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Left/Right Polarity in Gestures and Politics. The Multimodal Behavior of Political Actors in TV Debates

Abstract

In this article we investigate how political actors involved in TV debates during the 2009 and 2014 presidential elections in Romania manage the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics). For this purpose we developed a multimodal analysis for some relevant sequences during these debates. The practice of integrating the meanings of different semiotic resources allows a better understanding of the meaning of verbal discourse, actions and behavior of political actors involved in a particular communication situation. In addition, the Multimodal Professional Analysis Tool, ELAN, allows the annotation and dynamic analysis of the semiotic behavior of the political actors involved in the analyzed sequences.

Keywords: presidential debate, multimodal analysis, Left/Right Polarity, political semiotics, political communication culture.

Introduction

In political communication, particularly in dialogic interactions such as televised debates, political actors organize their discursive behavior and communicative strategies by managing a whole semiotic resource complex (Calbris, 2003; Bucy & Bradley, 2004; Streeck, 2008; Poggi & Vincze, 2009; Lempert, 2011; Poggi et al., 2013). An important category of semiotic resources that political actors use in the effort to construct meaning in TV debates is represented by gestures. Understood as integrative part of the language system (McNeill, 1992, 2005; Kendon, 2004), gestures “are produced as a part of a speaker’s undertaking to shape a symbolic form of action” (Kendon, 1994, p. 193). Through gestures, humans “share emotions, experiences, and activities with others [...], invite others to share interest and attention” (Tomasello et al., 2010, p. 686). Their interactive nature with speech, their semiotic properties, their role in interaction determines the type of relationships (Streeck, 2009; Colletta et al., 2009), and what functions they subserve (Kendon, 2004; Mittelberg, 2007; Streeck, 2008;

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Müller, 2013; Bressemer, Ladewig, & Müller, 2018). Therefore, the knowledge and the proper use of different types of gestures, of other semiotic resources, as well as the relationship that establishes between speech and gestures is “a *sine qua non* condition of effective multimedia communication, optimizing the image capital that each personality builds upon” (Roventă-Frumușani, 1999, p. 205). For political actors, such knowledge opens up new possibilities for meaning making in face-to-face interactions.

In this study we investigate the correlations that are being established between the left/right polarity expressed by *co-speech* gestures (Kendon, 1994, 2004) and political left/right polarity. In addition, we examine how political actors conceptualize and communicate ideas with positive and negative emotional valence through gestures. In which measure gestures (left/right polarity in gestures) performed by political actors reflect political orientation (left/right polarity in politics)? How do the political actors manage the relationship between handedness (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and valence of the spoken clauses (speech with positive/negative valence)? What are the types of gestures that political actors use in their effort to be persuasive in face-to-face interactions such as televised debates? What are the functions of gestures that political actors perform in TV debates? In other words, we focus here on understanding the *multimodal behavior* of political actors in TV debates, from the perspective of how they manage the left/right asymmetry expressed through different types of semiotic resources.

In this paper we present the results of the research on Romanian presidential debates held in December 2009 and November 2014, respectively. For this purpose we developed a multimodal analysis for some relevant sequences during these debates. In conducting the multimodal analysis, we used the Multimodal Professional Analysis Tool, ELAN, that allowed us annotation and dynamic analysis of the semiotic behavior of the political actors involved in the analyzed communication sequences.

In the next section of this paper (2), we shortly discuss some key concepts in multimodality. While Section 3 presents some taxonomies of gestures, functions and several studies on the role of gestures in political persuasion, Section 4 examines left/right polarity in gestures and politics. In Section 5 we describe the research methodology, which starts from a multimodal analysis model. The results of the analysis are presented in Section 6, followed by the analysis and interpretation of results in Section 7. Finally, Section 8 presents our conclusions.

The „multimodal“ nature of discursive interactions

Words are not enough for making meaning in face-to-face interaction. Iedema (2003) highlights the “multimodal nature of all human meaning making” (p. 39). Also, Norris (2004) claim that “All interactions are multimodal” (p. 1). This perspective is shared by Kress (2010), who argues that “communication is always multimodal” (p. 36). Basically, multimodality is “the normal state of human communication” (Kress, 2010, p. 1). According to Kress (2010), *mode* is “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. [...] Different modes offer different potentials for making meaning. These differing potentials have a fundamental effect on the choice(s) of mode in specific instances of communication” (p. 79). Stöckl (2004) argue that modes can be distinguished from one another by “semiotic properties, cognitive orientation, and semantic potential” (p. 16). Due to these particularities, the different semiotic modes “tend to interact” (Mittelberg, 2007, p. 241). Understanding how

different modes, or semiotic resources, interact is at the heart of the multimodal analysis (Jewitt, 2009; O'Halloran, 2011; Siefkes, 2015).

In the interactions between different semiotic modes certain types of relationships are established, known as *intersemiotic relations* (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010). Depending on the context of communication, these relationships determine "relational meanings" in multimodal texts (Rovența-Frumușani, 1999, p. 193; Colletta et al., 2009, pp. 62-63). In this study, in order to establish the correlations gestures-corresponding verbal discourse, we used the taxonomy of semantic relations proposed by Colletta et al. (2009, pp. 62-63): (a) *reinforces*, in which the informational content of the gestures is identical and confirms the information of the verbal message; (b) *complements*, by which the gestures disambiguate the verbal message, or "cause a nuance of attitude in relation to the facts evoked by verbal discourse" (Rovența-Frumușani, 1999, pp. 193-194); (c) *supplements*, through which gestures supplement the information conveyed by the verbal message; (d) *integrates*, through which the meanings of the verbal message become more accurate due to the imagistic properties of the gestures; (e) *contradicts*, in which the information conveyed by the semiotic modes is contradictory; and (f) *substitutes*, in which "the information provided by the gesture replaces linguistic information, as in the case of certain performative and interactive gestures" (Colletta et al., 2009, p. 63).

