

**Making Meaning in Spanish from Trump's Meaningless
Discourse: Shortcomings in Translating the Dark Side of
Political Persuasion**

**Cómo dar sentido en español al discurso sin sentido de
Trump: dificultades de traducción del lado oscuro de la
persuasión política**

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Abstract: Donald Trump's speeches have often been criticised for lacking substance, coherence, and meaningful content, with critics highlighting his use of rhetorical strategies prioritising emotion, spectacle, and polarisation over reasoned debate and thoughtful policymaking. This study addresses the challenge of translating Trump's heterodox political rhetoric into Spanish, while also examining the limitations of neural and AI-based translation in capturing the nuances and complexities of political persuasion. Trump's speech on January 6, 2021, delivered before the march on the Capitol, is particularly significant due to its potential role in inciting the subsequent events. In it, he repeated false claims of election fraud and urged his supporters to "fight" in an attempt to overturn the election results. Our study aims to identify the unique traits in his discourse, particularly elements of meaningless rhetoric, and how these present challenges for translation. Making sense of his disjointed syntax and abrupt topic shifts is already difficult in English, and these traits add complexity when translating into other languages. We pursue to demonstrate that, despite significant advancements in neural and AI translation systems, they still struggle to capture language nuances, especially in the context of rhetorical quirks and dysphemism used by Trump. His deployment of colloquialisms, tags, hyperbole, and other linguistic oddities, deeply embedded in American culture and political context, are challenging to convey accurately in Spanish without losing their original meaning, subtlety, or impact. Our work seems to find a compromise, enhancing the comprehensibility of the translated version while retaining some of the original's flavour.

Keywords: Political rhetoric, AI translation, Neural translation, Political text translation, Trump's language

Resumen: Los discursos de Donald Trump han sido a menudo criticados por su falta de sustancia, coherencia y contenido significativo, con críticos destacando su uso de estrategias retóricas que priorizan la emoción, el espectáculo y la polarización sobre el debate razonado y la formulación de políticas reflexivas. Este estudio aborda el desafío de traducir la heterodoxa retórica política de Trump al español, al tiempo que examina las limitaciones de la traducción neuronal y de la IA para capturar los matices y las complejidades de la persuasión política. El enfoque se centra en el discurso de Trump del 6 de enero de 2021, antes de la marcha al Capitolio, significativo por su posible papel en incitar los eventos posteriores. En este discurso, Trump reiteró afirmaciones falsas sobre fraude electoral y urgió a sus seguidores a «luchar» para revertir los resultados electorales. Nuestro estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los rasgos únicos en el discurso de Trump, en particular elementos de retórica sin sentido, y cómo estos presentan desafíos para la traducción. De hecho, entender la sintaxis discontinua y los cambios abruptos de tema de Trump ya es difícil en inglés, y estos rasgos añaden complejidad al traducirse a otros idiomas. Pretendemos demostrar que, a pesar de los avances significativos en los sistemas de traducción neuronal y de IA, aún tienen dificultades para capturar los matices del lenguaje, especialmente en el contexto de las peculiaridades retóricas y los disfemismos utilizados por Trump. Su uso de coloquialismos, etiquetas, hipérboles y otras rarezas lingüísticas, profundamente arraigadas en la cultura y el contexto político estadounidense, son difíciles de transmitir con precisión en español sin perder su significado original, sutileza o impacto. Nuestro trabajo busca encontrar un término medio, mejorando la comprensibilidad de la versión traducida mientras se retiene algo del sabor original.

Palabras clave: Discurso político, Traducción de IA, Traducción neuronal, Traducción de textos políticos, Lenguaje de Trump

INTRODUCTION: ORTHODOX POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND THE RISE OF POPULISM

Political discourse is a form of communication that performs an ideological function, exercises social control, and legitimises power within the socio-political context (Partington and Taylor, 2018, p. 2). Nevertheless, today political power emanates from the rapport established with the audience conceived as a “mass” (comprising the people, the audience, the citizenry), encompassing a diverse and heterogeneous array of individuals. This suggests that to attain social influence, it is imperative to emphasise and, most importantly, to ensure the comprehension of shared values by the majority (Charaudeau, 2002 and 2003).

