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# A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of a Sample of Posters Used in the 2016 and 2020 Election Campaigns in Ireland

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**Abstract.** The main objective of this research is to analyse the main similarities and differences in the way the political leaders of the Irish political parties Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are portrayed in the political posters of the general election campaigns of 2016 and 2020 in Ireland. The analysis of the posters will shed light on how the visual and linguistic characteristics contribute to the portrayal of the politicians and to the way they are empowered as leaders. Therefore, this article highlights the importance of the poster in the creation of political power. The politicians in the posters will be approached as social actors and the political poster understood as a multimodal text. Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar (2021) will be used to analyse the compositional design of the poster. Moreover, van Leeuwen's model of visual social actors (2008) will be used to analyse how social distance, social relation and social interaction contribute to establishing a relationship between the politician represented and the audience. The results of the research will show the main strategies employed in order to persuade people to vote for one party instead of another, in the sample selected.

**Key Words.** Ireland, campaign posters, multimodal critical discourse analysis, social actors, visual grammar.

**Resumen.** El objetivo principal de esta investigación es analizar las principales similitudes y diferencias en la forma de retratar a los líderes políticos de los partidos políticos irlandeses Fianna Fáil y Fine Gael en los carteles políticos de las campañas electorales generales de 2016 y 2020 en Irlanda. El análisis de los carteles arrojará luz sobre cómo las características visuales y lingüísticas contribuyen a la representación de los políticos y a la forma en que se les empodera como líderes. Por tanto, el artículo destaca la importancia que tienen los carteles políticos en la creación del poder político. Los políticos de los carteles serán tratados como actores sociales y se entenderá el cartel político como un texto multimodal. Se utilizará la gramática visual de Kress y van Leeuwen (2021) para analizar el diseño compositivo del cartel. Además, se utilizará el modelo de actores sociales visuales de van Leeuwen (2008) para analizar cómo la distancia social, la relación social y la interacción social contribuyen a establecer una

relación entre el político representado y la audiencia. Los resultados de la investigación mostrarán las principales estrategias empleadas para persuadir a las personas a votar por un partido en lugar de otro, en la muestra seleccionada.

**Palabras clave.** Irlanda, carteles de campaña, análisis crítico del discurso multimodal, actores sociales, gramática visual.

## 1. Introduction

Examining political advertising allows for deeper analysis of party brand personality (Kaur and Sohal 2019). For this reason, this article intends to analyse and contrast the posters used by two of the main political parties in Ireland, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, to present their candidate for Taoiseach (the Irish Prime Minister) in the last two elections, on 26 February 2016 and on 8 February 2020. In 2016, the two candidates were Enda Kenny, who had been the political leader of Fine Gael since 2002, and Micheál Martin, who had been the leader of Fianna Fáil since 2011. He was also the candidate in the 2020 elections. However, the 2020 candidate for Fine Gael was Leo Varadkar, who had been the leader of the political party since 2017 (Freelon and Wells 2020; Plescia, Blais and Högström 2020).

Fianna Fáil was founded in 1926. Its political ideology is characterised as Irish Nationalist and Irish Republican; it can be considered a liberal party with a centrist ideology. This is the political party that has won the most elections in the history of democracy in Ireland (Nohlen and Stöver 2010; OECD 2019). Fine Gael was founded in 1933. It is considered more a proponent of market liberalism than its traditional rival, Fianna Fáil. Its ideology is associated with the progressive centre although in the twentieth century it was considered conservative. This party has rarely governed Ireland without a coalition (Nohlen and Stöver 2010; OECD 2019).

In the 2016 election, Enda Kenny's Fine Gael remained the largest party despite having lost 26 seats, obtaining 50 of the 158 seats available. Fianna Fáil was the main opposition party with 44 seats. This party had suffered its worst-ever election result of 20 seats in 2011. The outgoing government was a Fine Gael–Labour Party coalition led by Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Tánaiste Joan Burton (Courtney and O'Malley 2016; Gallagher and Marsh 2016; Reidy and Suiter 2016). In the 2020 elections, Fianna Fáil secured most of the seats, winning 38. This party was followed by Sinn Féin with 37 seats. In this case, Fine Gael, led by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, finished third with 35 seats (Plescia, Blais and Högström 2020). Table 1 shows the distribution of candidates in the two political parties analysed and the election results:

Table 1. Candidates and results in the political parties under analysis.

