

Retoryka nowych mediów/nowych wyzwań

Rhetoric of new media/new challenges

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Aggressive rhetoric in Croatian post-election political discourse

Agresywna retoryka w chorwackim dyskursie powyborczym

Abstract

Aggressive rhetoric in Croatian political discourse became particularly prominent during the parliamentary election in 2015. A deep polarization of society yielded a new political option, one of the strongest since the beginning of Croatian independence in 1990. After the great election success, MOST got the opportunity to form the new Croatian Government either with HDZ or SDP, the two most influential parties in Croatia. This situation caused enormous tension in the post-election period and consequently intensified the politicians' aggressive rhetoric. The aim of this study is to describe, interpret and explicate linguistic and rhetorical devices which contributed to the aggressiveness, and ultimately conclude which of the political options listed above is the most aggressive.

Agresywna retoryka w chorwackim dyskursie politycznym zintensyfikowała się podczas wyborów parlamentarnych w 2015 roku. Głęboka polaryzacja społeczeństwa wyniosła do władzy nową opcję polityczną – partię MOST – jedną z najsilniejszych partii od początków niezależnego państwa chorwackiego w 1990 r. Partia ta miała utworzyć nowy rząd koalicyjny albo z HDZ, albo z SDP – pozostałymi dwiema najbardziej wpływowymi partiami. Rywalizacja w negocjacjach koalicyjnych wywołała duże napięcie, a w konsekwencji wzrost agresji w wypowiedziach politycznych. Niniejsze studium ma na celu opisać, zinterpretować i wyjaśnić użycie zabiegów językowych i retorycznych, które odpowiedzialne były za wzrost agresywności dyskursu politycznego, a także wskazać, którą z partii uznać można za najbardziej agresywną.

Key words

aggressive rhetoric, hate speech, political discourse, rhetorical devices
agresywna retoryka, mowa nienawiści, dyskurs polityczny, zabiegi retoryczne

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1. Introduction

Croatian political discourse, just like many other national discourses, is a very interesting field for rhetorical research. This paper is an attempt to familiarize the public with changes in Croatian political discourse after the parliamentary election of 2015, the most marked one of which is an ever-increasing aggressiveness in the politicians' public appearances.

According to many Croatian communication scholars and political scientists (e.g., Drezga 2015; Kišiček 2018; Vujić 2007) aggressiveness in Croatian political discourse has been on the rise over the past decade. However, this is not the first time that it had occurred. Several times during Croatia's twenty nine years of independence, aggressive rhetoric was present in public discourse, especially at the beginning of the 1990s, during and after the Homeland war. This rhetorical model may have been understandable during wartime, when questions of national integrity, separation from the multinational state of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) and peace negotiations of the new, independent republic of Croatia burdened the discourse (Drezga 2015). Yet, how could the resurfacing of aggressive rhetoric be explained twenty-five years later? In our opinion, it is the result of a deep polarization of the Croatian society caused by numerous socio-economic factors, e. g. the global economic crisis, general impoverishment, and the lowering of living standard, non-transparent privatization, and corruption. Politicians, be it consciously or unconsciously, tend to deepen the polarization through their discourse. Some

1. Contributed to the manuscript with the concept and thesis design, theoretical framework, methodology used in the preparation of a manuscript, and with the data interpretation.

2. Contributed to the manuscript by researching the corpus, and with the data interpretation.

do it because they “lack arguments, some are eager to share their opinion, but are not acquainted with the facts” (Kišiček 2017, 211), some do not follow the culture of dialog, whilst some incessantly and purposely impose a choice between two extremes, *us* and *them*, *ours* and *yours*. This reflects a low level of political culture, which is stripped down to the dichotomy friend–foe, the rationalization that whoever is not with us is against us (Drezga 2015).