For centuries, and until very recent times, political rhetoric has been built upon two Aristotelian pillars: persuasion and conviction (Charaudeau, 2009, p. 278). Conviction relies on logical and rational arguments, targeting the cerebral cortex (referred to as *logos* by Aristotle). Conversely, persuasion operates in the realm of emotion, invoking the affections (*pathos*) and the control of *ethos*, which entails the speaker's *persona* to be aligned with the audience, who must possess the ability to enthuse and inspire (Charteris-Black, 2011 and 2017). As we discuss below, of the two, persuasion has emerged as the predominant tool for mobilising audiences within the socio-political landscape.

The emergence of new characteristics in political discourse signals a shift from the traditional forms of political communication. According to claims from Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; van Dijk, 2002; Wodak, 2015 and 2021, as examples) and from International Relations (IRR), researchers as Koschut (2018 and 2020) underline several strategies as prevalent, such as:

- a) Dynamics of identification or alterisation: utilisation of polarising language that dichotomises the audience into “us vs. them” categories.
- b) Manipulation of textual structures: strategic avoidance or selective emphasis on specific topics achieved through narrative scheming.
- c) Employment of fallacious arguments: utilisation of deceptive claims to manipulate factual data for persuasion.
- d) Tacit adoption of ideas leading to cognitive prejudice: implicit acceptance of concepts that contribute to cognitive bias.

These strategies have become more pronounced with the rise of populism, which has permeated contemporary politics globally (Moffitt, 2016). Broadly speaking, populist discourse is based on the moral distinction between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elites” (Mudde, 2004), and upon a staunch defence of popular sovereignty, while railing against any elements that could limit it. Populism has become a powerful tool of social manipulation that relies on a Manichaeian lexicon and rhetoric. Given its broad political spectrum across any ideology, today the phenomenon refers to any political discourse or style where emotion prevails over reason and logic, deploying manipulation strategies such as victimising the people, demonising the adversary, and engaging in post-truth politics (Breeze and Llamas Saíz, 2020).

1. DONALD TRUMP'S ORATORY AS A FORM OF POPULISM

Donald Trump's political discourse during—and after—his presidency in the United States has been a notable example of the contemporary trends depicted in our previous section. His rhetoric has been characterised by polarisation, simplification of complex issues, and a constant appeal to emotions over reason. His style is unlike traditional political language, bearing a unique brand that has become synonymous with his political *persona* and which reinforces his image as an “outsider”, an outcast hero challenging the political establishment (Sclafani, 2018). His discourse has indeed been effective in polarising American society, generating deep divisions and exacerbating tensions between political, racial and social groups (Domínguez-García *et al.*, 2023). Trump's rhetoric has cultivated a climate of confrontation and distrust, hindering constructive dialogue and consensus on critical national issues. His approach reflects populist traits, notably his frequent appeals to the “pure people” against the “corrupt elites”, even as a plutocrat who touts his business acumen and experience outside the political sphere (Sclafani, 2018, p. 51). His message overall has been effective in mobilising his electoral base but has also generated significant criticism and resistance from other sectors of American society and internationally. In contrast with the *gravitas* of traditional political oratory, with its use of tropes and schemas (Partington and Taylor, 2018; Charteris-Black, 2017), Trump's inflammatory rhetoric often presents as simplicity what is rather a reduction in expressive refinement, using black-and-white concepts to simplify the complex reality that surrounds us (Hart, 2020). Some of his rhetorical traits are the following:

a) Low (vs. high talk) and unadorned style: according to the Flesh-Kincaid test on readability (Viser, 2015), Trump's language often reflects a very low (grade-4) level of complexity with basic, short sentences, typically containing around 17 words, some of them repeated (Wang and Liu, 2018). His syntactical style lacks the density and nuance usually associated with the political discourse of his American predecessors.