Party	Candidate in 2016 and results	Candidate in 2020 and results
Fine Gael	Enda Kenny 50 seats	Leo Varadkar 35 seats
Fianna Fáil	Micheál Martin 44 seats	Micheál Martin 38 seats

Political posters have a key role in election campaigns because the way the leader is portrayed intends to persuade the audience in its voting choice. I am interested in how political posters persuade voters and impact on the creation of political power. My intention in this article

is to analyse the political posters of the candidate for Prime Minister of Ireland of the political parties Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael during the election campaigns of 2016 and 2020. The different posters under analysis will be deconstructed in order to observe how the visual and linguistic characteristics contribute to the portrayal of the politician and to the way they are empowered as leaders. This study will contribute to research in this area by analyzing the main strategies used to persuade the audience to vote for the political parties chosen and to highlight the power of the politician. This has an effect on audience perception of the politician and on their decision to vote for one party or another. Consequently, posters are understood as social texts, whose meaning can only be understood by paying attention to the social context where they are framed. Thus, the analysis will establish a connection between the way the posters communicate and the social situation where they are used. Therefore, this article highlights the importance of the poster in the creation of political power.

The main research questions are the following: How are Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's leaders portrayed as social actors in the posters used for the campaigns in the 2016 and 2020 general elections? What are the outstanding characteristics in terms of visual and linguistic choices? Are there similarities and differences in the way politicians are depicted in the posters analysed? To answer these research questions, I will use Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar (2021) and van Leeuwen's visual analysis of social actors (2008) for the analysis presented in section 4.

This article is organised in the following way: section two offers the literature review. This is followed by the data, aims and methodology. Section four concentrates on the analysis of the political posters. This is followed by a comparison of the posters analysed. The article finishes with some conclusions based on the study.

## **2. Literature review**

Following Woods (2006), politics is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, social and ideological ideas into practice. Language has a key role in this process because every political action is influenced, depicted and prepared by language. In fact, political discourse uses linguistic and visual techniques that persuade the audience to believe the political messages transmitted (van Dijk 1997). This justifies the literature review being divided into two sections: one on political communication and the other on multimodal discourse analysis.

### **2.1 Political communication**

Politics, in general, is about finding solutions to general problems and about trying to find some common ways to organize society. Following Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 34), it:

[...] is about arriving cooperatively, and through some form of (collective) argumentation (deliberation), at decisions for action on matters of common concern, it is about what to do in response to public disagreement and conflict (e.g. over such issues as the distribution of scarce social goods) and in response to circumstances and events.

In addition, discourse is a form of social practice (Fairclough 2001). It includes all forms of communication that people use to express thoughts or feelings in context. Critical approaches to discourse have been used in order to study different types of discourses, including political discourse. In fact, this article is based on political communication and on political discourse analysis (PDA). The roots of political communication are in Aristotle and Plato (Wilson 1990). Nowadays political communication uses methodologies and concepts of political science,

sociology, communication, journalism, rhetoric and history among others, which make it an interdisciplinary field of study.

The tools of Critical discourse analysis (CDA) have been used to analyse political discourse (Chilton 2004; Ferreira DeSouza 2018; Jones and Collins 2006; Wodak 2015). These studies treat discourse as social practice and point out how social, cultural and political context influence discourse. Consequently, CDA does not only involve the study of language but also the study of people and institutions (van Dijk 2009), as Baker et al. (2008: 273) point out:

We understand CDA to be an academic movement, a way of doing discourse analysis from a critical perspective, which often focuses on theoretical concepts such as power, ideology and domination. We do not view CDA as being a method nor are specific methods solely associated with it. Instead, it adopts any method that is adequate to realize the aims of specific CDA-inspired research.

In this paper, PDA is important for the process of deconstruction of the ways meanings are engaged in political posters to persuade people to vote for a particular political party (Álvarez Benito, Fernández-Díaz and Íñigo-Mora 2009; van Dijk 2006a). Within PDA there are studies that concentrate on the relationship between political discourse and media in order to deconstruct the characteristics of political discourse in the press or on television, especially observing the different genres that politicians use such as debates, speeches or political interviews (Chen 2007; Fetzer and Lauerbach 2007; Hakan 2016; Kaur and Sohal 2019; Shäffner and Bassnett 2010).