The period from 1991 (when Croatia became independent) to the present has been marked by a rivalry between the two biggest political parties – HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) and SDP (Social Democratic Party). Despite all the mentioned social issues, a third option never arose (except for the liberals, who held sway for only a short period in the 1990s) until 2015, when the underdog MOST (Bridge of Independent Lists) capitalized on the public disillusionment in the two strongest parties. Social polarization was transposed onto the political scene (and vice versa), leading aggressive rhetoric to culminate as early as the pre-election campaign. This was expected, as politicians have been known to use all linguistic means to fight for every vote. Accordingly, the public appearances of Croatian politicians were often filled with insults so as to denigrate an opponent and at the same time signal their wrongdoings (e.g., Vančura and Tomić 2013). What was surprising was the extension of this aggressive rhetoric into the post-election period, when rhetoric is expected to soften. However, since no one won the majority of seats, another campaign started after the election. Thus, the period after the eighth parliamentary election in Croatia was so specific that it begs a study limited only to this timeframe. It was the longest and the most unpredictable period of government formation in the recent Croatian history that lasted 76 days, from 8 November 2015 when the election was held to 22 January 2016 when the Prime Minister finally took office. Thus, to be able to analyze and interpret the political discourse of the moment, it is important to offer a brief overview of the political situation from which it arose.

1.1. The eighth parliamentary election in independent Croatia

The 2015 Croatian parliamentary election was the eighth since the 1990 first multi-party election, and the first since Croatia joined the European Union in 2013. “The elections also introduced several novelties into party competition” (Raos 2015, 11), namely the creation of broad pre-election coalitions and preferential voting. “These changes rendered the party system less stable and transparent, which consequentially made the election and formation of the parliamentary majority less predictable” (Raos 2015, 11). Thus, the ruling SDP (Social Democratic Party) created a broad center-left coalition *Hrvatska raste* (Croatia is Growing), while HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) formed the center-right *Domoljubna koalicija*

(Patriotic Coalition). Apart from these, several smaller coalitions were also formed (Raos 2015).

The actual outcome of the election was unprecedented and staggering. As per the results listed on the website of the Croatian Parliament on April 19th, 2016, <http://www.sabor.hr/8th-term>, the election produced a hung parliament. In other words, Patriotic Coalition won 59 and Croatia is Growing 56 seats. Thus, for the first time, the third contender became crucial for the formation of a parliamentary majority. In this case, this was MOST, a list of candidates which won only 19 seats. “It became obvious that MOST,” this heterogeneous, ideologically undefined platform of regional provenience “would be playing the key role in the negotiation process” (Raos 2015, 6). The election was followed by more than 45 days of negotiations between all three parties, producing numerous twists and turns mainly due to MOST’s frequently changing demands put before the two larger, ideologically-based, coalitions. Finally, MOST decided to lend its support to HDZ. The coalition was further supported by three more representatives, giving it a slim majority of 78 seats in the Parliament. A Croatian-Canadian entrepreneur Tihomir Orešković, generally unknown to the public, became the new Prime Minister.³ This political drama produced numerous public appearances charged with an increasing amount of aggression which instigated this analysis. Before examining the topic at hand, several terms important for its understanding will be defined.

2. Politics and political discourse

Politics could be defined in many different ways, since “its meaning changes with every change of culture and circumstance” (Minogue 1995, 2). Some authors (Bayram 2010; Chilton 2004) define politics as a “struggle for power.” According to Chilton (2004), this struggle or conflict is between two sides; between those who want to affirm or prove their power and those who want to oppose it. However, Chilton’s insight goes beyond this definition, for he considers politics as “co-operation,” as well, meaning that “politics is used as a tool by which the institutions and the practices of any society interact to solve issues related to money, influence, and liberty” (Chilton 2004, 3). On the other hand, Bayram (2010, 2) claims that “the aim of this struggle for power is to accomplish certain political, economic and social goals.” Politics can be defined as “all activities which support seizing and defending power. It is concerned with the power of making decisions, of controlling people’s behavior and values” (Jones and Peccei 2004, 36). However,

3. Apart from Raos (2015), the website https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Croatian_parliamentary_election was also used to obtain data on timelines and numbers of seats, accessed on April 25, 2016, and January 25, 2021.

van Dijk gives a more specific definition of politics “as the set of activities that politicians engage in” (2002, 20). According to Wodak and Cillia (2006, 727), the definition of politics “ranges from a wide extension of the concept according to which every social utterance or practice of the human as a *zoon politikon* is ‘political’ to a notion of politics referring only to the use of language by politicians in various settings and in political institutions.”

Political discourse can be defined “as the site where politicians’ multiple ideological identities are enacted: by definition they speak as politicians, but also as conservatives or liberals” (van Dijk 2002, 22). Political discourse is called “political” because of the “functions it fulfills in the political process” (van Dijk 2008, 176). Seemingly, the features of political discourse vary, as do its purposes. Provided that politicians interact with society in general, their purposes may be: “to persuade voters to be a party loyal and to turn up to vote, to move a floating voters’ party loyalty, to make people adopt general political or social attitudes in order to attract support for a present policy” (Rozina and Karapetjana 2009, 114).