b) Low talk is also evident in Trump's frequent grammatical errors, use of unusual or colloquial words not typically found in formal speech or writing,

such as “bigly”¹, “braggadocious” or “covfefe”², and his lexical inaccuracies and fragmented expressions. These elements contribute to a more relatable and conversational tone, aligning with his populist appeal and distinguishing him from traditional political figures (Moyer, 2016). Such informal language style reinforces his image as an outsider and connects with audiences who view formal political speech as elitist and disconnected from everyday concerns.

c) Tags, discursive markers and rhetorical questions: as stated by Sclafani (2018), Trump’s speech is replete with discursive markers like “believe me”, “by the way”, and “you know?”, which often precede statements that may lack factual basis. These tags serve to engage the listener and lend an air of conversational informality to his speeches, distinguishing it from the more formal rhetoric typically employed by non-populist politicians. This, together with rhetorical questions in a monologic context, results in an unceremonious style which helps to build rapport with his audience and reinforces his image as a relatable, outsider figure who challenges the *status quo* (Sclafani, 2018, p. 42).

d) Truncated sentences, slim content, strange aside comments and *non sequiturs*: despite its verbosity, Trump’s speech frequently lacks substantial content and coherence. His language is often characterised by broken sentences, minimal use of complex sentence structures (hypotaxis), frequent topic divergences, and bizarre asides. These traits suggest a strong influence of oral culture and an improvised, off-the-cuff speaking style. Trump’s approach can make his communication seem more relatable and spontaneous to his audience, but it often results in a message that is fragmented and lacking in depth. The combination of verbosity and a lack of substantive content serves to obscure his points, making it challenging to discern clear policy positions or logical arguments (Lakoff, 2016 and 2017; Mercieca, 2020).

e) Directness and dysphemism: Trump is unapologetically blunt in his criticism of opponents, religious groups, developing countries, the disabled,

¹ The term “bigly” became somewhat emblematic of Trump’s speaking style during his political campaigns and presidency. It actually stems from a misinterpretation or mishearing of his pronunciation during speeches. In various instances, it is believed that when he has said phrases like “big league”, they have been heard as “bigly” due to his pronunciation style and the context of his speeches.

² The term “covfefe” was originated from a tweet by Donald Trump on May 31, 2017. The tweet read: “Despite the constant negative press covfefe.” The tweet went viral and became a subject of widespread humour and speculation due to the apparent typographical error. It remained online for several hours before being deleted, during which time it generated numerous memes and discussions about its meaning.

and women (Schertzer and Woods, 2022). His disparaging nicknames for political adversaries, while often cruel, have gained significant popularity. Examples include “Crooked Hillary” for Hillary Clinton, “Lyn’ Ted” for Ted Cruz, and “Sleepy Joe” for Joe Biden. This approach not only reinforces his image as a straight-talker but also galvanises his base by framing his opponents in a derogatory light.

f) Misuse of rhetorical schemas, such as hyperbole and repetition. The former is evident in the abuse of intensifiers like “really”, “incredibly”, and “enormously”, as well as unique phrases like “super-duper” (Inzaurrealde, 2017), creating a sense of urgency or emphasis. As to the latter, Trump’s campaign rhetoric often constructed external threats through repeated references to “radical Islamic terrorism”, portraying Islam as a monolithic danger to the West (Hall, 2021 p.53).

In summary, Donald Trump’s political discourse epitomises contemporary needs, characterised by polarisation, emotional appeals, and the simplification of complex issues. While effective in mobilising his base, his rhetoric has deepened societal divisions and hindered dialogue. In contrast to traditional political oratory, his style lacks refinement, relying on simplicity and directness. His use of colloquialisms, grammar mistakes, and dysphemism reflects an unorthodox approach that resonates with his populist image. Moreover, his misuse of rhetorical techniques, such as repetition, serves to reinforce negative associations and further polarise discourse.