In addition, some studies concentrate on political advertising due to its importance during election campaigns to persuade people to vote for one party or another, depending on the ideology (Hakan 2016; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2006). Tejumaiye and Obia (2018, 3) define political advertising as follows:

[...] all efforts made by politicians, political parties, and parties' candidates to plan, design and disseminate messages intended to engender favorable attitude, perception and behaviour among the electorates which would in turn lead to the exercise of the electorates franchise in favor of the parties and their candidates.

In this sense, persuasion is a concept that needs to be taken into consideration due to its importance in political advertising. It can be understood as a legitimate form of mind control, in which “[...] the interlocutors are free to believe or act as they please” (van Dijk 2006b: 361). Following Pelclová and Lu (2018: 1), I understand persuasion as a social phenomenon that “[...] consists in interaction between social actors (the persuader as the initiator of a persuasive communication and the addressee or audience as the target of persuasion) in a public environment”.

Persuasion is a concept that can be considered from various perspectives, such as political science, rhetoric, sociology, linguistics, communication studies, psychology, among others (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2020). Persuasion is an umbrella term of influence, i.e., it contributes to people's attitude formation by causing them to do or to believe something (Schott and Wolf 2018), in Dontcheva-Navratilova's words (2020: 2): “[...] research into persuasion has striven to identify the constitutive features of persuasive communication and to understand how persuasive strategies and persuasive language are used to shape human interaction”. Thus, the attitudes, beliefs, motivations, intentions or behaviours of people can be modified in different contexts, such as election campaigns (Seidman 2008). The fact that the texts under study in this article are political posters makes clear that they belong to propaganda (Popova 2012), which is a form of persuasion used to convince a large audience, in this case, the Irish population during the election campaigns chosen. In consequence, paying attention to

persuasion while analysing the main linguistic and visual characteristics found in the political posters under study will be useful to deepen our understanding of how political posters interact with the audience (see section 4.2).

This article intends to contribute to the area of political advertising, especially to the studies that concentrate on political posters and their effectiveness as political propaganda (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017; Philipps and Richter 2016; Popova 2012). One of the main purposes of political advertising in general and of the political poster in particular is to have an effect on voting behaviour (Abdennadher, Ayed and Wood 2019; Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017). As Philipps, Schölzel and Richter put it (2016: 86): “Posters are a vital part of election campaigns”.

Concentrating on the political poster involves the analysis of the visual and linguistic elements in order to delve into the meaning of the poster in context, on the persuasive power of the political poster and on its effect on the potential voters. The main purpose of political campaigns is to persuade, and the political poster is one of the tools used for that purpose. The fact that posters are multimodal texts justifies devoting the next sub-section to multimodal critical discourse analysis.

## 2.2 Multimodal discourse analysis

Contemporary societies are multimodal because communication takes place through different modes that build meanings using different resource systems. In this sense, van Leeuwen (2014: 281) makes clear that: “The term multimodality refers to the integrated use of different semiotic resources (e.g. language, image, sound and music) in texts and communicative events”.

The theory of multimodality and multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) have been developed in the last decades thanks to the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), Jewitt (2009), Kress (2010), O’Halloran (2011), Moya Guijarro (2014, 2019), and Painter (2018), among others. Multimodal critical discourse analysis does not analyse language in isolation but in connection with its socio-cultural context (Fairclough 2003) because language is understood as a form of social action (Fairclough 1992). The discursive practice of deconstructing meanings in texts tries to unveil power relationships (Fairclough 1995). In addition, multimodal research contributes to deepening our understanding of the role of semiosis in social life as van Leeuwen makes clear in his book *Multimodality and Identity* (2021: 51): “[...], social semiotic interpretation needs to build on three kinds of knowledge: a knowledge of language and other semiotic modes; a knowledge of cultural history, and a knowledge of sociological and philosophical theories that can help us understand the role of semiosis in social life”.

The different discourse options have ideological effects. In this sense, multimodal critical discourse analysis deconstructs the meanings associated with the different modes that compose a multimodal text (Machin 2013). Consequently, multimodality is essential to deconstruct the way political posters are created, due to the fact that they are texts where the general tendency is that the visual is a predominant element although its meaning has to be understood in combination with the written text.

Political posters are multimodal texts that are “intended to convey directive messages to trigger viewers’ courses of action” (Roh, Wooyong Eunsong, Hayoung and Iksoo 2019: 290). The combination of visual and linguistic features in these posters intends to inform and manipulate voters, being a type of propaganda (Holtz-Bacha and Just 2017). These posters represent politicians when they are not present, i.e., they are a means used by parties to present their candidates to the electorate and to persuade people to vote for a particular political party. Generally, political posters have been used for propaganda purposes during election campaigns (Popova 2012). Visual language has a key role in them because the way political candidates are portrayed in posters is a key strategy used in political communication to get votes.