In face-to-face interaction such as TV debates, political actors use different types of *semiotic resources*, or *semiotic modes*, as well as the relationships between them to communicate. Political discourse involves "not only the words and argumentation employed by politicians, but their voice quality, prosody, intonation, their gestures, gaze and facial expressions, posture, head and body movements" (Poggi et al., 2010, p. 2). Political actors can shape the meaning "through their selection and configuration of modes" (Jewitt, 2009, p. 15). The political message itself is approached as "multimodal discursive interaction" (Lempert & Silverstein, 2012, p. 27) that takes place in a particular socio-cultural context. In this study we will focus on the gestures, as a special type of semiotic modes, and the way in which the political actors manage a certain aspect of relationships that are established between speech and gestures. In the previous section, we suggest that gestures are "interaction phenomena" (Streeck, 2009, p. 13) that can influence the image capital, or brand, of political actors (Rovența-Frumușani, 1999, p. 205; Lempert, 2011, p. 243).

In summary, we note that "several modes are always used together" (Kress, 2010, p. 28), due to the different potentials for making meaning. The political actors can update in certain moments of the interaction those communicative modes, or semiotic resources, that maximize the persuasive potential of the messages.

Types and functions of gestures. The persuasive value of gestures with pragmatic function

In order to describe the diversity of gestures, scholars such as Efron (1941), Freedman and Hoffman (1967), Ekman and Friesen (1969), McNeill and Levy (1982), McNeill (1992, 2005), Bavelas et al. (1992), Kendon (2004) or Maricchiolo, Gnisci and Bonaiuto (2012, 2013) have proposed several taxonomies. According to McNeill (1992), "all of the schemes are basically the same, a fact explained by their common descent from Efron's (1941) classification" (p. 75). For example, McNeill and Levy (1982), "inspired by the semiotic categories of C. S. Peirce (1960)", have developed a "classification scheme with four categories: *iconic*, *metaphoric*, *de-*

ictic, and *beat*” (McNeill, 2005, p. 38). “Iconic” gestures refer to the gestures that present “images of concrete entities and/or actions. They are gestures in which the form of the gesture and/or its manner of execution embodies picturable aspects of semantic content (aspects of which are also present in speech)” (p. 39). Abstract concepts can be described through “metaphorical” gestures. “Deictic” gestures allow the speaker to indicate abstract or concrete entities and actions present in the discourse content: “Abstract deixis *creates* new references in space; concrete deixis *finds* references in it” (McNeill, 2005, p. 40). Finally, “beats” gestures occur “when they took the form of the hand beating time” (McNeill, 2005, p. 40). Through this classification scheme, McNeill (1992) provides a “guided, systematic, and disciplined method for inferring these meanings and functions” that gestures possess. McNeill (2005) argues that “most gestures are multifaceted” (p. 38). In different communication situations, in the same gesture “we often find iconicity, deixis, and other features mixing” (p. 41).

In this article, we use the hand gesture taxonomy proposed by Maricchiolo, Gnisci and Bonaiuto (2012), which “combines classical gestures categories” (p. 407), mainly those described by McNeill (1992) and Ekman and Friesen (1969). We present this taxonomy, which we have also detailed in other studies (Drăgan, 2018, p. 204), in Table 1.

Table 1. Taxonomy of hand gestures – adapted from Maricchiolo, Gnisci and Bonaiuto (2012, p. 408; 2013, p. 117) and Gnisci, Maricchiolo, and Bonaiuto (2013, p. 881).

Type	Macro-categories (or Functions)	Specific-categories (or Attribute)	Sub-categories (or Semiotic Value)
Speech Linked Gestures (SLG)	Conversational (Interactional)	Cohesive	
		Rhythmic	
		Emblems	
	Ideational	Illustrative	Deictic
			Metaphoric
			Iconic
Speech Nonlinked Gestures (SNG)	Adaptors	Self-adaptors	
		Object-adaptors	

Based on this taxonomy of hand gestures, complementary to the *MUMIN coding scheme* (Allwood et al., 2007) – a general framework for the study of gestures in interpersonal communication –, we designed our multimodal analysis model.

Regarding the functions of gestures, we will focus on Kendon’s (1995, 2004) approach. According to Kendon (1995), gestures play two main functions: “contributes to various aspects of the content of the utterance of which it is a part”, and in this situation we speak about “substantive” gestures, and “expresses aspect of utterance structure [...], and the character of the ‘speech act’ or interactional move of the utterance”, as in the case of gestures with “pragmatic” functions (p. 247). Kendon (2004) distinguishes three main kinds of pragmatic functions: “modal” when the speaker interprets or expresses his opinion towards the content of the speech, “performative”, when the speaker steps in to clarify the speech acts, and “parsing”, when “the speaker may mark up some feature of the discourse structure” (pp. 281-282). Moreover, Kendon introduces “*interactive* or *interpersonal* functions of gesture as a separate

category” (Streeck, 2009, p. 180), that refer to the speaker’s role in the organization of the discursive interactions.

From the perspective of Poggi and Vincze (2009), gestures “serve both as cognitive and communicative functions” (p. 89). The *communicative function* of gestures refers to the fact that gestures “provide referential and discourse information by adding to, replacing, contradicting words”, while *cognitive function* considers gestures a “device to help the speaker’s thinking and lexical retrieval” (p. 89).

Streeck (2008) highlights a certain predisposition of political actors for gestures with pragmatic function. Analyzing the forms and functions of the gestures of the Democratic Party candidates in two primary debates during the 2004 presidential campaign in the United States, he noticed that the candidates “enacted a shared code of pragmatic gesticulation, using hand gestures to mark speech acts and display aspects of information structure and thereby providing viewers with visual structure that facilitates the parsing and processing of speech” (Streeck, 2008, p. 154).

