

CONSTRAINT FACTORS IN THE FORMULATION OF QUESTIONS IN CONFLICTUAL DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS OF SPANISH FACE-TO-FACE ELECTION DEBATES

José Luis Blas Arroyo

Abstract

This paper presents a study of the constraint factors that condition the form and functions of questions in a corpus composed of several face-to-face election debates that took place in Spain during different election campaigns. Some of these factors are of a distributional nature, such as the position of the questions in the politician's turns at talk, with final positions and fragments of simultaneous speech being the most favourable contexts for the formulation of these utterances. Questions are also favoured by stylistic and rhetorical forces, such as those which lead the speaker to repeat questions or question formats within wider inquisitive sequences, which represent almost half the corpus. In addition, these communicative units are also influenced by institutional factors, such as the political role played by the candidates in the debates (government/opposition), as well as the political expectations and identities that the politicians seek to enhance, and which may vary in different moments of the election campaign.

Key words: Questions; Face-to-face election debates; Political discourse; Spain.

1. Introduction

This study is part of a larger research project dealing with the form and function of the questions posed in the genre of face-to-face political-electoral debates. The fact that questions are omnipresent in verbal communication has made them the object of linguists' attention for decades, and a great deal of research has been conducted on their most outstanding structural aspects. The features that have been examined by linguists over the years are of several different kinds, including syntactic (inverted word order in some sentences, interrogative words, etc.), prosodic (melodic lines associated to different types of questions), semantic (their nature as incomplete propositions that need to be resolved by means of another element, usually an answer), pragmatic (distinction between the semantic value and the illocutionary force of different kinds of sentences), conversational (relevance of questions in the construction of verbal interactions by means of question-answer adjacency pairs) or rhetorical (relations with argumentation and persuasion), to mention but a few of the most significant topics (for further details on the more controversial points of this characterisation, see § 3.1 below).

Together with the analysis of these utterances from a theoretical point of view, in recent years there has also been a growing interest in studying the questions asked in institutional contexts, as shown by the recent publication of several monographic

volumes on the subject, as well as a number of papers in specialised journals. As a result, researchers have examined the behaviour of these units in a variety of settings, such as law courts, academic centres, police institutions, hospitals, business centres, as well as in different media genres, such as interviews or talk-shows, to name but a few of the most representative cases (cf. Drew & Heritage 1992; Ainsworth-Vaughn 1994; Heritage & Roth 1995; Ilie 1999; Shuy 1998; Heritage 2002; Archer 2005; Crawford 2008; Stokoe & Edwards 2008; Steensig & Drew 2008; Castor 2009; Ehrlich & Freed 2009; Tracy & Robles 2009, etc.).

Not surprisingly, questions have also been analysed within political discourse, mainly in genres like press conferences (Clayman 1993; Clayman & Heritage 2002), interviews (Jucker 1986; Harris 1991; Clayman 1993; Heritage 2002; Piirainen-Marsh 2005) or parliamentary debates, above all in certain activities related with controlling the government, like the “Question time” sessions (Harris 2001; Fenton-Smith 2008; Fuentes 2012). Paradoxically, however, to date little has been written about the way these utterances work in conflictual discourse such as a face-to-face election debate. The fact that this genre has a structure far less interactive than those mentioned above has probably played a part in reaching this situation. Indeed, at least in the short tradition of presidential debates in Spain, which provided the corpus in this research, the excessively constrained and previously arranged format makes it difficult for real interaction to take place between the candidates (and less still with the audience). This turns some phases of the dyadic encounter into a real “dialogue of the deaf”. Despite all this, however, there are also stages in the debate in which its leading players do not limit themselves to just outlining their manifestos and ideas, but also take the opportunity to knock those of their rivals. In this context, it is quite normal behaviour for them to pester their adversaries with a whole string of inquisitive acts, the answers to which can also be requested over and over again. Elsewhere we have seen how these questions play an important role on different levels (Blas Arroyo 2010). Thus, on an argumentative plane, questions represent milestones in the politicians’ way of reasoning, and they often resort to these linguistic units in order to introduce, modify or conclude relevant topics and phases in their discourse. From an informative point of view, these utterances also become instruments that are used to provide the audience with relevant data. Sometimes the politician wants that information to be supplied by his or her adversary, while on other occasions the speaker him/herself will be the participant responsible for providing it through his or her own replies. Whatever the case may be, the information always goes against the rival’s interests and, consequently, is favourable to the interests of the speaker’s own political faction. Nonetheless, questions also play a coercive role, since they become powerful tools for exercising control. This control is exerted over the conversational flow itself (by imposing topics of debate or manipulating turns) but, above all, over the adversary, who is asked trick questions, aimed at challenging his or her ideas and behaviours, while also revealing strongly evaluative attitudes on the part of the speaker.

At this point, however, it would be interesting to know what factors favour the formulation of questions in general and, more particularly, of some of the functions discussed here. To do so, in this paper we adopt a heuristic approach that combines both a qualitative and a quantitative perspective of discourse analysis. The result of this approach is a good instrument with which to understand the complex distribution of these utterances within this genre of political discourse (Heritage and Roth 1995). To do

so, we use a corpus composed of six face-to-face debates held in Spain in different election campaigns between the years 1993 and 2009.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The next section outlines the most significant institutional and interactional traits of the face-to-face election debate and how they can affect the way questions are posed. Then, in section 3, the corpus and the most important methodological issues are described. After that, in the main section of the article, we will conduct a detailed analysis of the distribution of questions in the corpus (section 4) and the effects exerted on that distribution by several factors of a distributional (section 4.2), institutional (section 4.3), stylistic (section 4.4) and typological nature (section 4.5). Lastly, the results obtained in the research are summarised in section 5.

2. The face-to-face election debate: Institutional and interactional features

The election debate is a subgenre of political discourse that belongs to the domain of conflictual discourses, in which generally two – but sometimes more – main participants stage a verbal duel under the attentive supervision of a moderator. The politicians' turns at talk in the debate are characterised by a series of features that can also be found in other persuasive discourses, such as in advertising, or even in other examples of political discourse (in parliament, at election rallies, and so on). However, as underlined by García Pastor (2006: 25-27), debates held during the election campaign display several important specific traits which have significant interactional implications. Thus, the election debate contains a few noteworthy exceptions to the generally non-spontaneous nature of these persuasive types of discourse, such as those deriving from the fact that it is impossible to foresee the other participants' reactions (audience, interlocutor) in their future turns. As a result, the politician has to continually reconstruct his or her interactive strategies.

Despite the foregoing what prevails in face-to-face election debates is a certain degree of one-sidedness, in the sense that "true participation occurs only on one side" (Lakoff 1981). This fact is relevant to our interests in this study, since politicians initially have absolute freedom to present, argue, criticise, be ironic, and even – as we shall see here – ask questions, without any of the constraints that these communicative acts are subject to in ordinary conversation or in other institutional genres, such as interviews or questioning in courts of law. Paradoxically, however, in the debate, the initial equality between the participants displays important restrictions, since, in practice, the interlocutor who is asked a question is not free to answer immediately (and often does not even intend to do so). In fact, in most cases he or she will have to wait to give the answer in the next turn. What we have just outlined is even more commonly the case in debates such as those held in Spain. Unlike the US presidential debates, in Spain no questions are accepted from other possible participants, such as journalists, experts or even members of the audience, whose role is merely passive. At the same time, the moderator can only ask about very general issues, as a way of introducing the different sections of the debate.

In spite of the foregoing the election debate is not always subject to these interactional constraint factors. In fact, in their more aggressive phases, the politicians do not limit themselves to merely outlining their manifestos and to exposing the flaws in those of their rivals. Instead, they are expected to harass their adversaries with

awkward questions in an attempt to reveal his or her true intentions in front of the audience.