2. TRANSLATING TRUMP INTO SPANISH: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR CONVEYING HIS UNIQUE RHETORIC

The present study highlights the challenge of translating Trump’s disdain for traditional political rhetoric into Spanish. The corpus for this study is the 11,000-word transcript of his 70-minute speech delivered by the former president on January 6, 2021, prior to the march on the Capitol. This piece of political oratory has been scrutinised closely for its potential role in inciting violence and undermining democratic norms and said to exemplify the potency and potential dangers of Trump’s direct and unconventional rhetoric (König, 2023). Trump instigated his followers to march to the Capitol, creating a tense and confrontational atmosphere that culminated in a violent assault on the heart of American democracy (Giroux, 2023).

Contrary to expectations, Donald Trump’s unusual and unorthodox rhetoric has sparked numerous research studies, some of which are cited in this work. Its blatant success, despite initial criticism from many linguists, sociologists, and discourse analysts, highlights the challenge of translating such rhetoric. Artificial intelligence and machine translation are increasingly integral to the translator’s tasks and should facilitate their work. However, this

study aims to discuss how these methods alone cannot produce a translated version that, in adding coherence and lexical correctness, retains the singular persuasive devices deployed by Trump; the triggers that make it successful in its provocative and inflammatory content. The present study, thus, seeks to explore, through examples, how the distinct features identified in Trump's speech pose significant challenges for translation via artificial intelligence (AI), specifically ChatGPT—a variant of OpenAI's Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) language model— and machine translation software (MT) like DeepL—an online neural translation service known for accuracy and natural-sounding translators. Our analysis highlights the indispensable role of human translators in making sense of the words of someone who is currently the President of the United States.

Translating Trump's often disjointed syntax and abrupt topic shifts is challenging in English alone. When extending such challenges to other languages, his rhetorical traits add layers of complexity to the task. Confronted with Trump's speeches, translators and journalists wrestle with the decision to render his words literally or to refine them, focusing more on the underlying ideas than on the literal text. His use of colloquialisms, tags, hyperbole, and other linguistic quirks, which are deeply embedded in American culture and political context, make them challenging to be conveyed accurately in Spanish without losing their original meaning, subtlety, or impact. In our work, we have tried to reach a compromise, whereby the translated version gains in comprehensibility but attempts to retain some of its bizarrely persuasive nuances from the original through the aid of strategies such as functional equivalence, modulation, and compensation. We will illustrate each of the above-mentioned rhetorical traits with examples reflecting features from Trump's rhetorical style, as discussed in the preceding section of the study. Subsequently, we will present our human-crafted improved English version of the original sentence, followed by the Spanish versions generated by ChatGPT (hereinafter referred to as AI) and DeepL (hereinafter referred to as MT), and conclude with our human-crafted Spanish version (HT).

2.1. *Low (vs. high talk) style; short, uninvolved sentences*

As we pointed out above, Trump's preference for short, simple sentences reflects a direct and straightforward communication approach (Kayam, 2018). He tends to combine this feature with a fair amount of repetition, which he uses for emphasis. As Lakoff (2016) puts it, this effect is persuasive, inasmuch the more frequently a word is heard, the more the neural circuit is activated and strengthened.

Let's see a first example of simplicity, which, as we saw, always seems to involve repetition:

1) We created Space Force, We, we, we. Look at what we did.

The inconsistent capitalisation and punctuation disrupt the grammatical structure and coherence of the sentence, in a pattern that Sclafani (2018, p. 39) labels as “epistrophic punctuation”: the repetition of short sentences conveying an affective or epistemic stance at the end of rhetorical units in Trump’s speeches. A more orthodox rendering of the expression would be: “We created the Space Force. We were the ones to do it. Look at what we accomplished.” which, still, would probably result in a less powerful message than the original. Let’s see the different versions rendered in translation:

AI: *Creamos la Fuerza Espacial. Nosotros, nosotros, nosotros. Mira lo que hicimos.*

MT: *Creamos la Fuerza Espacial, nosotros, nosotros, nosotros. Mira lo que hicimos.*

HT: *Fuimos nosotros quienes creamos la Fuerza Espacial. Está clarísimo que fuimos nosotros, y solo nosotros.*

In both the AI and MT versions, the repetition in Spanish of the first person plural *nosotros* might sound clumsy and unpolished, while the emphasis is lost. As regards the last version, the original epistrophic structure is compensated with an emphatic copulative relative clause, by repeating *fuimos nosotros quienes*; a superlative assertive (*está clarísimo*), and adding an exclusive noun phrase (*y solo nosotros*). This version underlines the role and responsibility of Trump’s administration in creating the Space Force, while it adds intelligibility and coherence to the statement for Spanish speakers.