3. Aggressive rhetoric vs. hate speech

In order to achieve positive-political-self-presentation and negative-political-other-presentation politicians use different methods and strategies. One of them is aggressive rhetoric, which they resort to for different reasons. Spencer-Oatey (2002 quoted in Vančura and Tomić 2013, 145) claims that rhetoric “is susceptible to ethnocentrism,” which can certainly be applied to Croatia, as the country is very sensitive about its national identity due to the above mentioned historical circumstances. Other authors (e.g., Kryžan-Stanojević and Feller 2009 quoted in Vidović Bolt 2013, 131) state that the “source of aggressive rhetoric should be sought in ideologies rooted in hatred towards the other” or “ideologies based on the creation of the image of a certain politician as strong, dynamic, determined and uncompromising” (Vidović Bolt 2013, 13). However, unfortunately, most often the source is simply “a low level of politicians’ culture, education and civilization” (Kišiček 2018, 124).

Initially, verbal aggression was understood as a form of verbal behavior aimed at insulting or deliberately harming an individual or a group of people, [...] accompanied by a highly emotional state of the speaker [...]. Now [...] aggressiveness is becoming increasingly associated with values such as persistence, ambition, and charisma (Petlyuchenko and Artiukhova 2015, 191).

Similarly, Kamińska-Szmaj (2007 quoted in Vidović Bolt 2013, 131) defines verbal aggression as “deliberate verbal behavior in public [...] which expresses negative emotions of the sender toward a person, institution or ideology and negatively qualifies someone (something) using linguistic means [...], which

are insulting and deviate from the linguistic and cultural norm.” These verbal assaults are realized using different models and strategies: insults, curse words, underestimating, mocking, but also stylistic and rhetorical figures – irony, sarcasm, allusion, metaphor, fallacies (Vidović Bolt 2013, Vančura and Tomić 2013). The distinctions between the terms aggressive speech, abusive speech, insult and invective⁴ are very fuzzy, so for the purposes of this paper, we will use the term aggressive speech, which includes all the others.

Aggressive rhetoric may be viewed as a means of practicing one’s freedom of speech. This is important since it may act as a way to let off steam which, if repressed, may eventually lead to violence (Alaburić 2003, 5-6). Despite the common belief that aggressive rhetoric and hate speech overlap, there is a clear distinction between the two. What is usually understood by the term hate speech is a “verbal expression of aggression towards minority groups” (Vilović 2011, 68). The appearance of this term in Croatia is connected with the beginning of the Homeland war in the 1990’s, when politicians and the media shaped and solidified it. Today it has been relocated to websites, social media and forums (Vilović 2011).

Hate speech is thoroughly defined in legal theory. The most often quoted source is the *Recommendation of the Council of Europe*, according to which hate speech includes

all forms of expression which disseminate, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed through aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and enmity towards minorities, immigrants and people of immigrant descent.⁵

The UN defines “hate speech as the advocacy of hatred based on nationality, race or religion,” as in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (article 20, paragraph 2). According to the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1966), member countries are required to not only prohibit hate speech, but also qualify it as an offence punishable by law (Munivrana Vajda and Šurina Marton 2016). Consequently, it becomes clear that aggressive rhetoric cannot be qualified as hate speech, as hate speech does not include: critiques of the government, government policies and the actions or viewpoints of individuals in the government. Politicians are quick to label any instance of aggressive rhetoric as hate speech so as to silence the political opponent.

4. *Invectiva oratio* or rhetorical invective is a well-known term denoting “intense speech with assaults at someone” (Marević quoted in Vidović Bolt, 2013, 131).

5. Recommendation No. R 97/20 on hate speech adopted by the *Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe* on October 30, 1997.

4. Purposes and methodology

This study set out to examine what kind of linguistic and rhetorical devices are used in aggressive speech, specifically in Croatian political discourse during the post-election period, from November 8, 2015 to January 22, 2016. The authors followed Fairclough's (1989, 26) three levels of linguistic analysis in aggressive discourse of Croatian politicians: descriptive (the one that remains within the formal properties of the text), interpretative (explains relationships between text and interaction) and explicative (explains relationships between interaction and social context). Within this framework the social context of statements which contain elements of aggressive rhetoric was described, and linguistic and rhetorical devices used to achieve aggressiveness were analyzed.