3. Corpus and methodology

The corpus used in this research consists of six face-to-face election debates that took place in Spain between the years 1993 and 2009. The participants in all these different electoral clashes were the candidates standing for the two main political parties in Spain: The *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) and the *Partido Popular* (PP). The first two debates, between Felipe González (G) and José María Aznar (A), were very significant in the Spain's short recent history of democracy, since they marked the moment when this country adopted the tradition of presidential debates in line with other democratic nations. Moreover, at that time many analysts agree that the results of that election were very closely linked to those debates, and more especially, to the second one, which was held just five days before the election. Unfortunately, Spanish citizens had to wait another fifteen years for the return of this kind of dyadic showdown between the main candidates in an election. Thus, in the 2008 general election, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (Z), for the PSOE, and Mariano Rajoy (R), for the PP, confronted each other in televised debates. The fifth encounter included in the corpus also took place in this same 2008 election, although this time between the vicepresidents for economic affairs in the two parties: Pedro Solbes (S), for the socialists, and Manuel Pizarro (P) for the conservatives. The last debate included in the corpus is the one between Juan Fernando López-Aguilar (L) (PSOE) and Jaime Mayor Oreja (O) (PP) during the European election held in 2009.

All the debates have essentially the same institutional and interactional format. Each candidate has a limited amount of time (between one and a half and two minutes, depending on the debate) for their turns at talk, and a little less for replies and rejoinders. In all the debates, except the one held between Solbes and Pizarro, which was restricted to economic issues, the participants discussed different aspects of current affairs, such as the economy and employment, social policies, foreign policy and security, and institutional policy. Within each of these thematic blocks, the candidates were free to address whatever particular issues they wanted to, which gave rise to a notable degree of conflict that became apparent, for example, in the frequent interruptions that the politicians employed to invade the verbal spaces initially set aside for each speaker.

The debates were recorded on the day they were broadcast. After obtaining the whole transcript, the next stage was to identify the utterances that could be working as questions. Lastly, the quantitative analysis was performed using the software application SPSS 18.0. Together with the most common descriptive statistics (absolute and relative frequencies, averages, etc.) and the contingency tables and graphs that derive from them, we also used a chi-square test to determine the reliability of some of the differences that were observed (level of significance: $p < 0.05$).

3.1. Coding the questions

Despite the progress made in the study of questions, there is still some disagreement about the way they should be defined or how to be analysed. For instance, there are

some differences on the subject of the (necessary and/or sufficient) relation between the interrogative form of a statement and its role in discourse as a question. While some traditional grammars establish a close relation between both elements (Alcina y Blecua, 1975; Seco 1982), many linguists and conversationalist as Schegloff (1972) defend the need to resort to levels beyond that of syntax, given the possible divergences between interrogative sentences and questions. These include the possibility of asking questions in ways other than by the use of the canonical interrogative sentences, such as declarative statements that end in a rising toneme, or indirect questions, in which the declarative mode is combined with inquisitive semantic contents.

Another interesting point for consideration refers to the discrepancies regarding the incomplete nature of questions, and whether they are essentially intended as a means to obtain information. This information can be of a variety of types, ranging from data of a public and factual kind to others of a more interpersonal, expressive or merely textual nature. Nevertheless, it has also been pointed out that the act of asking a question can be performed without the need of seeking information,

At this point we should also ask whether, for a utterance to be considered a genuine question, it always needs an answer (which may be verbal or non-verbal) and, if so, from which participant(s). For example, this is the reasoning underlying the discussion regarding the so-called rhetorical questions, which have traditionally been considered “false questions”, because their illocutionary force lies in the statement rather than in the question itself. But not even the most legitimate questions always require an answer. As recalled by Lyons (1977: 755), it would be necessary to draw an initial distinction between *asking someone a question*, which “... is both to pose the question and, in so doing, to give indication to one’s address that he is expected to respond by answering the question that is posed”, and the less demanding act of *posing a question*, in which “we merely give expression to, or externalise our doubt, and we can pose questions which we do not merely expect to remain unanswered but which we know, or believe, to be unanswerable” (our italics). The data obtained in different empirical studies show that, while some questions are answered with replies that can be considered coherent, others cannot be classified in the same way. And there are also considerable numbers of questions that are not answered at all. On this matter, Freed (1994) pointed out that the speakers are often far more tolerant with the obligations deriving from the question-answer pair than the constraints of a strict conversationalist model might lead us to expect.

Although we are aware of the difficulty involved in reaching an exhaustive definition of what questions are, in this paper we use a mainly functional criterion in order to identify these utterances in the corpus. From this point of view, we consider questions as being those discursive units which one of the participants in the communicative act uses to gather information, confirmation or actions, no matter who is going to provide them, as well as the syntactic and intonational format adopted by the speaker (about this structural aspects, see below). This functional criterion leads us, for instance, to include the above-mentioned rhetorical questions in our study. Although many linguists consider that these utterances only apparently perform the act of asking – since their main function consists in realising strongly evaluative statements – it is nonetheless true that, by employing them, the speaker conveys the addresser’s commitment to an implicit answer given by him or herself. In other words, with these (rhetorical) questions, the politician at talk is forcing his or her opponent to confirm a

piece of information - harmful for his or her interests - that no one could contradict in the present state of affairs.

In a previous study (Blas Arroyo 2009), we saw how questions display functional features that are different from those observed in other institutional genres. In political interviews, for instance, there is a succession of question-answer pairs in which the interviewer genuinely wishes to obtain information from the interviewee, information that is usually unknown to both the speaker and the audience. Yet, in political debates these questions are necessarily distributed in a different way. Thus, alongside: a) questions that are conceived to collect factual data from the interlocutor (which generally goes against his or her interests), as in (1), b) there are many others that do not fit this pattern. Among these, however, it is also necessary to distinguish between: b.1) rhetorical questions, as in (2), which don't require an explicit answer (since one is already contained within the question itself):

(1) R: ...yo voy a hacer una ley para garantizar que todos los ciudadanos puedan mandar a sus hijos a estudiar en castellano en toda España// *¿Usted la va a apoyar/ o no la va a apoyar?* (R/Z, 1)¹

[R: ...I am going to make a law to guarantee that all citizens can send their children to study in Spanish everywhere in Spain// *Are you going to back it or are you not going to back it?*]

(2) R: *¿Cree que es normal un país donde por poner un letrero en castellano automáticamente se te sancione?* (R/Z, 1)

[R: *Do you think a country where you are automatically fined for putting up a sign in Spanish is normal?*]²

and b.2) others in which the line between the two previous types becomes rather fuzzy. On the one hand, and like rhetorical questions, they do not seek the interlocutor's collaboration but, in contrast to them, they do satisfy the informational requirements of standard questions. Their peculiarity resides in the fact that this information is supplied by the actual speaker and not by his or her adversary. At the same time, the institutional context of the debate means that this information is not going to be used to fill in any potential gaps in the speaker's knowledge, but instead to enlighten the audience. The following is an illustrative example (for more details and cues to identifying these main types of questions in the debates, see § 4.5 below):³

¹ The number after the comma indicates the particular debate each example belongs to. Thus, the code from example 1 (G/A, 2) means that the fragment was taken from the second debate between Felipe González and José María Aznar.

² In transcribing the examples we followed a simplified and partially modified version of the conventions employed by the Valesco group in their analysis of Spanish colloquial speech (Briz et al. 2002).

³ Other quantitatively more marginal types must also be added to this list (see table 4). For example, echo questions, which repeat all or some of the words that have just been said by another speaker in the previous context (Dumitrescu 1996; Ilie 1999; Escandell 1999). It is also the case of the *exclamatory* questions, which, under a superficial interrogative guise, the speaker uses to hint at dislike, surprise, irritation, and so on. These questions are posed in those moments in the interaction in which the speaker feels particularly outraged by the interlocutor. Finally, under the label *Others*, we have included other types that are more difficult to classify, except for the so-called *exploratory* questions (3.3%) which are usually performed by the moderators, and which are used by these participants as a way to try to guide the content of the debate, by starting and orienting the discussion about certain topics in the early stages of the face-to-face debate (Ilie 1999).