The use of the political poster in the streets before elections is a recurrent feature of political parties to engage citizens with political leaders. This is essential because communication is crucial in election campaigns. Generally, political leaders are represented as approachable candidates that people can trust, i.e., they are represented at their best (Dumitrescu 2010: 20), and use strategies to get the audience's attention (Dumitrescu 2012; Vliegenthart 2012). Philipps (2015) approaches poster' analysis examining how voters are influenced by disfigured posters.

The analysis of political posters is justified because during election campaigns the streets are plastered with them in order to get voters' attention. They are normally situated one next to the other so that people are exposed to multiple posters (Matthes and Marquart 2015: 135). The high visibility of the poster highlights that it is a successful tool to communicate a political party's ideological position (Kaid 2012). In this sense, analysing the multimodal content of political posters is important in order to understand their function and the multimodal tools used to express meaning (Philipps and Richter 2016; Warner, and Banwart 2016).

### **3. Data, aims and methodology**

The data consists of the political posters designed to represent the leader of Fianna Fáil and of Fine Gael in the two general election campaigns of 2011 and 2020. Consequently, four political posters will be analysed, two from Micheál Martin, the leader of Fianna Fáil since 2011, one of Enda Kenny, the leader of Fine Gael for the 2016 elections, and one of Leo Varadkar, the leader of the party in the 2020 elections.

The compilation of the posters under analysis took place using a web page on Irish politics maintained by Mr Alan Kinsella (see <http://irishelectionliterature.wordpress.com/>), which compiles different materials related to Irish politics such as political posters, newspapers articles or photographs of politicians. After revising all the political posters used by the different political parties in the last two elections, i.e., in 2016 and in 2020, due to the limitations of space of this article, I decided to concentrate just on two of the main political parties in Ireland, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. The four posters were chosen from a larger data set where there were other posters, but in some cases the representation of the political leader was not as clear as in the ones chosen mainly because the politician was with other people or because the poster was blurred. Thus, the selection of the posters is justified because they are real posters used in the streets where the politicians can be clearly observed. In fact, the posters chosen are representative of those displayed in the whole country.

The main aims of this research are the following: 1) to analyse the political posters used by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in the election campaigns of 2016 and 2020, in order to deconstruct the way the political leader is represented and to identify the main visual and linguistic strategies used to persuade the audience to vote; 2) to observe similarities and differences in the posters; 3) to unveil the power politicians are given by the multimodal choices observed in the posters.

The poster is understood as a multimodal text where the written and visual texts combine in order to express meaning. For this reason, once the posters were compiled, the model of visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) was combined with the critical analysis of the written language in order to deconstruct the meaning of the poster as a whole and to observe how each mode contributed to the creation of meaning. Following visual grammar, the visual analysis concentrated on a) information value, i.e., the location of elements on the right (new information) or on the left (known information) highlights certain elements. In addition, ideal elements appear in the upper part of the layout, whereas real elements appear in the lower position; b) salience gives importance to certain units of information by their size,

colour, etc.; c) and framing shows if elements are connected or not. This analysis allows us to observe the way the different elements express meaning in a coherent way.

After this, the model of visual social actors proposed by van Leeuwen (2008) was used in the analysis in order to observe how social distance, social relation and social interaction contribute to establishing relationships between the politicians represented in the poster and the audience. Once the analysis was finished, a comparison of the different posters was made, in order to deconstruct the main similarities and differences observed in the representation of the politicians.

#### 4. Poster analysis

This section offers the analysis of the posters used by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in the two general election campaigns of 2016 and 2020 in Ireland. Each poster will be approached as a multimodal text in order to explore how the written text and the visual combine for the expression of meaning. Table 2 offers the slogans of both parties. They will be analysed in detail in the specific analysis that follows.

Table 2. Political parties' slogans.

<b>Party</b>	<b>Slogans: 2016</b>	<b>2020</b>
Fine Gael	<i>Let's Keep the Recovery Going</i>	<i>A future to look forward to</i>
Fianna Fáil	<i>An Ireland for All</i>	<i>An Ireland for all / Éire do chách</i>

Before analysing the posters in detail, it is necessary to contextualise them. For this reason, section 4.1 will offer an overview of the main ideas, proposals and ideology that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael had for their campaigns in 2016 and 2020. All these were present in each party's manifesto and were part of the two parties' political message during the said campaigns.