Generally, gestures with pragmatic function have a highly persuasive potential (Kendon, 2004; Streeck, 2008; D’Errico, Poggi & Vincze, 2013; Müller, 2013). According to Poggi and Pelachaud (2008), the persuasive value of gestures “seems to be contained more in the ‘expressivity’ parameters than in the global meaning of the gesture, and more in the inferences the gesture encourages than in its literal meaning” (p. 413).

For example, the “ring” type of gestures (*R-family* gestures), analyzed in detail by Kendon (2004), is part of the family of gestures with pragmatic function, which can have a significant persuasive effect. This is the gesture where the tip of the index finger is in contact with the tip of the thumb. Such gestures “convey the concept of precision” in certain contexts of communication (Vincze, Poggi & D’Erico, 2014, p. 181). They have specific meanings as they “specify” or bring “clarifications” to something specific. As a rule, they are used every time this clarification is important in the dynamics of conversational exchange. The person that performs them wants to ensure that “specific information be given prominence” (Kendon, 1995, p. 271). Through such gestures the speaker follows “gaining the agreement, the conviction or the understanding of the interlocutor” (Kendon, 2004, p. 241). Practically, the *R-family* gestures appear in conjunction with verbal speech sequences that “provides precise information”, or when “make a specific reference to something” (Kendon, 1995, p. 268).

Calbris (2003, 2011) also analyzes the gestures that convey the semantic marks of the precision concept. According to Calbris (2003), precision is “a symptom of implication” (p. 116). For the French author, the “Ring configuration” (*le rond* in french), which belongs to the *R-family* of gestures, convey “‘precision’, ‘rigour’” (Calbris, 2011, p. 32) and “evoke the notion of precision” (Calbris, 2011, p. 336). Furthermore, Calbris (2011) analyzes the cultural and contextual variability of the meaning of “ring” gestures (pp. 19-23).

Lempert (2011) investigates the family of *precision gestures* (*G-family* gestures), especially “precision grip gestures”, in the case of the former U.S. President Barack Obama. Such pragmatic gestures have implications of the type of actual involvement in the speech, as Calbris had already noticed (2003). Moreover, by performing such gestures, speaker “can invite one to infer not that just one is *making* a sharp point, but that one *has* a sharp point to make, or even that one *is* sharp, argumentatively speaking” (Lempert, 2011, p. 243). Therefore, under certain conditions, such gestures can influence “candidate brand” (Lempert, 2011, p. 243).

The *Palm-Up Open-Hand* gestures family (Kendon, 2004; Müller, 2004; Streeck, 2008), or *PUOH family*, is another category of gestures with pragmatic function useful in our analy-

sis. According to Müller (2004), by performing a PUOH type of gesture the participants in the discourse exchange are invited “to take on a shared perspective” on an “abstract discursive object” represented by the gesture (p. 233). Such a gesture results from the combination form (open hand) – function (hand’s orientation) (Müller, 2004, p. 233). Moreover, according to McNeill (2005), this type of gesture has a certain semiotic complexity: “the PUOH has two features: deixis, which resides in the orientation the hand (facing up), and a surface, which resides in the shape of the hand (a flat surface)” (McNeill, 2005, p. 52). The two components of the gesture, the orientation and the surface of the palm determine certain semiotic configurations: “Surface and orientation are significant in the gesture as components of the gesture’s iconicity (cf. Peirce, 1960). The deictic and shape components impose a kind of granularity of the possible meanings of PUOH” (McNeill, 2005, p. 52). Finally, McCullough comes to a similar conclusion to that of Müller (2004). Practically, when performing such a gesture, the intention of the speaker is “the idea of presenting a discursive object” (McNeill, 2005, p. 53). As a rule, such gestures are met “at the ends of turns at talk” (Streeck, 2008, p. 173). Streeck (2008) notes that in the dynamics of this gesture, “when the hands are held for a moment in this position, the function of the enactment changes to that of an invitation of response” (p. 173). In any case, the form-orientation association specific to the hand’s gestures determines various semiotic configurations that trigger interpretation scenarios as to the intent of the political actor who performed such a gesture.

Left/right polarity in gestures and politics

Idiomatic expressions in Romanian such as “a fi mâna dreaptă a cuiva” (being someone’s right-hand), “nu știe stânga ce face dreapta” (the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing) and others, often used in political discourse, reflect some aspects of left/right polarity in hand gestures. Such expressions indicate certain regularities that occur in the way people express concrete and abstract concepts and actions through gestures. Typically, during discursive interactions, “good things are often associated with the right side of space and bad things with the left” (Casasanto, 2011, p. 379). According to Casasanto and Jasmin (2010), “right- and left-handers were found to associate positive ideas like *intelligence*, *attractiveness*, and *honesty* with their dominant side and negative ideas with their non-dominant side” (Casasanto & Jasmin, 2010, p. 1).

In this study, we investigate some aspects of this type of left/right polarity in political discourse. The *political left/right polarity*, or *political orientation*, refers to the conventional way of conceptualizing the political spectrum in terms of left/right spatial metaphors. According to Casasanto and Jasmin (2010), “in linguistic metaphors, political affiliations are often spatialized along a left-right axis: Democrats are on the left and Republicans on the right of the political spectrum” (p. 3). Calbris (2008) shows that “the French refer to the Socialists, those who occupy the left half of the semicircle, by saying ‘the Left’” (p. 31). In Romania, things are similar from the perspective of the left-right political distinction: Social Democrats (PSD) are on the left and Liberals (PNL) on the right of the political spectrum.