The corpus is based on statements and comments issued by the political figures involved in the intense post-election debates, polemics and public negotiation. These include the prominent representatives of the two strongest Croatian political parties SDP and HDZ, as well as the representatives of the new political party MOST. A hundred recorded (and then transcribed), and written statements of politicians were taken from the most relevant internet news portals (such as *večernji.hr*, *net.hr*, *tportal.hr*, *rtl.hr*, *hrt.hr*, *dnevnik.hr*, *slobodnadalmacija.hr*, *jutarnji.hr*, *novolist.hr*, *express.hr*, *telegram.hr*, YouTube) and reviewed. Not all of them proved relevant to the research at hand, as they did not contain elements of aggressive rhetoric, so the final number of analyzed statements was 30.

First, in order to contextualize the appearance of aggressive speech in these excerpted statements, we have divided them according to six crucial events during the post-election period, these situations being: key figure of MOST expelled, MOST – SDP coalition, MOST – SDP coalition broken off, MOST – HDZ coalition, government formation, public appearances of the president.⁶

The presentation of results has been divided into two parts. In the first part, the statements related to the crucial events are interpreted within their political context. In the second part linguistic and rhetorical devices used in the excerpted statements, which contribute to the aggressiveness of Croatian political discourse, are listed, categorized and interpreted.

6. Results and discussion

6.1. Contextualizing the excerpted statements

6.1.1. The first event refers to the decision of MOST to expel their member Drago Prgomet on the basis of his private talks with the Croatia is Growing coalition.

6. The role of the Croatian president in the election process is that they name the prime minister-designate of the new Croatian government, which is why in this case the president also became the target of aggressive rhetoric.

With Prgomet expelled, MOST started to collapse, as three other prominent members soon left the party. One of them, Stipe Petrina, accused Božo Petrov, MOST's leader, of favoring the right-wing option, while most members were more in favor of the leftist one. So, attempts at breaking up MOST seemed to be the way for the left-wing coalition to gain the much needed support. What follows is a statement by Stipe Petrina, well-known for his exhibitionism, aimed at MOST's secretary Nikola Grmoja. The parts in italics present examples of especially aggressive rhetoric.

Grmoja is a *liar*, a *stinky little rat* who asked me through my associate to get in touch with him. [...] They are *atrocious liars*, feel free to write that down! [...] When somebody *sells themselves for 10 or 10.000 euros*, it's the same, the common denominator for that is – whore. I used to be a sailor, but even *port whores* don't act like that (Petrina quoted in Večernji list 2015).

6.1.2. The second statement refers to the MOST – SDP coalition that is, the aftermath of the crucial meeting between MOST, SDP and HDZ where they were to sign an agreement about a tripartite government. HDZ refused to do so, and SDP signed, thus continuing the negotiations with MOST, whilst the door was shut for HDZ. HDZ's leader, Tomislav Karamarko, explained in an interview that he was tricked by Zoran Milanović into stating his decision first so that Milanović could triumph with HDZ out of the way. Below is a part of the interview Karamarko gave on the national television.

Well, that's *an enigma*, that's an enigma, that MOST which, got 19 mandates to begin with *on the basis of their stories that they want reforms that they want a new morality* in Croatian politics, actually now supports the ones *who'd for four years been devastating the country* economically. Let's not even get started on *the questions of world view* – relationship with the war veterans, Vukovar, Croatian country, invalids of the Homeland War. And now all of a sudden this *patriotic* group that calls itself MOST comes to them and *gives them a mouth to mouth* to keep alive for a bit longer those who have absolutely nothing to do with Croatia. And to me that's *an enigma* (Karamarko quoted in HRT.hr 2015).

6.1.3. This statement is taken from an interview given by MOST leader only two days after the above mentioned agreement. Namely, MOST broke off the agreement with SDP on the grounds that SDP was back-handedly phoning their members and persuading them to leave MOST and join SDP.