Let’s see a second example of epistrophic punctuation:

2) And after this, we’re going to walk down, and I’ll be there with you, we’re going to walk down, we’re going to walk down.

In the context of Trump’s speech at the Capitol, the epiphora is intended to rally the crowd and emphasises his solidarity with them as they march together. The repetition reinforces his commitment to join and support them in their actions. Rephrased more elegantly it would be something like this: “Following this, we will all proceed together—I will be with you every step of the way—we will march down together.”

Let’s deal with the translations:

AI: *Y después de esto, vamos a caminar hacia allá, y yo estaré allí con ustedes, vamos a caminar hacia allá, vamos a caminar hacia allá.*

MT: *Y después de esto, vamos a caminar hacia abajo. Y yo estaré allí contigo, vamos a caminar hacia abajo, vamos a caminar hacia abajo.*

HT: *Y cuando esto acabe, vamos a marchar juntos y yo estaré ahí con vosotros; vamos a marchar juntos, vamos a marchar juntos.*

In the second and third versions, familiar pronouns common in Peninsular Spanish are used, which differ in other Spanish-speaking regions. Still, of the three, only the human version captures the essence of “we’re going to walk down” in the original sentence. It conveys the idea of moving forward in unity or solidarity, which aligns well with the context of the original statement. The first and second are more literal in the sense that they use *hacia abajo/allá* to translate “down”, which is correct in terms of direction but fails to get the sense of going forward all together.

2.2. Low (vs. high talk) style; colloquialisms and lexical errors

3) And to use a favourite term that all of you people really came up with: We will stop the steal.

In the original, the phrase “all of you really came up with” is grammatically incorrect, since the article “a” is unspecific and needs the determinate article “the,” and the modifier “really” is displaced (it should read “that you all really came up with”/that really all of you people came up with”). As a result, it is vague and lacks specificity. A more correct version would be “And to use a phrase that many of you have really embraced: We will stop the steal”; “Stop the Steal” is a massive disinformation campaign—attributed to a criminal veteran named Roger Stone—which spread across social networks like an out-of-control virus, disseminating misinformation and violent rhetoric—and spilling into real life, like the protest at the Capitol (Fung, 2020). The Merriam Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines “steal” as a “fraudulent or questionable political deal.”

Let’s see the translations made by AI and MT, and our own:

AI: *Y para usar un término favorito que todos ustedes realmente inventaron: Vamos a detener el robo.*

MT: *Y para usar un término favorito que todos ustedes realmente inventaron: Detendremos el robo.*

HT: *Y voy a usar un buen lema que os habéis inventado vosotros: vamos a acabar con este atraco.*

Again, the use of *vosotros* instead of *ustedes* reflects the cultural norms of the average Peninsular-Spanish speaker, where it is commonly employed to address a familiar group. This choice enhances the translation’s relatability

and cultural suitability. A compensation is sought by using *atracó* with the demonstrative pronoun *este*, which typically implies a more direct and perhaps even dramatic form of theft or robbery than *robo*, which invokes a more standard and neutral tone.

Let's see a second example:

4) Always, you watch the VA, it was on television every night, people living in a horrible, horrible manner. We got that done. We got accountability done.

A clearer version of Trump's assertion would be "Every night, you would see reports about the VA on television, showing people living in horrible, horrible conditions. We took action to address this issue with the passing of the Act."

The three versions of the translation follow:

AI: Siempre, ves el VA, estaba en televisión todas las noches, personas viviendo de una manera horrible, horrible. Lo hicimos. Conseguimos la responsabilidad.

MT: Siempre, ves la VA, estaba en la televisión todas las noches, la gente viviendo de una manera horrible, horrible. Conseguimos eso. Hemos conseguido que se rindan cuentas.