Calbris (2003, 2008, 2011), analyzing hand gestures of the former French Prime Minister between 1997 and 2002 and former candidate to presidential elections in 1995 and 2002, Lionel Jospin, notes a certain correspondence between the gestures performed with the left hand and his political orientation. At that time, Lionel Jospin was a representative of the So-

cialist Party, therefore affiliated with the political left-wing. Calbris (2011), shows that “every allusion to the left-wing government, such as decision making marked by lowering the edge of the hand in the Right Angle configuration, or inciting the State represented by advancing the Right Angle configuration, is signified with the left hand” (p.314).

Poggi and Vincze (2009) observed a similar phenomenon when analyzing the gestures performed by Ségolcne Royal in an interview for France 2. Former Socialist candidate in the 2007 French presidential elections in, “very consistently uses her right hand while speaking of the right, the rich, the speculation, while she uses her left hand while mentioning the poor, the workers, or the middle class” (Poggi & Vincze, 2009, p. 87). Poggi and Vincze (2009) analyze to what extent these “body behaviours have a persuasive import” (p. 87). From this perspective, political actors need it “to get access to the Persuadee’s mind: to be understood” (p. 89). Practically, “hands and head may contribute to the comprehensibility of political discourse by continuously indicating whether the Speaker is talking of the left or the right” (p. 89). Such a continuous effort on the part of a political actor to manage this type of left/right polarity expressed by *co-speech* gestures, can lead to a “subtly evaluative import” effect from the public in the sense desired by the politician (p. 89). In the situation discussed, Poggi and Vincze (2009) advance the hypothesis that the French politician’s gestures have “primarily a cognitive, not a communicative and persuasive function” (p. 89). The gestures performed by Ségolcne Royal appear to accompany the verbal discourse “mainly to help herself retrieve the corresponding images, concepts or words” (p. 89).

Casasanto and Jasmin (2010) propose a new perspective for understanding how the political actors manage the relationship between left and right hand gestures and the verbal discourse, respectively the political message. The two researchers analyzed the discourse and gestures from the final debates of the 2004 and 2008 US presidential elections, which involved two right-handers (Democrat John Kerry and Republican George W. Bush) and two left-handers (Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain). Casasanto and Jasmin (2010) were more interested in the relationship between hand gestures and the emotional dimension of messages, or valence, than in the political orientation (left/right polarity in politics) – hand gesture (left/right polarity in gestures) relationship. According to the two authors, the results show a less known and explored connection between *action* – most probably understood in terms of the pragmatic value of the performed hand gestures – and *emotion*, in the sense of the positive or negative content of the message. “Speakers associate positive messages more strongly with dominant hand gestures and negative messages with non-dominant hand gestures” (Cassanto & Jasmin, 2010, p. 1). The political orientation of candidates, usually associated with left-right orientation, did not influence the pattern of research: “according to the candidates’ gestures, the implicit mapping from the left and right hands to valence varies according to bodily characteristics, not politics” (Cassanto & Jasmin, 2010, p. 3).

Research methodology

The purpose of this article is to investigate how the political actors involved in TV debates during the 2009 and 2014 presidential elections in Romania manage the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics).. In a previous study (Drăgan, 2017), we presented the results of a similar analysis for the political actors who participated to the two final presidential debates in November

2014: Victor Ponta (PSD), Prime Minister of Romania at that time, and Klaus Iohannis (PNL), Mayor of the city of Sibiu and leader of the *Christian Liberal Alliance* (ACL) coalition at that time. The protagonists of the December 2009 presidential debate organized by the Institute for Public Policies and moderated by journalist Robert Turcescu, were Mircea Geoană, the political left-wing candidate (PSD+PC) and Traian Băsescu, the political right-wing candidate (PDL) and President of Romania at that time.

The corpus of the research presented here consists of a single communicational sequence of approximately equal duration – 5 minutes and 40 seconds – with that of the six communicational sequences analyzed in the previous study, with a total duration of approximately 5 minutes. We practically replicated the research design of the previous study, maintaining the criteria for selecting the communication sequences: homogeneity, common theme/topic, and the criterion of strategic messages (Drăgan, 2017, p. 41). Similarly to the previous study, we performed a multimodal analysis for the selected sequence according to the mentioned criteria. The steps of this multimodal analysis model have been detailed in another research, in which we analyzed the “positioning acts” of political actors in TV debates (Drăgan, 2018, pp. 203-205):

1) The annotation of semiotic resources (speech and gestures), using ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator).

2) Identifying semiotic types of gestures.

3) Attributing function to gesture (Colletta et al., 2009, pp. 61-62).

4) Identifying the relationship of gestures with corresponding verbal discourse (semantic relations).

5) Identifying the semiotic resources that political actors use to manage the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics).

6) Selecting frames in which political actors perform relevant gestures from this perspective (handedness – political orientation relationship).

7) Analysis and interpretation of results.

The data were annotated and analysed using ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator), a multimedia annotation tool developed at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. To study the gestures, we used The MUMIN coding scheme as the starting point, developed in the Nordic Network on Multimodal Interfaces (Allwood et al., 2007). As mentioned earlier (Section 3), in addition to the MUMIN coding scheme, for the annotation of hand gestures, we used a coding system used in the analysis of the various forms of political communication (Maricchiolo, Gnisci & Bonaiuto 2012, p. 408; Gnisci, Maricchiolo & Bonaiuto 2013, p. 881).

In order to identify the “relational meanings” (Rovența-Frumușani, 1999, p. 193), we used the taxonomy of semantic relations proposed by Colletta et al. (2009, pp. 62-63), presented in Section 2. The gesture-speech correlation are disambiguated in context. Basically, the informative content of the verbal discourse is compared to that conveyed by the gestures performed by political actors. Information conveyed by a particular gesture correlated with the corresponding verbal message can be framed in one or more types of semantic relationships. Gestures can carry out more relational functions, and they implicitly have more relational significance depending on the communication context (Allwood et al., 2007, p. 279). In such

situations, we selected the most visible semantic relationship (out of the six), accompanied by some comments.