(3) R: *¿Hay algún país del mundo donde ocurra eso?// Solo en este↓ en el que gobierna usted señor Zapatero (R/Z, 1)*

[R: *Is there any country in the world where that happens?// Only in this one↓ in the one that you are governing Mr Zapatero]*

From the point of view of their form, these utterances can be found in different formats in the corpus. The majority of them take the grammatical form and intonation of interrogative sentences, among which four main groups can be distinguished:

a) *Yes/no questions*, as in (4), which require either an affirmative or a negative answer, and whose final toneme is generally rising.

b) *Disjunctives*, like this one in (5), which call for a decision to be made between two or more alternatives, and where two different melodic groups can therefore be distinguished.

c) *Wh- questions*, like (6), which are headed by an interrogative pronoun or adverb (*qué, quién(es), cómo, dónde*, etc.) and have an intonation that usually ends on a falling melodic line.

d) *Tag questions*, as in (7), that is, expressions (*¿verdad? ¿no?*) added at the end of a statement with a rising intonation and a main back-channel function.

(4) R: *¿Sigue usted manteniendo que la situación económica de España está mejor que nunca? (Z/R, 1)*

[R: *Do you still believe that the economic situation in Spain is better than it's ever been before?*]

(5) R: *¿A qué Zapatero hay que apoyar? (2 s.) ¿Al Zapatero que deja pasear a de Juana Chaos por las calles en San Sebastián?/ ¿O al que luego lo mete en la cárcel porque le conviene? (Z/R, 1)*

[R: *Which Zapatero are we to give our support to? (2 s.) The Zapatero who allows de Juana Chaos to stroll through the streets of San Sebastián?/ or the one who later puts him back in prison because it suits him to do so?*]

(6) R: *¿Qué ha hecho usted en educación? (R/Z, 1)*

[R: *What have you done as far as education is concerned?*]

(7) R: *Esto es fútbol para usted ¿no?, (Z/R, 2)*

[R: *This is football for you isn't it?*]

However, on other occasions, questions are embedded in declarative sentences that contain a subordinate clause headed by an interrogative element. If these indirect interrogatives are of yes/no or disjunctive nature (see above), the clause is introduced by the connective *si* ('if'), as can be seen in (8). On the other hand, if the interrogative sentence is a *Wh- question*, the introductory element is an interrogative pronoun or adverb, as in (9) (Escandell 1999):

(8) Z: *Diga usted si es cierto o no (Z/R, 1)*

[Z: *Say whether it is true or not]*

(9) P: *Querría saber qué política tienen sobre gas natural/ qué piensan sobre renovables (P/S)*

[P: I would like to know *what policies you have regarding natural gas/ what you think about renewable energy*]

Yet, since our main criterion for characterising questions is essentially functional, some declarative statements that act in context in a similar way to interrogatives were also included in the analysis. Labov and Fanshell (1977: 100) coined the term “B-event statements” to describe those like the ones in (10), in which the speaker formulates a mental predicate, i.e. feelings, knowledge, opinions, and so on (generally by means of a rising intonation) that the recipient can interpret as needing a confirmation or denial in the next turn:

(10) G: O sea/ *que no lo han dicho ustedes* [que éramos unos pedigueños al solicitar la ayuda económica europea]

A: Usted está faltando a la verdad (G/A, 1)

[G: *So/ you didn't say that* [thar we are always asking for money in Europe]

A: You are lying]

4. Results and analyses

4.1 *General results*

As can be seen in Table 1, the 521 questions of the whole corpus are scattered unequally throughout the debates. One factor that seems to contribute to this imbalance is the length of the debates. This is brought out by the fact that the highest figures are to be found in the two encounters between Aznar and González in 1993, which both lasted for over two hours. In contrast, the debate for the European election between López Aguilar and Mayor Oreja in 2009 went on for just over an hour, and this would probably help to explain why it was the duel that contained less questions.

Despite the foregoing, if the average numbers of questions in relation to the whole debate are calculated, it can be seen that the length of the debate in itself is not always enough to account for the number of questions in the corpus. Thus, for example, the two debates between Rajoy and Zapatero in the 2008 general election lasted for a similar amount of time and yet there were almost twice as many questions in the first (90) as in the second (52).

These and other inconsistencies can be explained by the incidence of a number of different factors that we will now go on to analyse.

Debate		No. questions	%	No. words	Average
1	G/A	109	20.9	23 536	0.0046
2	G/A	173	33.2	26 865	0.0064
3	Z/R	90	17.3	16 465	0.0054
4	Z/R	52	10	16 074	0.0032
5	S/P	57	10.9	12 055	0.0470
6	L/O	40	7.7	11 953	0.0033
Total		521	100	106 948	0.0048

Table 1: Distribution of the questions in the corpus

4.2. Distributional factors: the position of the questions in the turn

The position of questions is not uniform within the politicians' turns at talk. To conduct a detailed analysis of these positions we coded each of the utterances in the following contexts:

a) *Initial* contexts: These are questions that appear at the beginning of turns. Within this position, however, we can distinguish between two degrees. On the one hand, there are questions located among the first of the speaker's utterances after regaining the turn (code P). This is an especially significant position in the turn, since it is where the speaker must decide on what his or her first verbal action will be (i.e. to answer the interlocutor's questions, to attack what he or she said earlier, etc.). Thus, in the excerpt below, Mariano Rajoy (PP) uses the first statement of the turn he has just been granted by the moderator to launch an attack against Rodríguez Zapatero's (PSOE) previous words. In that turn, the socialist leader had accused the Partido Popular of being uncooperative and of taking part in illegal wars fostered by the ex-president of the United States, George W. Bush. Note how Rajoy resorts to rhetorical questions in order to cast doubt on his rival's arguments and to accuse him of cheap populism.

(11) Z: ... a diferencia de su período/ que fue defender las guerras ilegales/ estar sometido al presidente Bush/ y congelar/ porque no subieron nada/ los recursos para la ayuda a la cooperación y la lucha contra la pobreza y la miseria. Ustedes...

M: Vamos al último minuto/ Es su tiempo.

R: ¿Usted quiere que le voten por lo de la otra vez?// ¿Bush/ el 11-M/ Iraq/ Aznar (2 s.) ¡Oiga// cambie un poco de discurso/ y hable de lo que le importa a los españoles! (Z/R, 1).

[Z: ... unlike your term of office/ which was defending illegal wars/ yielding to President Bush and freezing /because you did not raise anything/ the resources for cooperation assistance and the struggle against poverty and misfortune. You...

M: We're going into the last minute/ It's your time.

R: Do you want people to vote for you because of what happened the other time?// Bush/ 11th March/ Iraq/ Aznar (2 s.) Listen// change your tune a bit/ and talk about things that really matter to the Spanish people!]

Nevertheless, this action may go on for a little longer, in which case we consider a second series of questions, namely, those that are posed in a somewhat more advanced position (*delayed initial contexts*; code C). In the same debate we have just referred to in the previous example, the leader of the Partido Popular used a question to begin his line of argument, which runs in the opposite direction to the ideas about education that had been defended by Rodríguez Zapatero earlier. Note, however, that unlike (11), the question is not placed right at the beginning of the turn (which Rajoy takes advantage of to accuse his adversary of not wanting to deal with the controversial topic of immigration), but instead comes immediately after it:

(12) M: Adelante Señor Rajoy...

R: ...Lo que es evidente es que el señor Zapatero no quiere hablar de inmigración después de las críticas que ha producido su política/ Uno de los asuntos más importantes que tenemos planteado hoy en España (3 s.) habla de Educación// *¿sabe lo que hicieron ustedes en materia de Educación?*// Mire// 48 horas después de llegar al Gobierno/ derogaron la Ley de Calidad de la Educación/ que no había entrado en vigor (Z/R, 1).

[M: Go ahead Mr Rajoy...