HT: Cada noche podíamos ver en la tele en qué horribles, horribles condiciones viven los veteranos. Pero lo hemos conseguido. Hemos conseguido que la ley se apruebe.

"VA", which is an unfamiliar English term in Spanish, refers to the United States Department of Veteran Affairs in English, literally translated as *Departamento de Asuntos de los Veteranos*. In the third translation, "VA" is not explicitly mentioned, but the context of the sentence suggests that it refers to the conditions experienced by veterans, which is further clarified in the following sentences. This maintains clarity, while avoiding the need for a lengthy translation of "VA" that might disrupt the flow of the sentence. By the same token, when Trump refers to "accountability" at the end of the paragraph, he is referring to the 2017 Veteran Affairs Accountability Act, one of the key legislative achievements during his presidency. Boasting about passing this law aligns with Trump's broader messaging of prioritising the needs of veterans and reforming government institutions to better serve them. Translating accountability as *rendición de cuentas* ignores that Trump is referring to the name of the Act.

2.3. *Tags, discursive markers and rhetorical questions*

We have already touched on how Trump's oratory often repeatedly employs direct questions in a concise format. However, considering their significance, let's provide a couple of examples to illustrate how their literal or machine translation might awkwardly disrupt the flow of the text.

5) You know, we don't want to give \$2,000 to people. We want to give them \$600. Oh, great. How does that play politically? Pretty good? And this has nothing to do with politics, but how does it play politically?³

This series of brief phrases or inquiries, akin to the rhetorical questions in the given example, effectively highlights key aspects, instilling a feeling of urgency or significance. An improved, more comprehensible version of this chain of short sentences would be: "You know, we don't want to provide \$2,000 to people; we'd rather give them \$600. Oh, fantastic. How does that resonate politically? Favourably? And despite this being apolitical, what are the political implications?"

The AI, MT and HT versions follow:

AI: *Sabes, no queremos dar \$2,000 a la gente. Queremos darles \$600. ¡Genial! ¿Cómo se percibe eso políticamente? ¿Bastante bien? Y esto no tiene nada que ver con la política, pero ¿cómo se percibe políticamente?*

MT: *No queremos dar 2.000 dólares a la gente. Queremos darles 600 dólares. Estupendo. ¿Cómo funciona eso políticamente? ¿Bastante bien? Y esto no tiene nada que ver con la política, pero ¿cómo se juega políticamente?*

HT: *Es que no queremos que se den 2000 dólares a la gente, sino más bien 600. Guay. El caso es que no sé cómo se interpreta eso desde el punto de vista político. ¿Queda bien? Y no es una cuestión política, pero ¿cómo se interpreta políticamente eso?*

³ In this cryptic sentence, Trump is referring to the debate surrounding the amount of direct stimulus payments to be included in a COVID-19 relief package. Initially, there was disagreement over whether the payments should be \$600 or \$2,000 per individual. Trump appears to be sarcastically questioning the political implications of providing \$600 instead of 2,000, suggesting that the decision may be perceived negatively by the public despite its potential benefits. He emphasises the absurdity of the situation by asking how it plays politically while asserting that it has nothing to do with politics.

We think the third version adeptly captures Trump's informal tone and the colloquialism inherent in the original English sentence, while ensuring clarity and coherence for Spanish speakers. This rendition presents a more structured approach, while transmitting the aggression or insistence that might arise from the rapid succession of short phrases or questions in the original. The colloquialism *Guay* replaces "Oh, great" and "Pretty good" (a hyperbole frequently used by Trump). Additionally, according to Fundéu (n.d.), *Es que no*, used to express contrariness, gives a pretext, or provides a justification in Spanish, for "You know, we don't", maintains the derision and negative emphasis of the original. Furthermore, *el caso es que* is incorporated as a discourse connector that introduces an explanation, justification, or conclusion as the central idea of the discourse, often providing an unexpected piece of information. In our view, the expression *¿cómo se interpreta políticamente?* surpasses in idomaticity both the AI's *¿cómo se percibe políticamente?* and the MT's literal rendition, *¿cómo se juega políticamente?* The former significantly improves overall comprehensibility and impact.