##### 4.1 An overview of the 2016 and 2020 campaigns

Fianna Fáil considered that the core priorities of the government were the following in 2016: a) To create decent jobs and support enterprise; b) to cut costs for families and improve the services they rely on; c) to tackle crime and develop community services and d) to secure home ownership and tackle homelessness (Fianna Fáil 2016: 2). The party is committed to giving people the sort of Ireland that people want to create. In this case, they justified their slogan with the following paragraph from the General Election Manifesto (2016: 7): "Will we move forward together as a country or will we become more unequal and unfair? Fianna Fáil is clear where it stands; we need a new government committed to building 'An Ireland for all.' Building an inclusive Ireland involves a country where 'economic growth is felt across the nation, families can own their own home, streets are safe, hard work is rewarded and society takes care of its young, vulnerable and older people'." (Fianna Fáil 2016: 7).

Fine Gael emphasized that they had a long-term economic plan to reinforce Ireland's position in Europe. The party emphasized that they were pro-jobs and pro-family. They proposed to make real their slogan of continuing with the recovery in three steps: 1. More and Better Jobs 2. Making Work Pay 3. Investing in Better Services (Fine Gael 2016: 6). In this way, they intend to offer jobs, to help people in poverty, to improve the socio-economic situation of the country so that people do not have to leave, and to invest money on health and education. They justify these proposals because "we know that only a strong economy that

supports people at work can pay for the services needed for a just society” (Fine Gael 2016: 6). On the same page of the manifesto, they make clear that they understand Ireland as to be a “pro-jobs and pro-family country of stability, growth and opportunity for all”.

In 2020, Fianna Fáil kept the same slogan. This is justified because in the 2020 Manifesto the party makes clear that the biggest challenge of Ireland is to be a country that serves all the people living in it (Fianna Fáil 2020). This is challenging because the situation is characterized by some facts such as: “People are struggling to access our health services when they need them. Communities feel abandoned and believe that decency and fairness have been forgotten. Far too many families are homeless and many people are struggling to pay high rents or to buy a home” (Fianna Fáil 2020: 7). The manifesto highlights the party’s five aims for 2025: 1. Quality of life for every family; 2. Owning your own home; 3. Strong, vibrant and safe communities across Ireland; 4. Delivering our climate change targets; 5. Work for Ireland’s values on the global stage.

Fine Gael changed the slogan in the 2020 elections. *A Future to Look Forward to*, with the subtitle *Building the Republic of Opportunity* suggest that the party wants to make progress that improves Ireland in the future. The following statement of the 2020 Manifesto makes this explicit (2020: 1):

An improving economy and the careful management of our public finances, along with the sensitive stewardship of the upcoming Brexit trade negotiations, will enable us to drive that momentum and provide more houses, more hospital beds, more nurses and Gardaí, deliver climate action, and drive tax reform.

The manifesto emphasizes what the political party has done “with a particular focus on home ownership and universal healthcare” (Fine Gael 2020: 1) so that people can trust them to continue working for the country.

#### 4.2 Analysis of the posters

Having offered an overview of the main ideas that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael had for the 2016 and 2020 elections, I will now offer a detailed analysis of the political posters that both parties used to portray their candidate for Prime Minister of Ireland in these elections. The two posters used for the 2016 elections will be followed by those used in 2020 (see Figures 1–4).

Figure 1. Political poster of the candidate for Prime Minister of the 2016 Fine Gael campaign.



Enda Kenny is the only social actor represented in this political poster. He appears right in the centre of the poster, clearly framed by the slogan “*Let’s Keep the Recovery Going*”. The name and logo of the political party are at the bottom. Consequently, this text is read from the centre to the margins because it is the photograph of the candidate that is given importance, not only due its location right in the centre of the poster but also its size. In a sense, the slogan, the web page and name of Fine Gael are used to frame the candidate.