The selected communicational sequence focused on the “fight against corruption”, a theme similar to those covered by the sequences analyzed in the previous study (Drăgan, 2017). Therefore, we were guided by the following research questions in our analysis:

RQ1. What are the semiotic resources used by the political actors involved in the discursive sequence analyzed in order to communicate and construct the meaning, and what are the differences that occur in how they manage the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics)?

RQ2. What are the differences between how political actors have managed the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics) for the sequences analyzed during the debate held in December 2009 compared to the debates held in November 2014?

Results

In the following two examples (Fig. 1, respectively Fig. 3), we present the results of the research for each political actor involved in the December 2009 debate. Every frame captures a particular aspect of the handedness – political orientation relationship, being selected on the basis of the multimodal analysis conducted with the ELAN software (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 4).

Figure 1. The relationship between hand gestures and political orientation in the case of the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing, Traian Băsescu: a, b, c, d – gestures executed with the left hand.



The first gesture (see Fig. 1a) is executed by Traian Băsescu while giving the following statement: “But if we are talking about the fight against corruption, I would make the following statement”. The second gesture (see Fig. 1b) is performed while Traian Băsescu gives the following statement: “They have received all Parliament’s approvals and so on”. It is a fragment in which the then Romanian President explains the evolution of the corruption cases at the Court of law regarding the dignitaries of the Romanian state. The third gesture (see Fig. 1c) is made while the candidate of the political right-wing gives the following statement: “But the victory in the fight against corruption, beyond the fact that ANI (*National Integrity Agency*) was made, and I had an important role to play in making this law”. The last gesture presented, the fourth (see Fig. 1d), is performed while Traian Băsescu gives the following statement: “You’ve never heard any of Petrom nor Alro Slatina nor Rodipet privatized in a way no one knew when and how”. The then president discusses here the stoppage of fraudulent privatizations during his term.

Figure 2 shows the timeframe with the ELAN interface that captures the first situation analyzed from the perspective of the hand gesture – political orientation relationship in the case of the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing, Traian Băsescu (see Fig. 1a).

Figure 2. Frame with ELAN Interface – Traian Băsescu’s statements on “The fight against corruption”, Realitatea TV, December 3rd, 2009.

ELAN 5.3 - MG_TB_coruptie_RTV_3dec2009.eaf

File Edit Annotation Tier Type Search View Options Window Help

Grid Text Subtitles Lexicon Comments Recognizers Metadata Controls

Verbal_TB_eng

Nr

Annotation

1 The answer is one:

2 Romania is the most corrupt country, as a perception, across Europe after five years of mandate Traian Basescu.

3 With a point. Point.

4 Otherwise ... And if we talk about what really is ...

5 I'm sorry, it's a report, if Transparency International does not tell you anything, we have a problem.

6 It is obvious that we have a problem with this phenomenon.

7 We have to admit it.

8 The question is: why do we fail every time?

9 And my answer is: because we try to politicize the act of justice every time

10 And the corruption of the one who was before, on the occasion of the people.

Selection: 00:02:26.990 - 00:02:28.300 1310

Verbal_TB_ro [14] 30.000

Verbal_TB_eng [14] 00:00:01.000 00:00:02.000 00:00:03.000 00:00:04.000 00:00:05.000 00:00:06.000 00:00:07.000 00:00:08.000 00:00:09.000 00:00:10.000

Verbal_MG_ro [14]

Verbal_MG_eng [14]

Verbal_Moderator_ro [14]

Verbal_Moderator_eng [14]

SemioticTypes_Conversational [22] Cohesive

SemioticTypes_Ideational [14]

_Emblems [14]

_Illustrators [22] Deictic

SemioticTypes_Adaptors [14]

_Self-Adaptors [14]

_Object-Adaptors [14]

Head [24] HeadForn BowedHead HeadForward

Gaze_Direction [24] GazeForward G GazeForward

Gaze_Interlocutor [24] ToModerator A ToModerator

Face_General Aspect [14] NoExpressions

Face_Eyes [14] Extra-Open Extra-Open

Face_BrownEyes [14] NoM Raise NoMovements

Posture [14] BodyForward

Hand_Handedness [14] SingleHand

Hand_Openness [14] PalmClose

Hand_Orientation [22] PalmUp

Hand_Trajectory [22] HandUp

Hand_Fingers [22] IndexExtended

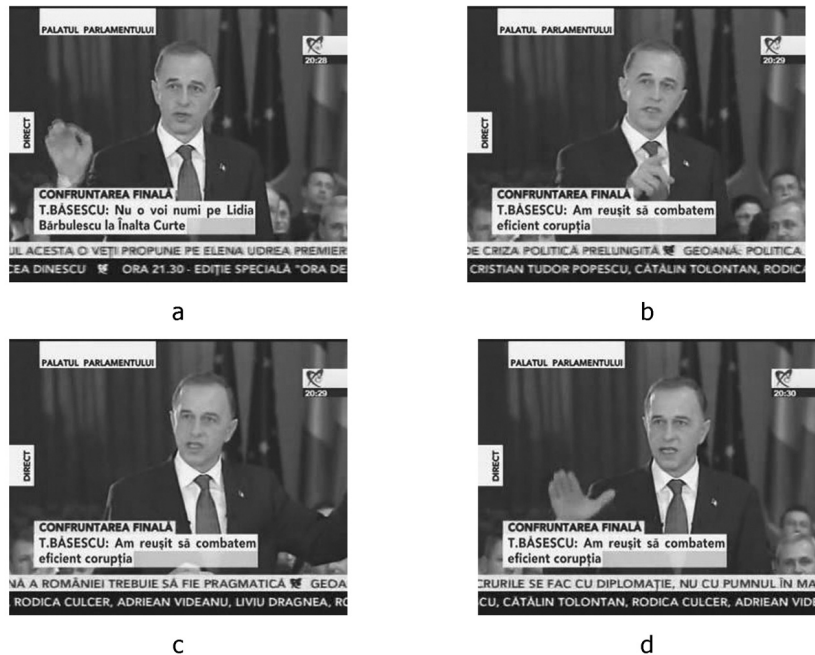
Semantic_Relations [22] Reinforces

Cinematic_Perspective [14] Oblique

Cinematic_Frame [14] LongShot Medium

In Figure 3, we present the relevant timeframes for the analysis of the relationship between gestures and the ideological orientation in the case of the candidate affiliated to the left wing, Mircea Geoană.

