
aracne

Classificazione Decimale Dewey:
302.2094 (23.) COMUNICAZIONE. Europa

ANTONIO PIGA

COMMUNICATING EUROPE

THE EVOLUTION OF RHETORICAL PRACTICES IN EUROPEAN UNION DISCOURSE

aracne

ISBN
979–12–218–1768–3

PRIMA EDIZIONE
ROMA 3 MARZO 2025

To my father

TABLE OF CONTENTS

9 *Acknowledgements*

11 *Introduction*

15 Chapter I
Institutional framework
1.1. Unity yet diversity, 16 – 1.2. Conceptualizing EU integration models, 17 – 1.3. A sui generis social entity, 20 – 1.4. The creation of a civic identity, 22 – 1.4.1. *The normative perspective*, 23 – 1.4.2. *The cognitive perspective,* 24 – 1.5. The poor results of a civic identity model, 25

29 Chapter II
Corpus and methodology
2.1. Theoretical framework, method and aims, 29 – 2.2. Corpus description and selection, 32

37 Chapter III
Processes and tropes: an introduction
3.1. Clause as representation, 38 – 3.1.1. *General introduction*, 38 – 3.2. Different types of processes, 39 – 3.3. The status of a figure, 45 – 3.4. The role of tropes in the discursive representation of EU institutions, 48 – 3.4.1. *General introduction*, 48 – 3.5. Synecdoche, 49 – 3.6. Metonymy, 51

55 Chapter IV
Tropes and transitivity
4.1. The system of aspect, 55 – 4.1.1. *The system of tense*, 58 – 4.2. Mental process tropes, 58 – 4.3. Material process tropes, 65 – 4.4. Relational process tropes, 73 – 4.4.1. *Main types of "relational" clauses*, 75 – 4.5. Relational clause: intensive "identifying" trope, 81 – 4.5.1. *From practice to discourse: Europe's international social agenda*, 86

91 Chapter v
Tropes and thematic structure
5.1. From "Doing Europe" to "Europe does", 91 – 5.1.1. *Theme + Rheme and Given + New*, 92 – 5.1.2. *Convergence of "Europe" as Theme and Given*, 94 – 5.1.3. *"Europe" in 'complex' Theme*, 97 – 5.2. "Europe" as subject, 99 – 5.2.1. *Some criteria for the identification of the Subject*, 99 – 5.3. A further note on Theme, 102 – 5.3.1. *Multiple Themes: textual and topical*, 103 – 5.4. Simple clauses as Theme, 107 – 5.5. In the name of "Europe", 108 – 5.6. Tropes as commonsense assumption, 111

113 Chapter vi
Types of relationship between clauses
6.1. Elaboration, 116 – 6.1.1. *Paratactic elaboration*, 116 – 6.1.2. *Hypotactic elaboration*, 118 – 6.2. Extension, 119 – 6.2.1. *Paratactic extension*, 119 – 6.2.2. *Hypotactic extension*, 121 – 6.3. Enhancement, 123 – 6.3.1. *Paratactic enhancement*, 123 – 6.3.2. *Hypotactic enhancement*, 125 – 6.4. Logic of appearance vs explanatory logic, 131

135 Chapter vii
Trends in eu institutional discourse
7.1. The lines of meaning of the clause, 135 – 7.2. Democratization of discourse, 138 – 7.3. Commodification of discourse, 140 – 7.4. Technologization of discourse, 141 – 7.5. Discursive and social change in the EU, 142 – 7.6. A further comment on these trends, 148

151 Chapter viii
EU institutional discourse as advertising practice
8.1. Theoretical framework, 151 – 8.2. Relational function: ways of (inter) acting between the EU and its citizens, 159 – 8.2.1. *Aspects of mass communication,* 159 – 8.2.2. *Building relations through verbal communication*, 161 – *8.2.2.1. A note on hedging*, 178 – 8.2.3. *Building relations through visual communication,* 180 – 8.3. Ideational function: ways of representing "images" for the 'product Europe', 188 – 8.3.1. *Building "images" through verbal communication*, 188 – 8.3.2. *(Re) Building the European community*, 199 – *8.3.2.1. A further note on values: integration vs unification*, 205 – 8.3.3. *Building "images" through images,* 209 – 8.4. Identity function: ways of building the 'Euroconsumer', 214 – 8.4.1. *Some properties of consumerism*, 214 – 8.4.2. *Building the EU consumption community through verbal communication*, 215 – 8.4.3. *Building the EU consumption community through visual communication*, 219