R: ...What is quite obvious is that Mr. Zapatero does not want to talk about immigration after all the criticism aroused by his policy/ One of the most important issues that needs to be dealt with in Spain (3 s.). Talk about Education// *do you know what you did as regards Education?*// Well// just 48 hours after being voted into government/ you repealed the Educational Quality Act/ which had not yet come into force]

b) *End* contexts: This is another particularly prominent position in the turn, due to the interactional constraints it imposes on the interlocutor. However, as in the case of the previous contexts, we distinguish between two levels: 1) those questions that the speaker places in the last utterance of his or her turns (code F), as in (13); and 2) questions that arise nearby (code T), as in (14):

(13) R: ...Se ha limitado a ver lo bien que iba todo hasta que dejó de ir bien// Usted no le ha dado cuerda al reloj/ y el reloj se ha parado// *¿Sigue usted manteniendo que la situación económica de España está mejor que nunca?* (FIN DEL TURNO) (Z/R, 1)

[R: ...All you have done is to look at how well everything was going, until it stopped going well// You didn't wind the clock up/ and the clock has stopped// *Do you still maintain that the economic situation in Spain is better than ever?* (END OF TURN)]

(14) Z: ... Una medida parecida la ha tomado el Sr. Bush en los EE.UU./ de 600 euros// *¿sabe lo que ha hecho allí la oposición/ que también están en campaña presidencial?*// Apoyar// Hay muchas diferencias entre el gobierno del Sr. Bush y el mío/ pero las diferencias entre la oposición de EE.UU. y España son totales// Ustedes nunca han apoyado en nada al Gobierno/ no tienen parangón con ninguna oposición democrática de los países que conocemos (FIN DEL TURNO) (Z/R, 1)

[Z: ... A similar measure, but with 600 euros, has been taken by Mr Bush in the USA/ *do you know what the opposition has done there/ although they are also in*

the middle of a presidential campaign?// Back it// There are many differences between Mr Bush's government and mine/ but the differences between the opposition in the USA and Spain are immense// You never back the Government on anything/ you are unlike any other democratic opposition party in any country we know (END OF TURN)]

c) *Intermediate* contexts: As in (15); these consist of the rest of the utterances in each turn (code M) (with the exception of d) contexts, considered below)

(15) R: [...] al día siguiente cesó a la ministra de Educación// *¿Y sabe lo que dice el Informe Pisa?// ¿sabe lo que dice?* (2 s.) Que somos el tercer país de la Unión Europea en tasa de abandono escolar// EL TERCERO (2 s.) el treinta y uno de la OCDE en ciencias//, el treinta y dos en matemáticas/ el treinta y cinco en lectura (3 s.) *¿Sabe lo que hay que hacer en materia de Educación?// usted/ que le gusta tanto hablar de derechos// mérito/ trabajo/ esfuerzo/ autoridad del profesor/ que es el que enseña y el alumno es el que aprende [...]* (Z/R, 1)
 [R: [...] the next day the Minister of Education was dismissed// *And do you know what it says in the Pisa Report?// Do you know what it says?*(2 s.) It says that we are the third country in the European Union in terms of school drop-out rates//, the THIRD (2 s.) number 31 of the OECD in sciences// 32 in mathematics/ 35 in reading (3 s.) *Do you know what has to be done in Education?/ You/ the one who is so fond of talking about rights// merit/ work/ effort/ the authority of the teacher/ who is the one who teaches and the pupil is the one who learns (...)]*

d) *Simultaneous speech* contexts: That is, all those fragments of the debate in which one participant interrupts his or her adversary's turn in order to ask a question (code I). Previous research has shown that interruptions are complex phenomena and that it is not always easy to decide what an interruption is and what it is not. Nevertheless, within the context of the Spanish debates, where the speech turns of politicians are initially inviolable according to the rules previously negotiated by the two election teams, we consider interruptions to be any untimely interventions made by the opponent during the time in which the speaker has the turn at talk. In fact, these interruptions are often used to obstruct the opponent's line of argument. The interrupter uses them as a way to put the speaker on the spot, by refuting or correcting what he or she has said, which can end up by triggering an angry reaction in the interrupted politician. The excerpt that follows is a good example of this context, in which one candidate (Rodríguez Zapatero) uses an echo question (*a apoyar, a apoyar 'lend support? lend support?'*) to cast doubt on an earlier statement made by his rival (Rajoy). In that earlier intervention, Rajoy had claimed that the Partido Popular had lent support to the Government after the traumatic breakdown of talks between the Government and the terrorist group ETA:

(16) R: [...] SIEMPRE, señor Rodríguez Zapatero// Ya me hubiera gustado a mí/ ya me hubiera gustado poder apoyarlo/ ya me hubiera gustado// Pero era imposible// Hasta lo fui a apoyar después de la tregua y me engañó
 Z: *¿A APOYAR?/ ¿A APO[YAR?*
 R: [Y MINTIÓ/ como mintió a los españoles// Y ahora vamos a hablar de seguridad ciudadana.

[R: (...) ALWAYS, Mr Rodríguez Zapatero// I would have liked to/ I would have liked to have lent you my support/ I would have liked to// But it was impossible// I even went to lend you my support after the ceasefire and you deceived me.

Z: LEND SUPPORT/? LEND SU[PPORT ?

R: [And YOU LIED/ as you lied to the people of Spain// And now let's talk about public safety]

Position (codes)	Frequency	%
P	48	9.2
C	40	7.7
F	69	13.2
T	76	14.6
M	225	43.2
I	63	12.1

Table 2: Distribution of the questions according to their position in the turns

A quick glance at Table 2 shows that many questions in the debate occur in intermediate positions in the turn (43.2%). Proportionally, however, these questions are not more likely to be found in these contexts, because of the huge quantitative imbalance existing between those central phases -where more than 80% of the utterances in the corpus are concentrated-, and the scant size of these in the more peripheral positions.

In practice, a detailed analysis shows that there are other contexts that tend to favour questions more. This is the case, for example, of end positions, where 28% of all the questions in the corpus are concentrated. In this respect, some particularly significant examples are those used to close the turn. In his study on an election debate between candidates standing for the vice-presidency of the USA in 1992, Bilmes (2001) noted how these *appended questions* were used more frequently by the democrat Al Gore, who probably thought that a higher degree of interactivity with his adversary would be beneficial to his interests. In contrast, the republican Dan Quayle, with far less experience in the dialectical arts than his opponent, did not resort to this tactic at all, and opted for a much less interactive kind of debate.

In our corpus, the choices about whether or not to use these end positions to pose questions also differ significantly from one politician to another. Thus, there are candidates who show very little inclination to utilise them (the most outstanding example is that of Pizarro, with no questions of this kind at all), while others are far more willing to do so. This is the case of Felipe González, especially during his second debate with Aznar in 1993, whom he bombarded with direct questions, as in (17), where the socialist leader ends his turn with a disjunctive question about the PP's plans with regard to tax policy:

(17) G: [...] y ese es su problema/ ninguna de las cuestiones que le haa→ que le he planteado esta noche/ las ha respondido// Hemos empezado por

Edimburgo y vamos a terminar por qué tipo de fiscalidad pretenden ustedes↓// Y no lo va a decir tampoco esta noche/ porque usted va a ocultar todo lo que sea delicado desde el punto de vista de los votos↓// *¿Van- van a mantener esa progresividad desde el punto de vista fiscal// o la van a corregir como prometían en su programa fiscal?* (G/A, 2)

[G: (...) and that is your problem/ you have not answered any of the questions that I→ that I have asked you this evening// We started out with Edinburgh and we are going to finish up with what kind of tax system you want↓// And you are not going say it this evening either/ because you are going to conceal everything that could turn out to be a delicate subject as far as votes are concerned↓// *Are you- are you going to keep that progressive system from the point of view of taxes// or are you going to correct it as you promised in your tax manifesto?*]

In addition to reproaching his opponent for the deliberate self-interested absence of answers, the socialist politician interrogates his rival on an aspect of the tax policy that had not been made very clear in the PP's manifesto, and which amounted to suggesting that with this conservative party governing Spain, progressive tax would come to an end, with the subsequent detrimental effects on the welfare state.