Figure 3. The relationship between hand gestures and political orientation in the case of the candidate affiliated to the left wing, Mircea Geoană: a, b, d – gestures executed with the right hand, c – gesture executed with the left hand.



The first gesture (see Fig. 3a) is performed by Mircea Geoană while giving the following statement: “Romania is the most corrupt country, as a perception, across Europe after five years of mandate Traian Basescu. With a point. Point”. The second gesture (see Fig. 3b) is made by Mircea Geoană while giving the following statement: “And my answer is: because we try to politicize the act of justice every time, and the corruptions of the one who was before are the enemies of the people”. The third gesture (see Fig. 3c) is performed by the candidate affiliated to the left-wing with his left hand, this time while continuing the previous statement: “and corruption around the man of the power of the day is protected by the Romanian state system”. The fourth gesture (see Fig. 3d) is made by Mircea Geoană with his right hand, while giving the following statement: “The most corrupt country in Europe, five years of Mr Basescu’s mandate”.

Figure 4 illustrates the timeframe with the ELAN interface that captures the first situation analyzed from the perspective of the relationship between hand gestures and political orientation in the case of the candidate affiliated to the left-wing (see Fig. 3a).

Figure 4. ELAN Interface Frame – Mircea Geoană statements on “The fight against corruption” theme, Realitatea TV, December 3rd, 2009.

The screenshot displays the ELAN 5.3 interface for the file 'MG_TB_coruptie_RTV_3dec2009.eaf'. The top menu bar includes File, Edit, Annotation, Tier, Type, Search, View, Options, Window, and Help. Below the menu is a toolbar with icons for various functions. The main window is divided into several panes. On the left, there is a video preview pane showing a frame of Mircea Geoană speaking. The central pane displays a list of annotations for the 'Verbal_MG_eng' tier. The bottom pane shows a timeline with various tiers and their corresponding data points.

Annotations:

- 1 The answer is one:
- 2 Romania is the most corrupt country, as a perception, across Europe after five years of mandate Traian Basescu.
- 3 With a point. Point.
- 4 Otherwise ... And if we talk about what really is ...
- 5 I'm sorry, it's a report, if Transparency International does not tell you anything, we have a problem.
- 6 It is obvious that we have a problem with this phenomenon.
- 7 We have to admit it.
- 8 The question is: why do we fail every time?
- 9 And my answer is: because we try to politicize the act of justice every time
- 10 And the interpretation of the act who was before us the essence of the people.

Timeline:

Tier	Time	Value
Verbal_TB_ro [14]	00:01:14.836	România este cea mai coruptă țară, ca percepție, din întreaga Europă, după cinci ani de mandat.
Verbal_TB_eng [14]	00:01:14.836	Romania is the most corrupt country, as a perception, across Europe after five years of mandate Traian Basescu.
Verbal_MG_ro [14]	00:01:14.836	Cu punct. Punct.
Verbal_MG_eng [14]	00:01:14.836	With a point. Point.
Verbal_Moderator_ro [14]	00:01:14.836	Otherwise ... And if we talk about what really is ...
Verbal_Moderator_eng [14]	00:01:14.836	Otherwise ... And if we talk about what really is ...
SemioticTypes_Conversational [24]	00:01:14.836	Cohesive
SemioticTypes_Ideational [24]	00:01:14.836	ring gesture
_Emblems [24]	00:01:14.836	
_Illustrators [24]	00:01:14.836	
SemioticTypes_Adaptors [24]	00:01:14.836	
_Self-Adaptors [24]	00:01:14.836	
_Object-Adaptors [24]	00:01:14.836	
Head [24]	00:01:14.836	TiltRight, HeadForward
Gaze_Direction [24]	00:01:14.836	GazeForward
Gaze_Interlocutor [24]	00:01:14.836	ToModerator, ToModerator
Face_General Aspect [24]	00:01:14.836	NoExpressions
Face_Eyes [24]	00:01:14.836	Extra-Open, C Extra-Open
Face_BrownEyes [24]	00:01:14.836	NoMovements
Posture [24]	00:01:14.836	Raise, NoMovements
Hand_Handedness [24]	00:01:14.836	SingleHand
Hand_Openness [24]	00:01:14.836	PalmOther
Hand_Orientation [24]	00:01:14.836	PalmDown
Hand_Trajectory [24]	00:01:14.836	HandDown
Hand_Fingers [24]	00:01:14.836	FingersOther
Semantic_Relations [24]	00:01:14.836	Reinforces
Cinematic_Perspective [24]	00:01:14.836	
Cinematic_Frame [24]	00:01:14.836	

Analysis and interpretation of results

The situations presented in the two examples (Fig. 1, respectively Fig. 3) capture moments relevant to our discussion regarding the relationship between hand gestures, or *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures), and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics) of the candidates.