225 *Conclusions*

233 *References*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all the members of the English Language Department of the University of Cagliari, in particular Prof. Daniela Francesca Virdis for her patience, guidance and for her unwavering support. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Luisanna Fodde for her being so friendly, cooperative and precious any time. A special thanks goes to Prof. Ines Loi Corvetto, for her constant encouragement. Many patient friends and colleagues have helped me in too many ways to mention and I thank each and every one of them.

INTRODUCTION

Communication between the EU and its citizens has, from the outset, always been a fertile domain of investigation in the field of language analysis and specialized discourse. The attention on the ways the EU communicates with its citizens became particularly interesting after the Post-Constitution vote in 2005, which showed that the 'European project' lacked the support of the majority of Dutch and French citizens, reflecting a deeper disenchantment. In other words, there was, and there probably still is, a problem in how European citizens perceive the EU. For this reason, the Commission drafted what is called a Plan-D in synergy with another slightly earlier document, the "Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission" which "seeks to improve the way in which the Commission presents its activities to the outside world" (Commission of the European Communities 2005: 2). In this respect, the European Commission has been increasingly focusing on finding new ways to "improve the communication and image of the European Union" (Communication to the Commission 2005: 2). Specifically, the main innovation in this new communication policy is the increased emphasis on using direct and understandable 'language' as well as the creation of a "single face" (Communication to the Commission 2005: 5) in all EU public communication, namely a "unified Commission presentation to enhance recognition and avoid

confusion in all material addressing and visible to the general public"(Communication to the Commission 2005: 5).

Following the disappointing results of the referendum called in France and the Netherlands in 2005, this contribution illustrates the EU's new communication mode and the linguistic strategies adopted by EU institutions to guarantee an effective and sustainable communication policy. Broadly speaking, EU communication initiatives revolve around the idea that a new EU image needs to be created and made available to the general public through simple yet compelling communication strategies and materials.

This contribution is divided into two macro-sections of linguistic analysis: the synchronic linguistic analysis and the longitudinal one. The synchronic linguistic analysis in sections 4 and 5, while the longitudinal one in sections 6, 7 and 8.

The preparatory section to synchronic analysis is introduced in section 3, which offers a broad overview of the process types, as well as an introduction of tropes, in particular metonymy and synecdoche.

In sections 4 and 5 the intent is to demonstrate that EU institutions present themselves as personified entities in order to improve their public perception. Indeed, the use of tropes of the material and mental process type demonstrate that tropes are used as a linguistic strategy to convey a sense of "rhetoric of factuality" (Fairclough 1995a: 93) in which a personified "Europe" (or "EU/European Union") emphasizes what it concretely "does" or "thinks" for the benefit of EU citizens. It will be argued that the combination of tropes with material and mental process types not only denotes a particular 'world view' in which the anthropomorph "Europe" (or "EU/European Union") is construed as a "potent" agency that "does" the deed, but also as a "volitional" Senser "endowed with consciousness" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 203) and thus able to "feel", "think" and "perceive" what needs to be done for the benefit of its citizens. As far as the tropes of the relational process are concerned, it is pointed out that those of the "intensive attributive" type are used as a linguistic strategy for self-appraisal in EU discourse. Indeed, the Carrier "Europe" ("EU/European Union") is conferred as the Emoter to which the "ascriptive" verb ("is") (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 499) ascribes a particular class of "quality" (i.e.