The structural significance given to questions placed in an end position in the turns means that the addressee may interpret some of them differently from the speaker's intentions. This is what happens, for example, in the following dialogue between Zapatero and Rajoy, where the question formulated by the socialist candidate ("Do you remember that?") is intended more as a way of poking fun at the political stances taken by his opponent in the past ("...the United States was going to help us in our struggle against ETA") than of obtaining a real answer from him. Nevertheless, the fact that it is formulated at the end of the turn seems to force Rajoy to answer, albeit with just a curt "no":

(18) Z: ... Sí/ señor Rajoy// vuelve usted a hacer uso del terrorismo/ y la verdad es que lo han hecho desde hace varios años/ hasta para justificar la guerra de Irak lo hicieron// fíjese/ que fue una de las mayores extravagancias que tuvimos que escuchar en su momento↓// Se inventaron que para justificar el apoyo a la guerra de Irak/ porque Estados Unidos nos iba a ayudar en la lucha contra ETA↓// *¿Se acuerda de eso?*

R: No (Z/R, 2)

[Z: ... Yes/ Mr Rajoy// you are using terrorism again/ and the truth is that you have been doing the same for several years/ you even did it to justify the war in Iraq/ which was one of the most preposterous things we had to listen to at that time↓// In order to justify backing the war in Iraq/ you invented the idea that the United States was going to help us in the struggle against ETA↓// *Do you remember that?*

R: No]

Another favourable contexts for the formulation of questions are interruptions, often deliberately employed with different filibustering aims. In the corpus, we find Felipe González again as one of the main exponents of this tactic, which in many cases

ended up unhinging his opponent, as can be seen in the following fragment. It shows how the socialist leader invades the conservative candidate's discursive space on several occasions, in order to urge him to provide explicit information ("...tell me which ones... but tell me which ones") about the content of the nine economic plans! that González supposedly has implemented in the last legislature, and which Aznar is using in the debate to discredit the anarchic-socialists economic policy:

- (19) A: USTED/ señor González/ el año pasado tuvo que corregir CINCO veces el objetivo de precios↓
 G: diga cuáles
 A: USTED/ señor González/ presentó NUEVE planes económicos↓
 G: *diga [cuáles*
 A: [en DIEC[IOCHO meses↓
 G: [PERO DIGA CUÁLES
 A: pero si no hace falta/ señor González/ desde eel→ desde el→. desde las medidas liberalizadoras del mes de septiembre/ hasta el pacto social de progreso/ hasta el pacto de competitividad/ pasando por las medidas del mes de enero/ pasando por los recortes del mes de mayo y del mes de junio...
 G: *¿pero usted le llama planes económicos a eso?!*
 A: perdón/ ¿me quiere usted dejar hablar si es tan amable?// le pido que sea tan amable de dejarme hablar... (G/A, 2)
 [A: You/ Mr González/ had to correct the price target FIVE times last year↓
 G: tell me which ones
 A: YOU/ Mr González/ submitted NINE economic plans↓
 G: *tell me [which ones*
 A: [in EIGH[TEEN months
 G: [BUT TELL ME WHICH ONES
 A: but there's no need/ Mr González/ from→ from the→ from the liberalising measures in the month of September/ to the agreement for social progress/ to the competitiveness agreement/ including the measures introduced in the month of January and the cuts in the month of May and the month of June...
 G: *but do you call that economic plans?!*
 A: Excuse me/ would you be so kind as to let me finish speaking?// I'm asking you to kindly allow me to speak...]

In contrast, initial contexts are less inclined to be used to ask questions. One exception, however, is the case of those questions asked by politicians who, after regaining their turn, decide to reintroduce one question that they had posed earlier, but which had then gone unanswered. In the conversationalist analysis of Bilmes (2001) on the US vice-presidential debate between Al Gore and Dan Quayle in 1992, he reports on the use of these *raising questions* as offensive weapon in the democrat candidate's discourse. Their presence in our corpus is more sporadic, but there are nevertheless several revealing examples. One of them can be found in (20), during the first of the debates between González and Aznar, in the moment when the moderator has asked the participants to briefly sum up and close a thematic block:

- (20) M: ...ese mismo minuto para Felipe González y pasamos a política exterior.
G: no/ el minuto sólo lo empleo en decir// "*Sr Aznar, diga alguna vez qué es lo que va a hacer*"?/ el problema del [vacío político de su propuesta...
A: [se lo acabo de decir/ señor González
G: no/ hombre/ no
A: mejorar la gestión/ mejorar la calidad/ y natu[ralmente/ garantizar...
G: [o sea que no tienee→ no tiene ninguna... (G/A, 1)
[M: ...that same minute for Felipe González and we move on to foreign policy
G: no/ I will only spend this minute on saying// "*Mr Aznar, tell us sometime what you are going to do*"?/ the problem of [the political vacuum of your proposal
A: [I've just told you/ Mr González
G: no/ sir/ no
A: improve management/ improve quality/ and [of course ensure
G: [in other words you haven't got one→ you haven't got one...]

The socialist leader uses his first words not to summarize what he has said until now, but to make a renewed effort to get Aznar to answer the questions he had asked him earlier and which the conservative candidate had not answered. In any case, it is interesting to note how Aznar opposes that idea and assures his interlocutor that he had already replied, thus giving rise to a new series of verbal overlaps.

4.3. Institutional factors: The candidates' political role and their identities and expectations

Together with the distributional factors analysed in the previous section, in election debates, questions are also conditioned by institutional constraints. One of these is the political role played by the participants in the debate. In five of the six debates, candidates from the governing party (the PSOE) were set against the leaders of the chief Spanish opposition party, the PP. Initially, things appeared somewhat different in the debate held between Mayor Oreja (PP) and Juan Fernando López Aguilar (PSOE) during the European election in 2009, since the PP had won in the last election, albeit by a slim margin. However, the fact that these elections have always been played in a national, non-European, key, means that the roles of both candidates can be considered equivalent to those played by the politicians in the rest of the debates. In fact, the PP had considered that election as being the first step towards the future defeat of the socialists at the next general election in 2012.

Although questions are not exclusive of either political faction, it would seem reasonable to expect representatives of the opposition to use a greater number of these inquisitive acts than those in the governing party. This is especially so in the case of

questions that reveal information to the audience that has a detrimental effect on the opponent's interests. And it is even more the case with those that serve no other purpose than to exert a coercive power over the interlocutor, who is criticised, accused and blamed for all the bad things the country is currently undergoing. It is not that the representatives of the government cannot make use of these same strategies (indeed they often do), but there seems to be a more natural tendency for the opposition to make use of such aggressive tactics. This, of course, makes good sense, since its main duty is that of questioning the government's policies with all the dialectical weapons it has at its disposal. In contrast, the government and its representatives are expected to defend the work carried out during the last term of office, while attacking the opposition initially appears to be an action, if not secondary, at least complementary to this last undertaking.

Initially, this hypothesis seems to be upheld by the general data, since the politicians of the opposition as a whole ask the representatives of the governing party more questions (N=266; 55%) than those posed in the opposite direction (N=227; 46%) (X^2 : 184,921; p. 000). Nevertheless, a more detailed analysis of the data shows how this factor interact with other institutional -even idiosyncratic- constraints, that are linked to the discursive identity of the politicians.

The form and function of questions in institutional and non-institutional contexts is sometimes strongly associated to the discursive style and the identities that the participants wish to reveal (Crawford 2008; Tracy 2009). For example, Tracy (2009) saw how different judges in the same law court vary in the way they carry out their questioning. These differences are not only related to their own personal style (more deliberate, more aggressive, etc.), but also to their political (progressive, conservative, etc.) and attitudinal (favourable, unfavourable, etc.) stance with regard to the object of the court hearing (marriage between homosexuals in the state of California).

In the case we are dealing with here, this is also true, although the number and type of questions asked by politicians is also closely related to the type of debate and, above all, to the expectations the different candidates have as regards the election. Thus, the more or less aggressive styles and identities of the politicians are stressed (or toned down) by the political situation and by their electoral outlooks. Hence, although generally speaking the members of the Spanish opposition ask their opponents more questions than vice versa, thereby reflecting the greater institutional aggressiveness to be expected of this political faction, in practice not all its representatives act in the same way.

Thus, for example, the institutional hypothesis just mentioned would be initially confirmed, as shown in Table 3, in the cases of Rajoy (90) and Mayor Oreja (23), whose average numbers of questions are higher than those of the representatives from the governing party, Zapatero (48) (X^2 : 12,783; p. 000) and López Aguilar (18), respectively (nevertheless in this last case the differences are not statistically significant: X^2 : 0,610; p. 435). Yet, this does not occur in the encounters between Aznar (128) and González (129), whose general figures are very similar (X^2 : 0,004; p. 950), and in the debate between Solbes (31) and Pizarro (25) the situation is inverted (X^2 : 0,643; p. 423).