It can be easily seen that in the first example (Fig. 1), all those four gestures made by the candidate Traian Bănescu are gestures performed with the left hand. Basically, in the analyzed sequence, most of the hand gestures performed by the candidate affiliated to the right-wing are performed with the left hand (11 of 14 gestures, meaning 79% of gestures). There are some moments in which he performs gestures with both hands (3 of 14 gestures, meaning 21 % of gestures). In addition, all those four gestures executed by the candidate Traian Bănescu have *deictic* value (the *pointing gesture* family).

We also note that all statements accompanying such gestures express ideas with *positive valence*, which refer to the achievements of the then President, especially those relating to “the fight against corruption”. The exception is only the last statement, in which the candidate of the political right-wing indirectly associates the phenomenon of fraudulent privatizations with the political left-wing. Accordingly, Traian Băsescu proposes some representations to the public, a certain way of indexation of the corruption phenomenon.

The analysis shows that in all the cases analyzed, the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing, Traian Băsescu, during spoken clauses with positive valence, performs left hand gestures. Practically, the relationship between the gestures performed with the left hand and the political orientation of the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing is asymmetric. Through the gestures performed, the right-wing candidate is continuously offering clues of the type “whether the Speaker is talking of the left or the right” (Poggi & Vincze, 2009, p. 89). In the case of Traian Băsescu’s last gesture, in which he builds a certain indexing of the phenomenon of corruption, his intention of persuading the audience is obvious. The representative of the right-wing provides to the audience clues that can determine the orientation of the audience’s assessments in a certain sense, that of the reading preferred by the speaker. According to Poggi and Vincze (2009), such behavior “always reminding the audience what party is one talking about can have a subtly evaluative import, thus being persuasive in a stricter sense” (p. 89).

Also, research shows that the dominant function of the hand gestures performed by the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing is the *communicative function*. Traian Băsescu, when performing left-handed gestures, makes explicit references in his verbal discourse on right-wing events and subjects, with only one exception. We cannot advance the hypothesis that such gestures accompanying his speech are mainly performed to “retrieve the corresponding images, concepts or words” (Poggi & Vincze, 2009, p. 89), as is the case with predominantly *cognitive* gestures.

The situations presented in the second example (see Fig. 3), help us to analyze the relationship between hand gestures, or *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures), and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics) for the left-wing affiliated candidate, Mircea Geoană. The first three hand gestures performed by the left-wing representative are gestures of *deictic* value (the *pointing gesture* family). The last performed gesture is part of the *Palm Up Open Hand* (PUOH) type of gestures’ family.

The first two gestures in the *pointing gesture* family are executed with the right hand, while Mircea Geoană refers to topics and ideas with *negative valence*: “Romania is the most corrupt country, as a perception, across Europe after five years of mandate Traian Basescu”, respectiv “because we try to politicize the act of justice every time”. The third gesture, also with deictic value, of *pointing gesture* type, is executed by the candidate affiliated to the political left-wing with his right hand this time. It is a gesture directed towards its interlocutor and is accompanied by the statement: “and corruption around the man of the power of the day is protected by the Romanian state system”. As a matter of fact, Mircea Geoană builds a discursive strategy that suggests to the audience a certain representation of the corruption mechanisms and phenomenon: the current power system – represented by the acting President today, here – is the one that protects the corruption around the dignitaries of the state. As mentioned earlier, the fourth performed gesture is part of the *Palm Up Open Hand* (PUOH) gesture family and is accompanied by the following statement: “The most corrupt country in Europe, five years of Mr Basescu’s mandate”. We recall that according to McNeill (2005),

when performing such a gesture, the speaker's intention is "the idea of presenting a discursive object" (p. 53). Moreover, according to Müller (2004), by performing such a gesture, the participants in the discursive exchange are invited "to take on a shared perspective" on the "abstract discursive object" represented by the gesture (p. 233). In our situation, the abstract discursive object represented by the gesture is the word "corruption" associated to Romania in the mandate of the acting President. Mircea Geoană, the representative of the political left-wing, invites the audience to share such a perspective by performing a rhythmically repeated *Palm Up Open Hand* (PUOH) gesture.

Every time he performs gestures with his right hand, Mircea Geoană makes explicit references in his verbal discourse to ideas with negative valence, to events the political right-wing is responsible for. We can say that there is a correspondence, a certain symmetry between the gestures executed with the right hand and the emotional valence of the messages in the situation of the candidate Victor Ponta. Practically, the representative of the political left-wing proposes to the audience certain representations of the corruption phenomenon and mechanisms by establishing a significant connection between topics expressing ideas with negative valence and the political orientation of his counter-candidate.

References to topics and events during the verbal discourse are also explicit when accompanying gestures. Therefore, the dominant function of the hand gestures performed by the candidate affiliated to the left-wing political party is also the *communicative function*.

Concerning the second research question, namely the identification and analysis of the differences that occur in the way the political actors managed the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics) for the sequences analyzed during the debate of December 2009 as compared to the debates of 2014, we can mention few aspects.

The first point refers to the fact that in both communication contexts (TV debates from 2009 and 2014) most of the gestures performed by the political actors have *deictic value* and are part of the *pointing gesture* family (Drăgan, 2017, p. 44). Practically, they are gestures with pragmatic function, through which the political actors try to present events and themes from a certain perspective, with the intention of persuading the audience.

The second issue concerns the type and quality of the relationship between hand gestures and political orientation of the political actors in all the communication situations analyzed during the presidential debates of December 2009 and November 2014 respectively. We keep in mind that for the sequences analyzed in the November 2014 debates, the left-wing candidate, Victor Ponta, we have identified a certain correspondence between the gestures performed with the left hand and political orientation (Drăgan, 2017, p. 44). Each gesture performed by the candidate representing the left-wing was then accompanied by clauses with positive valence (Drăgan, 2017, p. 42).