"proud", "keen", "pleased", etc.) in relation to a specific Trigger (i.e. "humanitarian tradition", etc.). On the other hand, relational process tropes of the "identifying" type seem to be used as a grammatical and lexical boost in relation to the roles and duties exerted by the EU on the world stage. Moreover, in section 4 and 5 it will also be demonstrated that there is a tendency in EU discourse to reconceptualize the trope "Europe" within the "EU" and the "European Union". This will also be demonstrated by synchronic quantitative analysis carried out in the overall corpus, which proved that the percentage of "Europe" used as a trope is higher than the other two tropes "EU/European Union". This finds confirmation not only by taking into consideration the general number of occurrences of "Europe", but also by considering the occurrences of "Europe" with every single process: material, mental and relational. In addition, the quantitative analysis carried out diachronically indicates that the occurrences of "Europe" as a trope rise after 2005. This might be related to the fact that, whereas the "EU/European Union" are understood as a set of institutions and as political organizations, the trope "Europe" is designated by non-strictly political and non-institutional connotations and seems to imply a sense of common narrative among all the citizens of Europe, an historical background shared by the institutions and its citizens.

The longitudinal linguistic analysis is introduced in section 6, in which contrastive linguistic analysis is carried out in order to demonstrate that in EU discourse there is a shift away from a more formal style and technical language towards a more informal, colloquial one and the simulation of private, face-to-face type of interaction. In more specific terms, the research reveals that the language employed by the EU is evidently grounded in an explanatory logic, elucidating the rationale behind their institutionalised acts. Nevertheless, the minimal use of hypotaxis in the post-referendum booklets, coupled with the inconsistent yet increasing ratio of parataxis to hypotaxis, may suggest a potential shift towards a logic of appearance, characterised by a predominant reliance on coordination and additive, and elaborative logico-semantic relations.

In this respect, in section 7 it will be argued that all these features are related to the (apparent) democratization of discourse, which involves

the reduction of overt markers of power asymmetry between subjects of unequal power, e.g. citizens and institutions. The empirical findings in section 6 draw from a comparison between the 'old' and the 'new' version of one of the informative booklets of the EU entitled "Europe in 12 lessons". This booklet was selected as it offers the most comprehensive overview of the EU, which includes a summary of a large number of topics that are developed in greater detail in the other booklets.

Section 8 sets out to demonstrate that there is on the part of EU institutions a constant attempt to communicate Europe directly to the public through corporate communication techniques. This is evident from the constant endeavour to make discursive practices maximally effective in the achievements of instrumental goals. Through proximity and the simulation of a closer dialogue with citizens, as well as the construction of a particular subject position for them, EU institutions aim at simulating solidarity and equality for teleological purposes. In other words, the intent of easification by means of reformulations of public discourse in a more private and informal style, a move to close the communication gap with citizens, is in reality a manipulation of contents, relations and identities. In this respect, it will be argued that there is a shift in EU discourse from the information-oriented communicative purpose of the 'old' corpus to the promotional-oriented one of the recent corpus. This is demonstrated by applying the ideological 'work' of advertising discourse to the discourse of the European Commission from the point of view of both verbal and visual semiosis.

CHAPTER I

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The main objectives underpinning the move towards Western European integration in the late 1950s, of the then European Communities (renamed EU only after February 1993) were mainly of a politico-economic nature. The result of which was the setting up of a customs union and a partial common market (cf. Alonso 2021; Krenn 2020; Musolff *et al.* 1996; Blommaert 2005). By contrast, in our day, the European Union is more and more geared towards creating a social construct that is gradually being "crafted onto" (Goldsmith 2003: 112) the pre-existing reified social construct, which is the nation-state. "Variable geometry" and "multilevel governance" (Goldsmith 2003: 112) are only some of the many expressions used to describe the nature of its territorial politics.

The creation of the European Union and the related process of economic, political, and social integration accompanying it, has dramatically altered the pre-existing concepts of the nation-state and subnational politics over the last few decades. The EU now has a draft constitution, a common currency, an anthem and many other symbols of its identity. It is also expanding, by taking on new members also from Central and Eastern Europe, and at the same time deepening its influence in that "the European Commission and European Court of

Justice issue new rulings overriding national laws" (Citrin and Sides 2004: 161). It is a sort of "quasi-state" populated by a European "quasi-nation" (Citrin and Sides 2004: 161). This does not mean, however, that the public debate on a whole range of controversial EU issues, such as integration, unification, a European army and the reform of the EU institutions and their procedures is over.