There are different vectors between Kenny’s shoulders and face that join the candidate with the two sections where there is written text in the poster, i.e., the slogan with Kenny’s photograph and with the name of the party. This makes it clear that the different elements of this multimodal text are connected. For instance, the words of the slogan are joined with Kenny’s face. Consequently, there is a symbolic identification between the party, the slogan of the campaign and Kenny as its political leader. The white background highlights the political leader even more. The fact that the colour of the letters used in the slogan coincides with the colour used as background of the section where Fine Gael’s name and web page appear contributes to giving cohesion to the poster through the use of colours.

The candidate looks directly at the audience, demanding an action, to vote for Fine Gael in the next elections. Consequently, this is an example of a demand image because the social actor represented establishes a relationship with the people who see the poster in the streets and who are potential voters.

The slogan of the campaign is clearly emphasized because it appears in bold capital letters at the top of the poster. Placing the slogan right on the candidate’s head is a way to identify the slogan with the candidate’s words. The multimodal relationship between the slogan and Kenny’s head evokes his political commitment to work for the improvement of Ireland. In addition, the persuasive direct look of Kenny has to be understood as a direct request to vote Fine Gael in order to make possible the reality expressed in the slogan. The use of the expression ‘Let’s’ is a clear persuasive strategy that makes readers engage with the message that the party has chosen to represent its main idea in the campaign. In fact, ‘Let’s’ establishes a symbolic relationship between Kenny and the audience because both are included and given an active role in the slogan. In addition, the use of the word ‘recovery’ suggests that Ireland is in the process of improving its socio-economic situation, and voting Fine Gael is the way to continue advancing in the recovery. In fact, the whole slogan is very persuasive, i.e., it tries to convince people to vote for the candidate, and involves people in the process of recovery mentioned. This type of slogan addresses the audience in a very explicit way and contributes to making people engage with the slogan and the political party associated with the leader featured. Thus, the language of the leaders in general and the slogans in particular can influence public opinion, following Perloff (2012: 258): “Leaders recognize that they must harness the news and persuasive media to sway public opinion, resulting in a continuous and complex interplay of influence among elites, voters, and an increasingly polymorphous media”.

Figure 2. Political poster of the candidate for Prime Minister of the 2016 Fianna Fáil campaign.



The information value of the composition shows that the poster is divided into two sections: the written text appears on the left and the visual on the right. There are different vectors joining the tie and the face of the candidate to the written text, which establishes a relationship between the meanings presented by the written text and the visual. The poster is read from top to the bottom because the candidate's head appears at the top of the composition. The photograph of Micheál Martin is the most salient element in the composition.

Although the slogan and the name of the party appear together, they are clearly distinguished because the white colour used for the letters in the slogan is the same colour used to frame the name of the party. Green is the colour associated with Ireland, so the colour chosen reinforces the slogan "An Ireland for all".

The background of the poster is blurred and light, which contrasts with Martin's face as the main focus of light in the poster and with the dark suit he is wearing. That type of background contributes to focusing the attention on the only social actor represented, the political leader. We see an elegant middle-aged man wearing a white shirt, a red tie and a dark suit who appears without promises except the slogan and the name of the party. The fact that he is not looking directly at the audience is a clear example of an offer: the candidate is there to be observed by Irish citizens.

The slogan "An Ireland for all" coincides with the main ideas that the party expressed in the 2016 Manifesto: using the word 'all' is associated with promoting inclusion and integration in Ireland. Although the slogan is clearly visible in the poster, the fact that it appears on the bottom left makes clear that it is not in a prominent position because it is the candidate that is clearly highlighted.

Figure 3. Political poster of the candidate for Prime Minister of the 2020 Fine Gael campaign.



The 2020 elections is the first time that Leo Varadkar was the candidate that Fine Gael proposed for Prime Minister. The information value of this poster is similar to that observed in Figure 1, where Enda Kenny was the candidate in 2016: it is a text read from the centre to the margins because the politician is the most salient element not only due to the size of his photograph but also because he appears in the central position. The white, blue and yellow in the background highlight him because they are very light colours. In addition, the number one is a salient element in the composition because it is another visual sign to reinforce the candidate. That number is clearly joined by vectors with the candidate's face and with the name of the party at the bottom of the visual. The photograph of the political leader is framed by the written text that appears at the top and at the bottom of the page.

It is notable that the written text at the top is the name of the politician represented, the unique identity of the candidate is highlighted by the explicit reference to his name and surname (van Leeuwen 2008: 40). The vectors between the written text at the top and the visual make clear that the name in the written language corresponds with the person represented in the visual. This nomination shows that there is an omission, because the complete sentence could be: "Vote Leo Varadkar for Prime Minister". Offering just the politician's name is catchy and clear for people who read the poster in the streets.