I think that everything that's been happening over the last five weeks after the elections says enough about *who's lying*. That is, who is *saying falsehoods*. After all, was it not only a week ago that Mister Milanović himself appeared in public and said please leave MOST and join the Croatia Is Growing coalition? [...] If even the boundary can't be respected, then that means that *there is no correctness on the part of the other side*, and that we won't tolerate. [...] We won't *reveal names* to the public at this moment because that's what the common body decided. Of course, I expect that all researches into who it was, what it was will begin now, and it will probably be discovered, but I don't want to reveal it because to me *that's a disgrace*, not ours, but *the disgrace* of some other people (Petrov quoted in RTL.hr 2015).

6.1.4. Having broken off the agreement with SDP, MOST reopened negotiations with HDZ, which prompted a quick response from SDP leader, Zoran Milanović.

You mentioned *Bandić and his crew*. Well *they were looking to be bought*. From the first minute till they signed. Nobody won the elections, HDZ and MOST will be forming a government, that's so clear. And this isn't over. I don't want to use metaphors, but this is *a weak government*, this is, unfortunately, a prime minister-designate that not only will not be deciding, there is something worse – *there is a danger* that he won't even be asked (Milanović quoted in HRT.hr 2016).

6.1.5. Below is a statement by Zoran Milanović on government formation. The exhausting negotiations were to come to an end after deciding on a prime minister-designate. MOST, however, insisted on a non-partisan candidate, which caused a debate on whether someone who was not legitimized by the public vote could perform the function of the Prime Minister. Despite the heated debate, Tihomir Orešković became the new prime minister-designate and, subsequently, Prime Minister. Controversies kept arising over the coalition's choice of ministers and one of the more memorable affairs arose when the Electronic Media Council suspended a local TV station because of their anchor's hate speech. The participants in the march brought a *partisan* and a *Chetnik cap*⁷ to the president of the Council and asked her to choose one. Of course, what they implied was quite obvious. But what was even more disturbing was the fact that the vice-president of the Parliament Ivan Tepeš joined the protests. Precisely this kind of labeling of opponents with the attribute *fascist* or *nazi* disables any attempt at dialog and paves the way for hate speech.

And the worst part of the whole story is that *this mob* is led by two *corpulent philo-fascists*, one of whom is the vice-president of the Croatian Parliament. Orešković, Mr. Orešković, remains silent. *He cannot remain silent* in the face of such a statement. And if he *wants to be called* Prime Minister Orešković, *he must react* to these things. Because this is *the baggage* of those who, in a time crunch, their time running out fast, *brought him to play the role* of the Prime Minister. *He is the Prime Minister legally, but he ought to be so morally, spiritually. He must react* to that. That man who in his spare time plays the role of the vice-president of the Croatian Parliament, but spiritually, and in all other senses, is nothing but a *street instigator*, should also be removed from his post (Milanović quoted in Žapčić 2016a).

6.1.6. In this statement SDP leader Zoran Milanović commented on the public appearances of the president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, a former HDZ member. Due to her political background, Zoran Milanović accused the president of pressuring MOST to form a coalition with HDZ, “While Kitarović and Karavaso

7. Terms *partisan*, *chetnik*, *ustasha* refer to members of different movements who fought in the Second World War; *partisan* — a member of an armed group formed to fight secretly against an occupying force, in particular one operating in German-occupied Yugoslavia; *chetnik* — a member of a Serbian nationalist guerrilla force; *ustasha* — Croatian fascist movement that nominally ruled the Independent State of Croatia during World War II. Nowadays, these relics of totalitarian phraseology are used in the political arena in former Yugoslav countries to sustain a false ideological polarization between the “left” and “right.”

were *talking smack* in Hungary, we were helping people. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović is *a handful of nothing*, I've known her since the time *she was sticking out of Tomislav Karamarko's pocket*" (Milanović quoted in Bertek 2016).

6.2. Linguistic and rhetorical devices in aggressive speech

In the second part of the research we have grouped the devices we found in the excerpted statements into two categories – linguistic devices and rhetorical devices, both of which politicians use to make their discourse more aggressive.

6.2.1. Linguistic devices

Linguistic devices used to describe opponents can be divided on the basis of the class of words they belong to: nouns, adjectives and verbs. Many of the nouns found in our corpus function as labels aiming to discredit the opponent. The labels can be divided into three categories based on their pragmatic meaning: crime, historical-military and character trait.