Let's see a second example:

6) Did you see the other day where Joe Biden said, I want to get rid of the America First policy? What's all that about? Get rid of. How do you say I want to get rid to America First? Even if you're going to do it, don't talk about it, right?

Though menacing, the sentence *per se* is not clumsy or grammatically incorrect. Still, an improved version is possible: "Did you see the other day when Joe Biden said he wants to eliminate the America First policy? What's all that about? 'Get rid of'. How can you say 'I want to get rid of America First'? Even if you're considering it, why discuss it openly, right?"

Let's see the three versions of the translation:

AI: *¿Viste el otro día cuando Joe Biden dijo, "Quiero deshacerme de la política de América Primero"? ¿Qué significa eso? 'Deshacerse de'. ¿Cómo puede alguien decir 'Quiero deshacerme de América Primero'? Incluso si lo van a hacer, ¿por qué hablar de ello, verdad?*

MT: *¿Viste el otro día que Joe Biden dijo: «Quiero deshacerme de la política America First»? ¿De qué va todo eso? Deshacerse de. ¿Cómo se dice quiero deshacerme de America First? Aunque vayas a hacerlo, no hables de ello, ¿verdad?*

HT: *¿Os habéis dado cuenta de lo que Joe Biden dijo el otro día? Dijo: «quiero terminar de una vez por todas con la idea de "Estados Unidos, primero"». ¿Qué quiere decir con eso de «terminar de una*

vez por todas»? *Y si está pensando en hacerlo, ¿por qué mencionarlo? ¿o qué?*

The artificial versions can be improved for a more natural flow and clarity, since they lack idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms commonly used in Spanish, which makes them sound somewhat awkward or overly literal. Additionally, there are punctuation errors and minor grammatical issues that could be refined for better readability. In the first, the phrase *¿De qué va todo eso?* could be slightly improved for clarity by rephrasing it as *¿Qué significa todo eso?*, and in the second, the phrase *Aunque vayas a hacerlo* could be slightly refined for smoother flow by saying *Y si está pensando en hacerlo*. Contrarily, in the third version, the idiomatic expression *terminar de una vez por todas con la idea de “Estados Unidos, primero”* effectively encapsulates Trump’s frustration with Biden’s statement about ending the “America First” policy. Additionally, the use of *terminar de una vez por todas* is more dynamic and conveys the intensity of “get rid of” better than *deshacerse de* in the two first versions, while *¿o qué?* conveys the conversational and slightly confrontational tone in the English original, better than the calque *¿verdad?* in the artificial versions.

2.4. *Truncated sentences, slim content, strange aside comments and non sequiturs*

We have already discussed how Trump embraces shallowness disguised as simplicity. His speeches often feature short, incomplete sentences with minimal substantive information. This style can create confusion and disrupt the coherence of his message, making it challenging for listeners to follow his train of thought or discern a clear argument. However, these traits also emphasise his personality and brand due to their memorability. Other characteristics that make his discourse paradoxically both confusing and emotionally appealing are the abrupt shifts in topic and tangential remarks that are unrelated to the previous discussion. These asides can seem more relatable or human to his followers, enhancing his connection with them.

The following is a good example of ruptured discourse:

7) Don’t forget when Romney got beat. Romney, hey. Did you see his [sic]? I wonder if he enjoyed his flight in last night. But when Romney got beaten, you know, he stands up like you’re more typical [sic]. “Well, I’d like to congratulate the victor.” The victor? Who’s the victor, Mitt? “I’d like to congratulate.” They don’t go and look at the facts. No,

I don't know. He got, he got slaughtered. Probably, maybe it was OK, maybe it was. But that's what happened.⁴

It is obvious how the paragraph lacks clarity and structure. It includes fragmented sentences, semantic voids, informal language, and abrupt shifts in topic, making it difficult to follow the flow of his thoughts. Additionally, Trump's previously discussed deployment of rhetorical questions and sarcasm adds to the confusion.