Similarly to what was already observed in Figure 1, the name of the party appears at the bottom of the poster. The colour chosen is also white, and the capital letters that are clearly distinguished are in the blue background. However, in this case, instead of offering the web page of the party (see Figure 1) we find "Vote 2 Emer CURRIE". The imperative followed by another example of nomination shows that the use of proper names to nominate the candidates is a characteristic of this poster. The size of the letters and of the number 2 contributes to showing a difference in power between the first candidate and the second one.

Representing Leo Varadkar looking directly at the audience shows that Fine Gael also chose a demand image for the 2020 elections. The politician requests a direct answer from the viewer: her/his vote. In fact, this poster is quite clear in the way the audience is asked for the vote, because the representation of the leader as a demand image is a very explicit way to request the vote. It is surprising that the slogan of the campaign "*A future to look forward to*" does not appear in the poster, which highlights the political candidate.

Figure 4. Political poster of the candidate for Prime Minister of the 2020 Fianna Fáil campaign.



This poster is similar to the one Fianna Fáil chose for the 2016 elections. The fact that the slogan of the Fianna Fáil 2020 elections is the same one as the 2016 elections shows that the party has a sense of continuity in their political project to improve Ireland by making it plural and more inclusive. In this case, the letters in the slogan are bigger than in the previous poster, which is a visual strategy to reinforce the slogan that Irish people were already familiar with from the previous elections.

The name of the party at the top and the slogan at the bottom are a way of framing and reinforcing the candidate who appears on the right of the multimodal text, the place of the most important part of the information. As mentioned with regards to the previous image, the size of the candidate's photograph makes the visual the most salient element in the composition. The blurred background is a visual strategy to help the audience concentrate on the political candidate.

The clothes worn by Martin in this poster are similar to those observed in the 2016 poster. The classic suit and tie is a recurrent way to portray politicians as elegant people who can be trusted. The 2020 facial expression of Micheál Martin is similar to the one in the 2016 poster, but in this case he looks directly at the audience. In other words, the poster is an example of a demand: by means of Martin's voting Fianna Fáil demands an Ireland for all.

## 5. Visual representation of social actors and poster comparison

I am interested in observing how the politicians depicted relate to viewers. In order to do so, I will use the three dimensions proposed by van Leeuwen (2008) to analyse the visual representation of social actors:

Social distance is important in interpersonal relationships. The fact that the political posters analysed are in the streets is a sign of how politicians try to approach the audience although they are not physically present. The visuals analysed are "close-up": politicians are depicted close so that people do not see them as strangers who are far away from them and from their realities.

Regarding social relation, the analysis of angles is essential to observe if the politicians represented show power or involvement. The vertical angle shows that of the four posters analysed, the political candidate is seen at eye level, with the exception of Figure 2, where Micheál Martin is seen from below. This gives power to the politician. The horizontal angle shows that the politician is seen frontally, which is a way of creating an equal relationship, with the exception of Figure 2, where the politician is seen from the side. The fact that the angles of Figure 2 are different suggests that Martin is less involved with the audience, while remaining empowered. Following van Leeuwen (2008: 139): "To look up at someone signifies that someone has symbolic power over the viewer, whether as an authority, a role model, or something else. To look at someone from eye level signals equality".

When considering social interaction, the crucial factor is if the people represented look at the viewers. The fact that three of the posters analysed represent the political leader looking directly at the audience highlights the portrayal of politicians as subjects that address the potential voters with their gaze. Consequently, they are represented "symbolically engaging with the viewer" (van Leeuwen 2008: 141) in a symbolic relationship where the main objective is to persuade the audience to vote for the political party they represent. This contrasts with the representation of Micheál Martin in Figure 2, where the characteristics of social distance and social interaction observed in the poster suggest that he is a political leader to be observed from a certain distance.

The following paragraphs offer the main similarities and differences observed in the political posters analysed. The visual and linguistic choices show that there is a relationship between the texts analysed and the socio-political context that frames them.