- a) Category 1 — crime: *criminals, robbers, thieves, criminal organization, mob*
- b) Category 2 — historical-military: *blackshirts, militants, philo-Nazi, instigator, Orjuna-member, mental communist, Serbs, communists, traitors*
- c) Category 3 — character trait: *liar, rat, masochist, fool, demi-monde, (port) whore, wimp*

The first category shows the deep antagonism in Croatian society, where it is not enough to simply refute the opponent's political program, but they have to be attacked using the *ad personam* fallacy. The opponent, thus, must be portrayed as a criminal, systematically plundering the motherland, with the other option plays the part of the morally superior savior who will end this pillage and bring well-being for all. The examples from the second category are very common in Croatian political discourse. The references to the Independent State of Croatia and Yugoslavia have for a long time burdened Croatian public life. Using sweeping generalizations, politicians and their supporters are divided into two camps – the *communists* and the *neo-fascists*. Such labeling places any left- or right-leaning option at the edge of the political spectrum, whereas, in truth, both SDP and HDZ advocate similar centrist policies. The move essentializes political actors, stripping the discourse of refinement and constituting an insurmountable gap between the true *patriot* on the one hand and the true *progressive* on the other, between *blackshirts* and *partisans, militants* and *nonmilitants/pacifists, fascists* and *liberals/democrats*, all of which are false dilemmas. The third category offers a good glimpse into the Croatian society. Apart from what may be called the standard variety of insults (subsumed

under the term aggressive speech) ranging from the lighter ones, such as *liar*, to the more bitter ones, like *rat*, labels such as *whore* and *wimp* clearly signal Croatian society's heteronormativity. The feminine is still related to weakness and to a lack of principle, which is why a lack of firmness is portrayed as not masculine.

Apart from labels, which are the most obvious manifestation of aggressive rhetoric, aggression permeates other nouns as well, contributing to the electrification of the public sphere. For example, lustration, the act of purifying the administration of alleged communist apparatchiks who have continued parasitizing on the state's resources even after independence was gained, has been called upon frequently as a method to signal the new administration's difference from the previous one. Moreover, in describing the rule of one's opponents as *hell*, *danger*, *catastrophe*, an atmosphere of false choice is created and the polarization of political arena is intensified.

Many adjectives (or in rhetorical analysis – epithets) have also been found, the function of which is rather similar to that of nouns. In other words, many of the adjectives function as qualifications and present ultimate judgments and rejections of the opponent's character. Again, the political and historical context is crucial for understanding qualifiers such as *Yugoslavian*, *pro-Ustashe*, *red*, *Ustashe*, *xenophobic*, *Chetnik*, *patriotic*. These adjectives serve to deepen the polarization by portraying any member of a leftist party as a communist and every member of the right-wing as a fascist, thus reducing the political fight as a struggle against a historical fiend. Qualifications on the criminal nature of the opponent's endeavors are also prominent, with adjectives *criminal* and *secret* appearing often to designate a lack of transparency on the opponent's part (e.g. "HDZ is a *secret* organization." "People from MOST have been elected to form parliamentary majority with a *criminal*, *spy* and *pro-Ustashe* coalition.").

However, the most interesting group might be qualifiers of personality. Here one can find a standard plethora of adjectives aimed at discrediting the opponent's ethos, their credibility: *dishonest*, *(im)moral*, *impolite*, *perfidious*, *inconsistent*. However, many of the adjectives paint a picture of the opponent as an outright threat which, again, blows the differences between the two contending sides out of proportion creating false dichotomies: *atrocious*, *extreme*, *rabid*, *wild*, *inhuman*, *crazy*, *dangerous* (e.g. "They are *atrocious* liars." "Red mob is *rabid*." "These are *perfidious* and *wild* people who threaten with latent violence and gas bottles."). Of course, both nouns and adjectives are often used as intensifiers, increasing the strength, aggressiveness and emotional effect of a statement.

The verbs found in the text further add to the creation of an atmosphere of division. Apart from the fact that politicians, *lie*, *cheat* and *steal*, they also *devastate*, *scare*, *destroy*, *belittle*, *impose*, *intimidate*, *butcher*. We may also include word

combination and idiomatic expressions, such as *red mob* or *rabid squirrels*, into linguistic analysis, but they are rhetorical devices, e.g. metaphors, and should be listed as such.