Leaders	No. questions	%
Aznar (PP)	128	24.6
González (PSOE)	129	24.8
Rajoy (PP)	90	17.3
Zapatero (PSOE)	48	9.2
Pizarro (PP)	25	4.8
Solbes (PSOE)	31	6
Mayor Oreja (PP)	23	4.4
López Aguilar (PSOE)	18	3.5

Table 3: General distribution of the questions asked by political leaders (NB. In all the six debates, candidates of PP represent the political Opposition, whereas the politicians of PSOE are in Government)

On the other hand, the distribution of those questions varies to a significant degree in the case of some politicians, especially in confrontations that consist of two debates instead of only one. For example, as can be seen in Figure 1, the behaviour of Rajoy is very different in his two duels. Thus, from the first (62) to the second (28) debate, there is a notable drop in the number of questions asked. The performance of Zapatero however, was far more homogeneous (27/21). The explanation for such large differences perhaps lies in the expectations of the conservative candidate and his party in the phases prior to each debate. In the years before that election campaign, many analysts – even within his own party – had expressed doubts about the capacity of Rajoy to win an election, especially after losing the previous one to the same opponent, Rodríguez Zapatero. Moreover, the pre-election opinion polls had systematically shown that the winner would again be the socialist party. Maybe that negative expectations makes it easier to interpret Rajoy’s aggressiveness in the first debate, with certain examples of rather unedifying behaviour in some phases. This was seen to be especially true when the conservative leader directly accused his opponent of slighting the victims of terrorist attacks. Hence, after all the criticism received, it was also reasonable to expect a higher level of restraint in the second debate (as in fact happened), and maybe this helps to explain the sharp decrease in the number of questions formulated by Rajoy in this last encounter.

A different setting can be appreciated in the debates between González and Aznar in 1993. On the one hand, we have a politician from the opposition like José María Aznar, whose verbal aggressiveness were to become legendary in Spanish politics and (of interest to our purposes here) for whom the number of questions asked in the second debate (74) was significantly higher than in the first one (54) (X^2 : 3,125; p. 077). Yet, Figure 1 shows how this increase is much sharper in the case of the government candidate, Felipe González, who used almost three times as many questions in the second debate (94) as in the first one (35) (X^2 : 26,984; p. 000). Although this second debate lasted a little longer (half an hour) and this could account for a small part of this increase, I believe that such a considerable change in strategy is again related to the politicians’ electoral perspectives and reckoning. Indeed, unlike the 2008 election, in 1993 some surveys had forecast a victory by the PP. There was also an aggravating

circumstance, the fact that, to everyone's surprise, in the first debate a very aggressive and well-prepared José María Aznar had been a clear winner. Hence, just five days before the election, the socialist party's outlook and, more especially, that of its candidate and leader for the past two decades, were frankly bleak, and the chances of losing the election after three consecutive victories (1982, 1986 and 1990) seemed very high. In this context, González's behaviour, which had been very restrained and presidential during the first confrontation with Aznar, changed completely on the second (and decisive) occasion. Thus, the inquisitive tactics employed to provoke the rival – the same used so skilfully by Aznar in the previous encounter– allowed González to literally corner the conservative candidate, who was displaying clear signs of his defeat by the end of the debate⁴. The charges of being a liar, the accusations of being inconsistent (which sometimes verged on sarcasm and jeering), as well as certain interactional practices such as continual interruptions or the non-stop barrage of malicious questions, aimed at pressuring the opponent and proving to viewers the existence of a supposed "hidden agenda", drawn up by the conservative faction, all became priceless verbal weapons in the hands of the socialist politician.

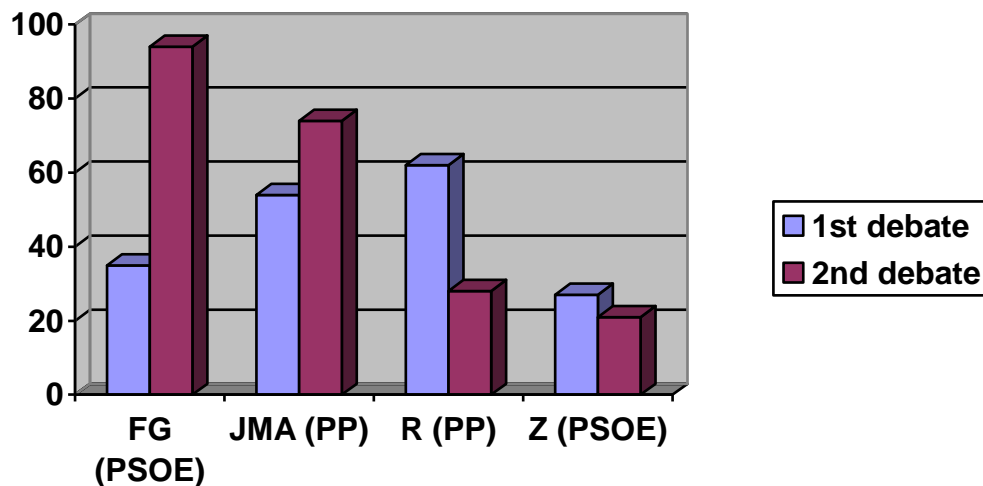


Figure 1: Number of questions asked by the politicians in the double debates

4.4. Questions and rhetorical styles

Together with the distributional and institutional factors discussed so far, in election debates, questions are also conditioned by other constraints. For instance, the presence of other questions within the close context accounts for the appearance of more utterances of the same kind, in a *priming effect* that has also been observed on variationist studies (Pereira-Scherre 2001). In conversation analysis, attention has also been drawn to the frequency with which questions and answers appear in some institutional genres as an integral part of broader sequences. This is what happens, for

⁴ As opposed to the first debate, in this second encounter Aznar left the television studio quickly, clearly worried and with a surly face, some facts that was unanimously underlined by the media.

example, in law courts, where lawyers and prosecutors group several questions together when it is their turn to examine witnesses and defendants (Archer 2005).

In the election debate a very significant percentage of all questions (41.3%) also occur in sequences in which two or more of these communicative acts are strung together. The rhetorical manners adorning many of the politician's discourses is reflected here in a tendency to frame their questions in repeated syntactic structures as the ones used by Mayor Oreja in this excerpt:

- (21) O: ...este modelo que ustedes dicen que es tan malo// *¿por qué no cambiaron hace cinco años?*(2 s.) *¿Y por qué/ por ejemplo/ cuando ustedes nos dicen/ “¿por qué no apoyan los del PP la crisis?”* (2 s.) *¿Por qué han negado la crisis hasta ayer?// ¿Cómo íbamos a resolver la crisis si ustedes negaban la crisis?↓// ¿No ve cómo la demagogia se deshace con facilidad?* (3 s.) Por eso el PP es el partido que/ en el año 96/ supo crear estos empleos (L/O)

[O: This model that you and your colleagues say is so bad// *why didn't you change it five years ago?* (2 s.) *And why/ for example/ when you say to us/ “why doesn't the PP back the crisis?”* (2 s.) *Why did you deny the existence of a crisis up until yesterday?// How were we to solve the crisis if you denied the existence of any crisis?↓// See how demagogy is so easily dismantled?* (3 s.) Is that why the PP is the party that/ in 1996/ knew how to create those jobs?]

Yet, despite the general importance of this factor in the corpus, its explanatory significance varies considerably from one politician to another, a fact that is related to the greater or lesser degree of rhetoricity that characterises their discourse. As can be seen in Figure 2, the tendency towards sequences made up of two or more similar questions is greater among candidates from the opposition.