The general tendency is to represent the political candidates alone so that their leading role is reinforced in the streets, where the posters are shown. Moreover, all the political leaders represented appear in a smart suit and a tie, which is a clear way to present them as elegant people who have the respect of Irish citizens. In 2016, there are differences in the colours of the ties that politicians use: Kenny's tie is green, a colour associated with nature and with the Republic of Ireland. Martin's tie is red, which is a colour that catches people's attention. Another common characteristic observed in the poster analysis is that the leaders are represented partially because political posters concentrate on the head and shoulders of the candidate. In addition, in the four cases, it is the political leader who is the most salient element in the composition. The fact that the politician represented takes up most of the poster leaves no doubt of the leading role of the candidate in the campaign.

Fine Gael's 2016 poster places the slogan at the top and the name of the party at the bottom. This contrasts with the 2016 poster of Fianna Fáil, where the slogan, the name of the party and its logo appear at the bottom left, covering part of the politician's jacket. In fact, Fine Gael gives more importance to the slogan, due to its position in the poster and to the type of letters used, which are more eye-catching than the ones used by Fianna Fáil. The main difference between the two 2016 posters analysed is that Enda Kenny is represented looking at the audience, whereas Micheál Martin is represented looking somewhere towards the right. Another clear difference is that Fine Gael's candidate is represented as serious, whereas the one of Fianna Fáil is smiling.

There is also a difference in the colours used by both parties in their slogans. In 2016, Fine Gael used blue letters on a white background, whereas Fianna Fáil used white letters for the slogan on a green background. Furthermore, the name of the party appears in green letters, but in order to make them visible and outstanding, in this case they appear on a white square created in the space provided for the slogan.

There are clear differences in the 2020 Fine Gael poster because the campaign slogan is not on the poster. In addition, it is the only poster where the name of the candidate appears. In this sense, the identification of the politician represented in the visual image and the name at the top of the poster make clear that Leo Varadkar is the candidate. This emphasis on referring to him linguistically and visually could be justified because this is the first time that he was the candidate for Prime Minister. Normally, the slogan is a persuasive message with an ideological effect on the potential voters, causing them to choose the party associated with the slogan when they have to vote. However, substituting it in this poster for the name of the candidate suggests that Leo Varadkar is highlighted due to the fact that he was not chosen as the leader of the party before and to persuade the audience to vote for him.

This is also the only poster where there is a reference to the second candidate. In this case, the audience is asked directly to vote for her: "Vote 2 Emer CURRIE". This is the only poster where we find an imperative, a very obvious written strategy to ask Irish people to vote for this political party. This and the fact the candidate looks directly at the audience contributes to reinforcing the poster as a demand, where the vote is asked explicitly.

Although Fianna Fáil kept the same political candidate and the same slogan in the 2016 and 2020 elections, there are some differences in the political posters in which Micheál Martin appears in the two campaigns. In the poster used by Fianna Fáil's 2020 campaign (see Figure 4), the name of the political party is separated from the slogan, and it is at the top of the poster, next to the candidate's head. However, as observed in the poster used by Fianna Fáil's 2016 campaign (see Figure 2), the slogan continues to appear at the bottom left of the poster, on the candidate, covering part of his jacket. Figure 2 is an example of an offer image, because the

candidate does not look directly at the audience, whereas Figure 4 is a demand image, because Martin looks directly at the potential voters.

## 6. Conclusions

Political posters have an essential role during election campaigns, and they are a key strategy used by political parties to get votes by having the Irish streets as the channel of communication before the elections. The posters analysed are understood as discourse as social practice because they communicate in context and they are multimodal texts designed in order to persuade the audience to vote for one party or another in political campaigns. The general tendency is to represent the politician looking directly at the audience, demanding the vote for the party represented, with the exception of Micheál Martin in the 2016 campaign.

The written text with the slogan and the name of the party (or the name of the candidate in Figure 3) has to be understood as single unit with the visual component because both modes of communication help viewers to understand the political poster as a whole. In addition, social distance, social relation and social interaction are important categories that allow us to approach the political candidates as social actors that establish a symbolic relationship with the audience, whose main purpose is to persuade them to vote for one political party instead of another.

Analysing the posters of the political candidates of two of the most important Irish political parties in the last two election campaigns shows that the general tendency is to represent the candidate with a formal appearance, with status, in a positive way and as active individual in the process of improving Ireland, as the slogans make clear. The visual representation of the politicians and the short and catchy slogans highlight the convenience of voting for that party. In this sense, the political posters analysed are effective propaganda and a sub-genre within political genres defined not only by being a multimodal text where the image of the political candidate plays a crucial role in the creation of meaning but also for their relationship with the socio-political context that frames them before the elections.

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