As far as these debates are concerned, the term that is most frequently employed is "Europeanization" (Coen and Dannreuther 2003: 256). It has acquired widespread acceptance amongst scholars and political scientists as a new term used to denote a variety of changes within European politics and international relationships (Phipps and Lawson 2022; Diez *et al.* 2006; Fischer 2023; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). In this sense, "Europeanization" can be a useful 'point of entry' for a deeper understanding of the significant changes occurring within European contemporary society. Europeanization is not a simple synonym for European regional integration or convergence between Member States, although it does overlap with aspects of both, but rather a term for the social sciences which ranges from history to culture, politics, society and economics (Fornäs and Rosengren 2022; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). In other words, it is, as will be explained in more detail in 5.5 below, a general process affecting citizens, actors, institutions, ideas and interests (Featherstone 2003).

1.1. Unity yet diversity

Questions about commonalities, similarities and differences have always been important in the European debate, which is mainly to be seen in terms of European integration *versus* European unification. Communication within EU Member States can be promoted and made easier only by converging economies, ideologies, lifestyles and by creating a sort of pan-Europeanism ground (cf. Fetzer and Bull 2006; Musolff *et al.* 1996). In this respect, the question that then arises is: what European citizens have in common? Is it mainly a question of lifestyle and material interest shared by the majority of Europeans? Are EU citizens nothing more than 'euro-consumers' within a consumption

community? Or, alternatively, do they also share other characteristics and interests such as historical values, beliefs and attitudes towards issues such as environmental protection, peace, religion and so forth?

The most important issue is to understand whether European people perceive Europe as the result of a process of common growth. In this respect, debates on economic convergence have increased over the years, not only in the direction of change but also on what causes change and how this change can be measured. In the past, the main factors explaining the process of convergence had been devoted to material factors such as infrastructures, financial capitals, access to natural resources, etc. (cf. Krenn 2020; Leonardi 1995). In most recent times, however, attention has started to focus more and more on the role of human resources and citizens, therefore on knowledge-based-economies, socio-cultural factors and values, etc.

The debate on European diversity and unity is certainly not one that can be quickly regulated and decided once and for all. In this respect, even the basic premises, i.e. the assumption of "common topics" (Musolff *et al.* 1996: 12) for European discourse are still far from clear. For example, are the same solutions advocated for problems that are perceived as common to the EU, i.e. coping with unemployment, immigration, etc.? In other words, according to Musolff *et al.* (1996), it is difficult to find general solutions for problems that are apparently perceived as common within the EU, in the sense that even problems at a supranational level generate widely diverse opinions and solutions at a national level.

1.2. Conceptualizing EU integration models

As can be seen in 7.3.2.1 below, from an institutional point of view, the process that better expresses the progressive shift from an international dimension to a supranational one seems to be the process of "integration" among European Member States. Indeed, as will be explained, the word "unification" seems to suggest a holistic view of identity, a sort of homologation of the single characteristics associated to the Italians, the Germans, the Greeks, etc. By contrast, the word "integration" conveys

a meaning of "unity", while at the same time projecting a model of plurality with mutual assent between Member States, as the preamble of the Treaty of Rome states: "A union among the peoples of Europe, not the creation of a European people". In this respect, the sense of belonging to the European Union cannot be fostered through the formation of a single and homologated European cultural identity.

There are different ways in which the process of integration has been conceptualized by observers and scholars over recent years.

The dominant viewpoint in the early life of the EU considered the process of European integration as an international process conceived of by sovereign states, whose purpose was to regulate the development of economic and political interdependence through a process of international and intergovernmental cooperation. Given that the EU is a treaty-based organization, which, as will be mentioned in 1.3 below, distinguishes itself from a federal or a confederal system (like, for instance, the USA, Germany and Canada), it is first and foremost a "state centred organization" (Goldsmith 2003: 114), in the sense that the Member States are at the centre of the decision-making process. Due to this, changes occur frequently, implemented by Treaties, such as those signed in Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000). Such a perspective allows control to remain firmly in the nation states and changes to occur only when powerful Member States freely decide to cooperate. (cf. Krejsler and Dahl 2009; Löfgren 2018; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). An example of this was the Nice Treaty (2000), which was solely in the interest of the 'big' States such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom, as these states were those which decided the final version of the Treaty (cf. Goldsmith 2003). As Hooghe points out (1996: 177), "decision making under this model is effectively elitist, closed, opaque, and not readily accountable". According to Hooghe (1996), de Gaulle's expression "*Europe des Patries*" most likely sums up this state-centred model of institutional organization.