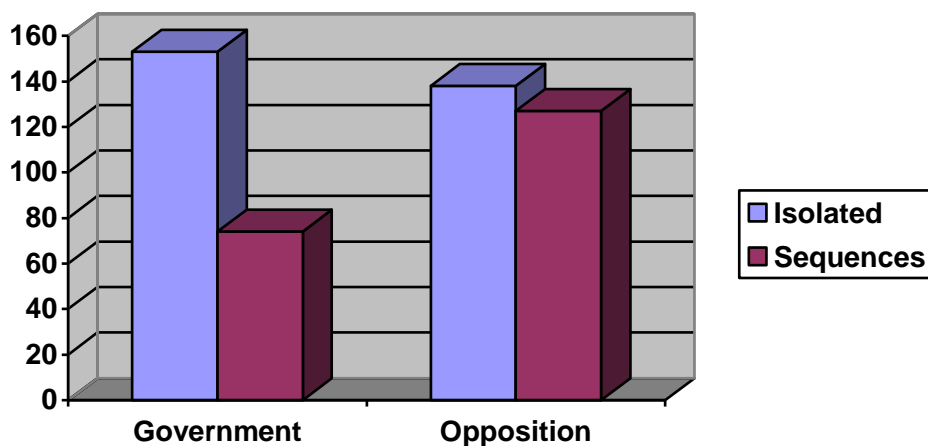


Figure 2: Distribution of questions in two different linguistic contexts in terms of the political role of the participants (absolute frequencies)

In all the encounters with socialist candidates, these sequences are clearly beaten by the conservatives, with very significant differences (X^2 : 13,975; p.000). Manuel Pizarro (52%) and José María Aznar (52%) are especially remarkable examples, followed by Mayor Oreja (47%) and Rajoy (42%), all of them with figures that are always significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than those of the correspondent socialist opponents (Solbes: 38%; López Aguilar: 33%; González: 31%; Zapatero: 31%, respectively).

Is there any explanation for these distribution patterns, or are they differences that, although statistically significant in this corpus, could change in others? In short, are they facts that stylistically characterise the discourse of the PP party more than that of the PSOE party? Although with the data available it is difficult to obtain results that can be generalised, our experience as an observer interested in the Spanish politics for many years, tells us that these strategies are part of the stylistic preferences of the conservative party, whose politicians often display a strong tendency to use all kinds of rhetorical resources, such as syntactic parallelisms, metaphors, hyperboles, and so forth. This intuition, moreover, is reinforced by other distributional facts that can be observed in the corpus and which are again related to a preference for certain types of questions, a topic that we referred to earlier (see section 4.2 above) and which we will come back to in the next section.

4.5. Questions? But what questions?

In a previous paper, we saw how there is a close relation between the main functions performed by questions in the election debate and a pragmatic typology of these communicative acts (Blas Arroyo 2010). These include the so-called rhetorical questions, that is, those "... used as a challenging statement to convey the addresser's commitment to its implicit answer, in order to induce the addressee's mental recognition of its obviousness and the acceptance, verbalised or non-verbalised, of its validity" (Ilie 1994: 128). Actually, they have sometimes been called "false" questions because their superficially interrogative guise conceals what are in fact strongly evaluative statements or negations (Freed 1994; Escandell 1999; Archer 2005). Transferred to the sphere of debates, we could say that the speaker not only assumes knowledge of the answer but also – and more importantly – interprets that it should be seen as obvious by the other participants in the communicative act. The politician's aim is to get his or her addressee to admit (in front of millions of people) the presuppositions implicit in his or her questions, because they are detrimental to the rival's interests. All these features can be observed in the following fragment, where we can see a series of rhetorical questions posed by Rajoy to Zapatero. Even an observer with only the slightest notions of what was going on in the Spanish political arena would be capable of deducing that, behind these questions, there is an obvious answer that has a negative effect on the Zapatero's face:

- (22) R: ... pero luego/ señor Zapatero/ ha habido muchos incendios en España a lo largo de estos años↓// en Huelva/ en Guadalajara/ en Galicia// ¿Cuál fue su actuación?/ ¿Qué hizo usted?/ ¿CUÁL/ ha sido su política forestal?/ ¿Fue usted sensible con la gente?// ¿Lo fue en Guadalajara?/ ¿Atendió a la gente?/ ¿Atendió sus necesidades? (Z/R, 1)

[R: ... but then/ Mr Zapatero/ there have been many fires in Spain over these last years↓// in Huelva/ in Guadalajara/ in Galicia// *What was your reaction? What did you do? WHAT/ has your forestry policy been?/ Were you sensitive to the people's needs?// To those in Guadalajara?/ Did you pay attention to the people?/ Did you tend to their needs?*]

In short, the question marks in “*What was your reaction?*” or “*What did you do?*” are followed by an implicit, but obvious, corollary: “none/nothing”.

As can be seen in Table 4, these strongly evaluative questions, in which there is a more than obvious concern for style, appear significantly more often in the discourse of the Spanish opposition party than in that of the governing party. In all the debates analysed, the politicians from the PP beat their opponents in the use of this strategy. This is a fact that seems to reinforce our hypothesis, that the Spanish conservative candidates employ a higher level of rhetoricity in the election debates. To sum up, they are not only the politicians that pose more questions to their opponents, but also the ones who insert more of them within rhetorical frames, such as the syntactic parallelisms in multiple question sequences seen above (section 4.4) or the rhetorical questions considered here.

Leaders	Interlocutor's answer		Speaker's answer		Rhetorical		Exclamatory		Others		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Aznar (PP)	33	25.7	25	19.5	45	35.1	10	7.8	15	11.7	128
González (PSOE)	70	54.6	32	24.8	10	7.7	7	5.4	10	7.7	129
Rajoy (PP)	25	27.7	30	33.3	26	28.8	1	1.1	8	8.8	90
Zapatero (PSOE)	16	33.3	20	41.6	3	6.3	2	4.1	7	14.5	48
Pizarro (PP)	22	88.8	3	11.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	25
Solbes (PSOE)	9	29	20	64.5	1	3.2	-	-	1	3.2	31
Mayor Oreja (PP)	11	47.8	1	4.3	6	26.1	1	4.3	4	17.4	23
López Aguilar (PSOE)	8	44.4	7	38.8	-	-	-	-	3	16.6	18

Table 4: General distribution according to political leaders and the types of questions

These rhetorical questions are particularly visible in Aznar's discourse, where they account for 35% of all his questions, an amount which contrasts greatly with the far

more moderate figures of his opponent, Felipe González (only 7.7%) (X^2 : 22,273; p. 000). And these same differences are maintained in other confrontations. Thus, Rajoy (29%) shows a clearly greater tendency to use rhetorical questions than Zapatero (6.2%), (X^2 : 18,241; p. 000). However, these distances are nothing compared with the head of the socialist party standing for the European election, Juan Fernando López Aguilar, whose discourse does not contain any questions of this type whatsoever, whereas his opponent, Mayor Oreja (30%), was again considerably more rhetorical (X^2 : 6,000; p. 014).

The exception to this rule in the PP party is represented by Manuel Pizarro, a newcomer to politics at the time of his debate with Pedro Solbes, and whose verbal behaviour was significantly different from that of the other candidates. In fact, Manuel Pizarro appears as the politician with the highest number of what could be considered the most canonical questions, in the sense that they are used by the speaker in the pursuit of factual information from his opponent. “Signed on” at the last moment by Mariano Rajoy as second on the list of PP candidates standing for election, and until a short time before one of the leading names in Spanish private banking, Pizarro could hardly be said to have had the expected profile of a professional politician. Faithful to the Aragonese stereotype of being stubborn but noble, capable of speaking plainly and with little desire to conceal his shortcomings with the use of rhetorical devices and other oratory arts, one of the most interesting features of Manuel Pizarro’s discourse is the fact that a very high amount of all his questions were used to ask Pedro Solbes for factual information concerning the economic situation that had been inherited after the last four years of socialist government.