6.2.2. Rhetorical devices

There are numerous rhetorical devices in the analyzed statements which contribute to the aggressiveness of discourse in the post-election period, yet the analysis will focus on the three most important – repetition, metaphor, and fallacy. Repetition as a figure “can appear in any number of combinations and various degrees” (Škarić 2000, 136); as a repetition of sounds (at the beginning and/or at the end of a statement), or as a repetition of words or whole sentences. Repetition serves to emphasize what has been said, but in our examples it is used to amplify the aggressiveness of discourse. Here are some examples of repetition: “Well, *that’s an enigma, that’s an enigma*, that MOST which, well, got 19 mandates” (Karamarko quoted in HRT.hr 2015); “*Orešković, Mr. Orešković, remains silent*. He cannot *remain silent* in the face of such a statement. And if he wants to be called *Prime Minister Orešković*, he must react to these things” (Milanović quoted in Žapčić 2016a). The latter example could also be considered a gradation, starting with a sole reference to the new PM’s surname, which serves to call into question his legitimacy, followed by a belated attempt at politeness by referring to him as Mr. Orešković, only to culminate with a recognition of his position, at the same time questioning his dedication to it. Another SDP member, Peđa Grbin uses gradations as well: “Orešković is *a puppet*, Karamarko is *the puppet master* and Petrov is *an extra*” (Grbin quoted in Žapčić 2016b).

Many colorful metaphors have been used to label the opponent: *puppet, puppet master, rabid squirrels, mental communist, hatted club*⁸, *Zoka of Brussels*.⁹ Again, many examples amplify the ideological division and allegorize the act of finding out the traitors and purging society of them: *demons of the past, hide in a mouse hole, witch hunt, to stick out of somebody’s pocket, euthanasia of Croatia, ideological war*.

We can define fallacies as an “errors of reasoning” (Palmer 2012, 165), “misleading types of argument” (Weston 2017, 87) or as an “argument containing faulty reasoning” (Van Fleet 2011, ix). On April 4, 2020, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* noted on its website <https://www.iep.utm.edu/fallacy/> that “fallacious arguments should not be persuasive, but they too often are. Fallacies may be created unintentionally, or they may be created intentionally in order to deceive other people.” According to Van Fleet (2011, ix), “there are two types of logical

8. A “club” in this context refers to the weapon used by cavemen and metaphorically labels the referent as intellectually challenged.

9. Indicating Milanović’s diplomatic past, which for some proves his lack of patriotism.

fallacies: formal and informal.” In this paper, we are interested in informal logical fallacies, which “are arguments flawed due to an error pertaining to the content of the argument” (Van Fleet (2011, ix).

Van Fleet (2011) divides informal logical fallacies into five categories: linguistic fallacies, fallacies of omission, fallacies of intrusion, fallacies involving built-in assumption and causal fallacies. There are many kinds of logical fallacies within each group, and “it is not uncommon to encounter certain fallacies that fit in more than one category” (Van Fleet 2011, ix). The most common types of fallacies that have been identified in this research are: *ad baculum*, *ad populum*, guilt by association, *ad hominem*, *ad personam* and overgeneralizing. The baculum argument is an appeal to force: “it may involve threats of physical violence or psychological harm such as public ridicule and loss of reputation” (Palmer 2012, 172). The former Prime Minister Zoran Milanović has used it: “These are perfidious and wild people who threaten with latent violence and gas bottles and then they tell me I cause social divisions because I insist on this country’s law” (Milanović quoted in Žapčić 2016a). *Ad populum* is an argument *to the people* with ideas are “assumed to be right because they are popular; they appeal to biases, prejudices and slogans” (Palmer 2012, 174). In Croatia, populists appeal to tradition and call for a return to the values of the past as part of a commonly shared background. Here is the populist statement by Tomislav Karamarko, HDZ’s PM hopeful: “Now, our members are also war veterans, our members are also poor people, economically disadvantaged people, our members are people who love their country. How could I, then, form a tripartite government with people who disavow Croatia?” (Karamarko quoted in HRT.hr 2015). “Guilt by association is an assumption that you are like those you associate with” (Palmer 2012, 173). In another statement, Karamarko commits the fallacy of guilt by association:

I hold no grudges, what can I say, I can only judge their [MOST] work. So, I believe they’ve made a mistake, I believe they’ve tricked their voters, I believe they’re inconsistent. And, so, to turn such a somersault, now, *you start from a position of a towering figure of morality only to wind up in the embrace of Zoran Milanović, a man who has done everything to keep himself in office, and, I repeat, they’ve been destroying the country for four years, so, that’s their problem that they’ll have to face.* And I’m sure that during some future elections, in the very near future, our citizens will know how to recognize and evaluate that (Karamarko quoted in HRT.hr 2015).