While this conceptual model of the EU might have been valid in its early period and up to the 1980s, a number of factors have recently undermined the state-centred model (cf. Rainer 2022; Neumann and Sending 2021; Hooghe 1996; Goldsmith 2003). Firstly, there have been changes in the whole decision-making process, with the introduction

of Qualified Majority Voting in an increasing number of policy areas. Secondly, the European Parliament now has a greater say in the EU decision making process than it used to. Thirdly, the ever-growing practice of "government by regulation" (Goldsmith 2003: 114), namely the regulatory decision of the European Commission and some EU agencies, again undermines the status of national governments. In other words, while national states remain the most important agents in the EU decision-making process, their position is far weaker than it was twenty years ago.

The second model is essentially a federalist one, according to which the EU is a kind of supranational state. This model is usually described in the academic literature (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Hooghe 1996) as a supranational model, in the sense that political decisions depend largely on the relationship between different levels of government (national, subnational, etc.). Jacques Delors could be regarded as its strongest advocate during the time he was President of the European Commission. He believed that the European Union should have an international core, this being the European Commission that worked at different levels: with national states and at the same time with the fragmented regional periphery. In contrast with de Gaulle's model, Delors proposes a model called "Europe of the regions", giving rise to "a contested hierarchy as regions compete amongst themselves and with the nation states over territorial representation" (Goldsmith 2003: 115), but with a powerful Commission standing at the centre and acting as policy controller.

Such an EU model was more prevalent during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period in which regional policy was growing in importance. During that time, the Commission, as the supranational body of the Union alongside the EU Parliament and the Council, with a tendency to promote regional policies and subnational governments in general, attempted to win regions over with a series of European-related issues (cf. Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Tommel 1998; Goldsmith 2003). In this respect, as regional policy grew more and more in importance, so did different territorial networks, which sought to represent regional and local interests; in doing so, they tried to influence Commission policies in certain areas. At the same time, the Commission itself specifically

encouraged some of these regional and local networks in policy areas with regional and local specifications, such as those concerning the environment, innovation and so forth.

The development of an EU model along this line required a more pluralistic decision-making process, although, of course, the Commission continues to play the central role in order to avoid a highly fragmented decision-making process. According to Goldsmith (2003) and Hooghe (1996), this model is more accessible and open than the state-centred one; however, "decisions would still be taken behind closed doors and in the corridors of the Commission" (Goldsmith 2003: 115).

A third model emerged during the mid-1990s (Vasilenko 2021; Vasilenko 2023; Hooghe 1996; Marks *et al.* 1996) and was characterized by a system of multilevelled governance. Hooghe (1996) defines this model as "Europe with the Regions" distinguishing it from Delors's "Europe of the Regions". This EU model did not only encompass the Commission, the European Parliament, the EU agencies and national governments, but also regional and other subnational levels. As pointed out in 1.3 below, the outcome became a decision-making system with multiple access points, offering numerous opportunities to exercise influence and pressure, and consequently many different places where decisions could be made. In this respect, there is no predominant agency or place that guides the decision-making process, but rather an "extensive subnational mobilization across all sectors" (Goldsmith 2003: 116). Paraphrasing Hooghe (1996), decision making in this case is described as pluralistic, in that nation states can no longer act as gatekeepers who ignore the EU policy agenda.

1.3. A *sui generis* social entity

Although some of the institutional and organizational characteristics of the European Union may spark off a comparison with a federal state, as pointed out below, the federalist perspective does not adequately describe this process. For example, if the typical distinction between federation and confederation is taken into consideration, one of the main characteristics of the former system is that the relationships between