Nevertheless, the idea of using questions as a trap, so that the opponent will end up digging his own grave, by providing information that goes against his or her own interests, is in no way exclusive to the opposition. In practice, the politicians of the government also use it to put a damper on those who seek to replace them in the executive. If the candidates from the conservative party demand to know facts that could make the government lose face, the socialists challenge their opponent to reveal their “hidden agenda”. This tactic was especially recurrent in the debates between González and Aznar in 1993. Since the first victory of the socialists in 1982, they had repeated their success on two more elections (1986 and 1990) by, according to their opponents, resorting to the “discourse of fear” (the fear to the return of the Right, traditionally associated with the Franquism). Nevertheless, that discourse reached its highest point during the campaign for the 1993 election. There, politicians such as Felipe González took advantage of all their public appearances to ask the PP -which some polls forecast as the winner- to explain loudly and clearly what they were going to do with some of the most important social policies (pensions, unemployment insurance, public health care and education, etc.) that the socialists had improved during their years in government. The two debates with Aznar were a magnificent platform for this tactic, to the point where 54% of all the socialist leader's questions were aimed at tricking an answer out of his opponent. Nevertheless, these general figures rose sharply in the second and decisive debate, in which González put all his eggs in one basket just five days before the election and with everything against him.

The possibilities of presenting information that has negative effects on the opponent’s interests are not limited to these questions that seek an answer from the addressee, since this reply is often given directly by the actual speaker (see again Table 4). One recurring informative strategy in these cases consists of drawing a comparison

between the achievements of different political agents. Thus, the informative load included in questions and their corresponding answers is used to represent the sharp opposition between the two spheres of *us* vs. *them* before the audience. These contrasts can be made by using tactics that affect the question-answer pair in different ways. Hence, in cases like those in (23), the speaker explicitly introduces the aforementioned contrast in the question turn, without the need for the answer turn:

- (23) Z: *¿Sabe que hay 40000 investigadores más en España que cuando ustedes gobernaban?* (Z/R, 1)
[Z: Do you know that there are now 40000 more researchers in Spain than when you were in power?]

Nevertheless, this contrast is more commonly entrusted to the whole pair, that is, to combinations made up of questions that are followed immediately by their reply, as in (24). In this example, Pedro Solbes offers some figures on the economy by comparing them with those of the previous conservative government, and, as expected, does so in such a way that they are always to the socialist party's favour.

- (24) S: *¿Sabe usted cuánto subió la inflación en el período en quee → la última legislatura del Partido Popular/ toda la inflación acumulada?* (...) (2 s.) Subió el 12%↓ (3 s.) *¿Sabe cuánto ha subido la inflación durante el período del Partido Socialista?* (2 s.) El 13%↓ (3 s.) *¿Sabe cuánto ha subido el petróleo- cuál era el precio del petróleo en ese período del gobierno del Partido Popular?* (2 s.) 27 dólares/barril↓ (2 s.) *¿Sabe cuál ha sido el precio del petróleo durante el período del Partido Socialista?* (2 s.) 60 dólares/barril↓ (S/P)
[S: Do you know how much inflation went up in the period in which → the last term of office of the Partido Popular/ all the accumulated inflation? (...) (2 s.) It went up by 12%↓ (3 s.) Do you know how much inflation has gone up during the period of the socialist party? (2 s.) 13%↓ (3 s.) Do you know how much crude oil has gone up, what the price of oil was in that period while the Partido Popular was governing? (2 s.) 27 dollars a barrel↓ (2 s.) Do you know what the price of crude oil has been during the socialist party period? (2 s.) 60 dollars a barrel↓]

This time, the figure that stands out above all the others is that of Pedro Solbes, in whose discourse 65% of all the questions that were asked were of this kind. The reason for this probably lies in the important role that this type of question plays on other levels of analysis. In addition to providing the audience with information that is advantageous for one's own face or detrimental for the opponent, with the ensuing coercive power that is gained over the latter, these questions also play a significant role in the presentation of the speaker's arguments (Blas Arroyo 2010). Indeed, it can be used by politicians to introduce, direct or conclude topics and subtopics in their turns, in a similar way to those observed in different didactic genres, such as talks, lectures, conferences, and so forth (Crawford 2008). This didactic element is very clearly present in the discourse of Pedro Solbes. As the most veteran socialist politician (he had already been a member of Felipe González's last government a decade before), Solbes has a long academic career as a professor of economics. Indeed, many political analysts

believe this background would explain his markedly teacher-like discourse, in which he rarely raises his voice and avoids fierce confrontations with his opponents. And that same pedagogical spirit probably helps to account for the recurrent presence of questions like those seen in example (24) during his debate with Manuel Pizarro.

5. Conclusions

In this study we have seen how politicians ask questions in different phases of the debates, and how these questions are favoured by a variety of factors. Among them appear what we have characterised as distributional constraints because they have to do with the position of these utterances in the turn. The quantitative analysis showed how questions are more likely to be posed in positions at the end of the turn, as well as in passages involving simultaneous speech and interruptions, in which one speaker impinges upon his or her rival's turn. These results are to be expected, if we consider that they are the two contexts that impose the most interactional obligations on the opponent, unlike what occurs with other phases of the turns at talk. Moreover, both the number and the form of these units are strongly influenced by stylistic factors, such as those which lead the speaker to repeat, on two or more occasions, questions or question formats within wider inquisitive sequences. In fact, nearly half the questions in the corpus appear in such sequences.

In addition, questions in debates are also conditioned by a series of institutional factors. One of these lies in the political role played by the candidates in the debate. Thus, the politicians of the opposition, on the whole, ask the politicians of the government more questions than the other way round. However, this is not the case in all the debates, and these inconsistencies can be explained by the influence of other factors which can sometimes neutralise and even invert such a tendency. Perhaps the most notable are the political expectations of the candidates, and which may vary considerably in different moments of the election campaign. This becomes especially apparent in those confrontations that consist in two different debates and where the politicians' verbal behaviour can vary considerably depending on those expectations. Hence, it has been seen how politicians who initially presented themselves with a controlled, presidential image in the first of their debates (the case of Felipe González, for example) act in a completely different way in the second: Harassing their opponent, calling him or her a liar, interrupting his or her turns, and -of special interest to this study-, asking trick questions, aimed at showing up the opponent and the party he represents. But this can also take place in the opposite direction. Thus, a politician who is criticised by the public opinion for being too aggressive in the first encounter (Rajoy) changes strategy the second time round, which is reflected, among other tactics, in the sharp drop in the number of questions asked.

These differences, however, not only affect questions as a whole, but also their different functional types. In this regard, a distinction had already been made between questions that genuinely seek an answer and those that do not. The former, in turn, can also be separated into questions whose answer is left to the interlocutor, on the one hand, and those whose reply is supplied by the speaker him or herself, on the other. As far as questions which do not seek any explicit answer are concerned -but, at least, an implicit and obvious one-, rhetorical questions stand out above the rest. Other more marginal

types in the corpus, such as exclamatory and echo questions, which are characterised by having a high evaluative content, could also be added to this group.

In this research, it has been shown how the distribution of these different functional questions in the corpus was also conditioned by the political identities. In this respect, the quantitative analysis showed how rhetorical questions are closely associated to from the Partido Popular politicians, whereas the candidates from the governing party (PSOE) tend to favour other types to a greater extent. This is the case, for example, when the negative expectations of the government leaders give rise to an increase in the formulation of trick questions, which are aimed at revealing information about the opposition's hidden agenda. In these occasions, the representatives from the opposition, like Aznar in his second debate with González, are tightly constrained by the interactional obligations imposed by a constant barrage of questions, the escape routes of which are few in number and not very alluring. Obviously, Aznar cannot answer with information that would go against his interests and those of his party, but a systematic refusal to answer could lead to a severe loss of face. In the end, politicians find themselves driven to undo the presuppositions that their rivals maliciously include in their questions.

Lastly, the argumentative value of questions which are intended to be answered by the speaker him/herself explains why they tend to be used more frequently in a more pedagogical, teacher-like discourse, as happens in the corpus with the veteran socialist politician, Pedro Solbes.

To finish, it should be pointed out that, in our opinion, a heuristic approach like the one undertaken here, where the qualitative and quantitative perspectives of analysis are combined, is a valuable tool for the sociopragmatic analysis of institutional discourse. In fact, a mere qualitative analysis of questions would not have allowed us to determine the way in which these communicative acts are disseminated throughout the corpus, or the different factors that are involved in their distribution.

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