In this example, the representatives of MOST are equated with SDP, simply because of they accepted a coalition with them and described as accomplices who have abandoned their principles.

Numerous examples of *ad hominem* and *ad personam* have been found: *stinky little rat, port whore, wimp, hatted club, rabid squirrel, liar, traitor*. *Ad hominem* translates as *to the person* and “ignores the facts entirely and instead attacks the

person presenting them. [...] They are often merely insults; they imply that there is something wrong with the speakers, which allows us to ignore their argument” (Palmer, 2012: 172). The difference between *ad personam* and *ad hominem* is that “the former relates to the characteristics of a person putting forth certain claims, whilst the latter relates to their credibility and behaviors regarding the topic at hand. [...] However, they are often blended in the *ad hominem* fallacy” (Škarić 2011, 86-87), e.g. “That man who in his spare time plays the role of the vice-president of the Croatian Parliament, but spiritually, and in all other senses, is nothing but a street instigator, should also be removed from his post” (Milanović quoted in Žapčić 2016a).

Overgeneralizing means “drawing a larger conclusion than the evidence supports, as it is difficult to verify statements about *all* or *most* or *even many*” (Palmer 2012, 166).

They didn't realize one thing: that when you speak against the Croatian Democratic Union which stems from its nation, which articulates the spirit of its nation, tradition of its nation, aspirations of its nation, then you are actually going against your own nation. Fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, all of them have the same, I would say, the same profile. We are the nation. The Croatian Democratic Union stems from and is its nation. And that is why no one can destroy it (Karamarko quoted in HRT.hr 2015).

Here the fallacy consists in claiming that HDZ supporters represent the people itself. Rather than an appeal to a democratic unity, this statement actually serves to masquerade the fact that, as is visible from previous examples, HDZ does favor a certain profile of persons who are considered to be true patriots, but now, having assumed power, a pretense of representing every citizen must begin. Aggressiveness is manifested in the persistent implication that anyone who does not support HDZ is not a true patriot, but rather sides with those who are destroying Croatia.

7. Conclusion

In all political campaigns, aggressiveness in political discourse is visible. Our research, however, has shown that aggressive rhetoric did not subside after the elections in 2015. This is no surprise as another campaign started after the election, due to no one winning the majority of seats. In this study aggressive rhetoric is considered as an umbrella term including invectives, insults, abusive language, etc. Using discourse linguistic and rhetorical analysis, different devices which contribute to the aggressiveness of discourse have been singled out. These include different labels, classifications and numerous fallacies.

As has been shown, the polarization of society is very visible in Croatian political life. The preferred aggressive rhetoric strategies are showing political

polarization, juxtaposition of opposite notions such as *democracy* vs. *communism*, *militants* vs. *pacifists*, *fascist* vs. *liberal/democrat*. The discourse openly stresses the gap between *us* and *them* and, of course, we are always presented as the good, and they as the bad guys. Our results confirm that the political opponent is always at the same time the epitome of everything bad, and the world is seen in *black* and *white*, or, better yet, *red* and *black*, according to the colors associated with left and right regimes. Speakers emphasize the negative traits of their opponents and the goal is well known – to gain voters’ and media’s support and to take over the opponents’ place and ultimately become the ruling party. However, what is signaled through the use of aggressive discourse is the ideological righteousness of the speaker. Although the Croatian media often claim that only the right-wing parties use aggressive rhetoric (Vujić 2007), this research did not conclude that any of the political parties was more aggressive than the others. Both the left-leaning and the right-leaning options show equal aggressiveness, so it can be concluded that aggressive rhetoric was a standard dialectical practice of all political opponents.

Actually, the foundation of Croatian political discourse consist in reducing reality to a choice between two options – either/or. Either *us* or *them*, either *ours* or *theirs*, either *mine* or *yours*, either *light* or *dark*, either *friend* or *foe* – *to be* or *not to be*. This type of discourse may have been understandable in times when national independence was in question, as was the case in the 1990’s, but in this instance, it simply perpetuates the symbolical burden of recent history which hinders Croatia from moving forward in establishing a political culture of dialog and provides fertile ground for truly dangerous political options to appear. The question remains, despite the fact that this binary view of things is legitimate, whether this kind of discourse is appropriate for the 21st century.

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