

Appointment procedure of Mgr. Július Rozenfeld, Ph.D., as associate professor
Department of British and American Studies
Faculty of Arts
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice

Thesis title: Cultural Schemata in Political Discourse: An Analysis of the Impact of Cultural Messages in American Political Campaigns

Opponent and review writer: María José Coperías-Aguilar, Ph.D.

REVIEW

The thesis presented here is a sound piece of research which brings together linguistic theories and cultural studies by analyzing cultural schemata in political discourse with a focus on the impact of cultural messages in American political campaigns. The thesis is well structured and moves smoothly from an introductory section in which the topic is presented, to the literature review of some of the most relevant studies on the relationship between language and thinking, as well as language and culture, followed by the presentation of the methodology applied to the selected corpus, the analysis of this corpus, the most important findings and the conclusions.

In the first chapter, the author thoroughly revises some of the most significant theories connecting the concepts of language, thought and culture. Especially relevant are those dealing with cultural schematas, that is, “mental frameworks that help individuals to perceive, process and interpret situations, events or interactions based on cultural knowledge” (p. 13). It is the analysis and contrast of these theories which allows the author to put forward his hypothesis that “contemporary American political debates are reflections and manifestations of the conflict between two distinct American cultures, which create and apply fundamentally different cultural schemata and thus result in conflicting communication styles, behaviour and decision-making patterns” (p. 68).

Chapter 2, devoted to the methodologies available to carry out the analysis of political texts, manages to select the approaches that can best prove the connection between culture and politics and how cultural schemata can be used in an effective way to enhance the cultural elements of discourse in political debates. In this sense, the choice, on the one hand, of the linguistic analytical model suggested by Chilton and Schäffner, in 2011, and, on the other, the critical discourse analysis (CDA) model presented by van Dijk in 2015 to assess both written and spoken political text are highly appropriate and useful for this kind of analysis.

These two chapters are supported by a significant number of documents, essays and reports, as shown in the References section (pp. 165-179), which includes both well-established academic works on the field published in the second half of the twentieth century and others published in recent years. A good complement to these academic references is the selection of some newspaper and television stories.

The corpus chosen is both appropriate and balanced presenting, on the one hand, the speech delivered by Vice President Kamala Harris at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois, on 22 August 2024, in which she accepted the nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate for the 2024 US presidential elections and, on the other, President Donald Trump's acceptance speech for the same elections, which he delivered at the Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on 18 July 2024. Next, the televised debate between Harris and Trump, celebrated at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia and moderated by David Muir and Linsey Davis, is analysed. This allows the author to reach some findings which are presented in section 3.4. The forty-six cultural schemata identified in the corpus are, first, listed and briefly explained and, then, coded in a chart.

The conclusions prove true the initial hypothesis and answer the research questions set out in the Introduction (p. 12).

Consequently, this thesis shows that the candidate is an excellent academic researcher, with a thorough knowledge of English language and linguistics, as well as familiar with the cultural nuances of Anglophone societies, in this case specifically American society. For this reason,

I do recommend to award the title of associate professor to the candidate Mgr. Július Rozenfeld, Ph.D.

Signed:

María José Coperías-Aguilar, PhD