This time, in the context of the debate of December 2009, we have identified a correspondence that appears between the right hand gestures and emotional valences of the messages in the situation of the left-wing candidate, Mircea Geoană. The representative of the political left-wing establishes significant connections between clauses with negative valence and the ideological orientation of his counter-candidate.

The situation is slightly different when we discuss about the representative of the political right-wing in both communication contexts, December 2009 and November 2014 respectively.

In the study dealing with the communicational sequences during the debates of November 2014, we have not been able to establish a correlation between the right-handed gestures

and political orientation of the candidate Klaus Iohannis, his messages predominantly referred to ideas with positive valence. Instead, we have identified a correlation between the gestures performed by the right-wing political representative with his left hand and his political orientation, such gestures being accompanied each time by predominantly clauses with negative valence (Drăgan, 2017, p. 44).

Also, it was not possible to establish in this study a correlation between the gestures executed with the left-hand and political orientation of the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing, Traian Băsescu. Each time the messages accompanying the gestures performed with his left hand were messages with emotionally positive contents.

A last aspect refers to the dominant function of the gestures performed by the political actors in each of the two communication contexts. We have established that in all the analyzed communication sequences, the dominant function of the gestures was the communicative function. The political actors explicitly refer in their verbal discourse to identifiable events and subjects, with the intention of persuading the audience in one direction or another.

Conclusions

In this article we tried to describe, analyze and interpret the differences that arise among political actors, from the perspective of how they manage the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics) in the December 2009 presidential debate, when compared to the situation from November 2014.

A first conclusion refers to the type and quality of the relationship between gestures and political orientation of the political actors in all analyzed communicational situations. For the analyzed sequence of the December 2009 debate, we identified a correlation between the type of gestures performed with the right hand and the emotional valence of the messages in the situation of the left-wing candidate, Mircea Geoană. The representative of the political left-wing establishes significant connections between the ideas with negative emotional valence and political orientation of his counter-candidate, a result consistent with the predictions of Casasanto and Jasmin (2010). As for the representative of the political right-wing, Traian Băsescu, although the messages accompanying left-handed gestures were messages with positively emotional valences, it was not possible to establish a correlation between the left-hand gestures and political orientation.

In the context of the November 2014 debates, we have seen that we can discuss about a correlation between the gestures performed with the left hand and political orientation of the left-wing representative, Victor Ponta (Drăgan, 2017, p. 44). Moreover, the gestures carried out by the candidate affiliated to the political left-wing have been accompanied by spoken clauses with positive valence (Drăgan, 2017, p. 42). Regarding the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing, Klaus Iohannis, it was not possible to establish a correlation between the gestures executed with the right hand and political orientation, although the messages were predominantly referred to ideas with positive valence. However, we have identified a correlation between the gestures performed by the political right-wing representative with his left hand and his political orientation, as such gestures were accompanied each time by clauses with negative valence (Drăgan, 2017, p. 44).

Therefore, from the perspective of the way in which the political actors have managed the relationship between hand gestures, or *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures), and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics), the results obtained are different in the two communication contexts, the December 2009 presidential debate and the debates of November 2014. While for the left-wing candidate, in the context of the presidential debates of 2014, we could discuss about results similar to those obtained in other studies (Calbris, 2003, p. 67; Poggi & Vincze, 2009, p. 87), for the political right-wing candidate, Klaus Iohannis, things are different. Klaus Iohannis is more interested in projecting negative representations and messages by strategies of associating them to the gestures performed and political orientation of the adversary (Drăgan, 2017, p. 44). A similar strategy was used by Traian Băsescu in December 2009, the candidate affiliated to the political right-wing, when he performed a gesture with his left hand while discussing a topic with negative valence associated to the political left-wing (see Fig 1d).

Another conclusion concerns the dominant function of the gestures performed by the political actors in each of the two communication contexts. As we observed earlier, due to the fact that the political actors explicitly refer in the verbal discourse on easily identifiable events and topics, with the intention of persuading the audience in one direction or another, the *communicative function* is the dominant function of the gestures in all the communication sequences analyzed. Moreover, most of the gestures performed by the political actors in both communication contexts are *gestures with pragmatic function* through which political actors attempt to present events and themes from a certain perspective, with the intention of persuading the audience. Most of these gestures have *deictic value* and are part of the *pointing gesture* family (Drăgan, 2017, p. 44). There is only one exception, when Mircea Geoană, the representative of the political left-wing, performs a gesture that is part of the *Palm Up Open Hand* (PUOH) gesture family, inviting the audience to share a certain perspective on the corruption phenomenon.

Finally, the findings of our research support the idea that the political actor whose semiotic behavior will appear more predictable, whose meanings will be congruent with the meanings of the verbal discourse, and which will have a balanced dynamics of the relationship between hand gestures, or *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures), and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics), can create a more pronounced sense of preference. In fact, it will look more convincing in front of the audience, and its messages will have a higher persuasive potential.

Regarding limitations of the research, we can discuss two issues. The first refers to the limits of the research design, meaning that in order to obtain relevant results regarding the relationship between hand gestures, or *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures), and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics), it is necessary to expand the research corpus, not only by analyzing a short sequence (lasting about 5 minutes). Thus, we may see how political actors relate to important topics and themes from the perspective of this relationship. The second limit concerns the relevance of this type of relationship in the effort of political actors to persuade audience in face-to-face interactions such as TV debates. The findings of our research suggest that the management of *handedness – political orientation* and *handedness – emotional valence* relationships influences “image capital” of political actors, and produces effects in terms of credibility and political persuasion. The symbolic use of gestures with left or right hand along the transverse axis in correlation with the emotional valence of messages needs to be investigated and developed in further studies. Moreover, we consider

that this predisposition of political actors for gestures with pragmatic function needs to be detailed in further studies, from the perspective of how this type of relationships (left/right polarity in gestures and politics) is managed.

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