together, this is what we are), *“la génération “en même temps””* (the generation “at the same time”).

The relationship of **non-disjunction** (acceptance) concerns *“nos partenaires allemands”* (our German partners).

The relationship of **non-conjunction** (segregation) applies to the opponent Jean-Luc Mélenchon on account of the irreconcilable position regarding the Russian foreign politics (*“il propose la paix de Moscou”* (he proposes the Moscow peace), *“la paix des autres”* (the peace of others)).

The relationship of **disjunction** (exclusion) is directed to *The Other* who incites to discord, division and therefore opposes the common good and welfare:

- ethnic alterity(-);
- corporate alterity (-);
- corporeal alterity (-);
- interactional-participatory alterity (*“le terrorisme qui tue / divise la France”* (the terrorism that kills / divides France), *“lutter contre DAESCH”* (to fight against ISIL), *“les propos indignes de Mme Le Pen”* (the outrageous remarks of Ms Le Pen), *“elle n’est pas digne, aujourd’hui, d’être à la tête de la République”* (she is not worthy, at present, of being the head of state), *“les commentateurs”* (the commentators), *“commenter par des interdits, par de nouvelles normes, par des conflits”* (to comment through prohibitions, new regulations, and conflicts)).

Emmanuel Macron is the candidate who refuses the cleavages and calls to the joining of efforts both inside and outside the country in the best interest of the people. The audience he addresses is seen as an undivided potential able to cooperate diligently in order to find solutions and achieve high performance. That is the very slack time for conciliation and concentration so critically needed in the French politics, when differences are left aside for paving the way for ambitious economic reforms that will



bring the long-awaited transformation. It can be inferred from Macron’s speech that he accepts the alterity of the German allies, segregates the alterity of the Russian-oriented position of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, but rejects the absolute alterity of the terrorism and Marine Le Pen’s utterances.

## 6. Discussions

The results of our research show that a number of alterity categories are widely missing in the speech of Emmanuel Macron. Accordingly, the call to unity and cooperation launched by Emmanuel Macron was highly appreciated by the voters as he was given preference at 2017 presidential election.

**Table 2.** Semiotic relationships and expression of alterity in the speeches of M. Le Pen and E. Macron of 19/03/2017

Type of semiotic relationship	Alterity	
	Marine Le Pen	Emmanuel Macron
Conjunction ( <i>assimilation</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethnical alterity;</li> <li>• corporate alterity;</li> <li>• corporal alterity;</li> <li>• targeted interactional-participatory alterity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> <li>• -</li> <li>• -</li> <li>• targeted interactional-participatory alterity</li> </ul>
Non-disjunction ( <i>acceptance</i> )	peoples of the world	German allies
Non-conjunction ( <i>segregation</i> )	media	the opponent Jean-Luc Mélenchon
Disjunction ( <i>exclusion</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethnical alterity;</li> <li>• corporate alterity;</li> <li>• corporal alterity;</li> <li>• interactional-participatory alterity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> <li>• -</li> <li>• -</li> <li>• interactional-participatory alterity</li> </ul>

## 7. Conclusions

The scanning of the political speeches through the grid of the chronotopic theory of alterity in combination with the semiotic model of Landowski, which form a bi-model treatment pattern, allows identifying and organising the categories of alterity used by the political actors in the fierce

race of persuading the voters. The most essential benefit is the possibility to identify and categorise the discriminatory and segregating discourse elements that lead to political dissent and to chronic inefficiency of the government action. The results of such analysis can contribute to the adequate building of arguments and counter-arguments in the framework of political discourse.

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