A revised version like this would maintain the essence of Trump's message while presenting it in a more organised and coherent manner: "Do you remember when Romney lost? Romney, hey. Did you see his reaction? I wonder if he enjoyed his flight last night. But when Romney lost, you know, he stands up like your typical politician, saying, 'Well, I'd like to congratulate the winner.' The winner? Who's the winner, Mitt? 'I'd like to congratulate...' They don't bother to check the facts. No, I don't know. He lost badly. Maybe it was fine, maybe it wasn't. But that's what happened." Such revision, to some extent, uses complete sentences, clarifies ambiguous references, and eliminates unnecessary repetition, resulting in a more comprehensible reading of Trump's words.

Let's see the translations:

Al: No olvides cuando Romney fue derrotado. Romney, eh. ¿Viste su...? Me pregunto si disfrutó su vuelo anoche. Pero cuando Romney fue derrotado, ya sabes, se levanta como los más típicos, «Bueno, me gustaría felicitar al ganador». ¿El ganador? ¿Quién es el ganador, Mitt? «Me gustaría felicitar». No van y miran los hechos. No, no lo sé. Él fue, fue masacrado. Probablemente, tal vez estuvo bien, tal vez no. Pero eso es lo que pasó.

MT: No olvides cuando Romney fue derrotado. Romney, oye. ¿Has visto el suyo? Me pregunto si disfrutó de su vuelo anoche. Pero cuando Romney fue derrotado, ya sabes, se levanta como si fuera más típico, «Bueno, me gustaría felicitar al vencedor». ¿El vencedor? ¿Quién es el vencedor, Mitt? «Me gustaría felicitar». No van y miran los hechos. No, no lo sé. Lo masacraron. Probablemente, tal vez estuvo bien, tal vez lo estuvo. Pero es lo que pasó.

⁴ In this paragraph, Trump is referring to the defeat of Mitt Romney, a Republican politician who ran for president in 2012 and later became a U.S. Senator. The night previous to this speech Romney was assaulted by Trump's followers when he flew to Washington to certify the votes of the 2016 election. Trump criticises Romney's reaction to his loss, suggesting that Romney congratulated the winner without thoroughly examining the facts or circumstances of the election.

HT: *¿Os acordáis cuando perdió Romney? El bueno de Romney. ¿Visteis su reacción? Me pregunto si disfrutó de su vuelo anoche. Pero cuando perdió, ya lo visteis, salió como el típico político, diciendo, «Bueno, me gustaría felicitar al ganador». ¿El ganador? ¿Quién es el ganador, Mitt? «Me gustaría felicitar...» No se molestan en comprobar los hechos. No, no lo sé. Lo masacraron. Quizá estuvo bien, quizá no. Pero eso es lo que pasó.*

The first version exhibits a somewhat disjointed structure. For example, *¿Viste su...?* disrupts the flow of the sentence. Something similar happens in the DeepL translation, where there are slight interruptions in coherence, such as the phrase *¿Has visto el suyo?*, which may sound somewhat awkward in this context. The sentence *Tal vez estuvo bien, tal vez lo estuvo* in this version could be more concise for better readability. The human version of Trump's speech is more effective and engaging than the other two, as, for instance, in the opening, *¿Os acordáis de cuando perdió Romney?*, a subject-verb inversion is deployed that creates an engaging rhetorical question, unlike the abrupt calques from English *No olvidéis/olvidéis cuando Romney fue derrotado*. *El bueno de Romney* inserted in the human version is a friendly, colloquial creation that connects with the audience better than the disjointed *Romney, eh/oye*. The tangential comment *¿Visteis su reacción? Me pregunto si disfrutó de su vuelo anoche* uses explicitation, to make up for the missing information in the original and artificial versions. The structured main event in Spanish also uses explicitation, as in: *Pero cuando perdió, ya lo visteis, salió como el típico político, diciendo, «Bueno, me gustaría felicitar al ganador»*, and maintains coherence and engagement avoiding the passive *fue derrotado*. Maintaining the rhetorical questions like *¿El ganador? ¿Quién es el ganador, Mitt?* challenges and provokes thought effectively, compared to the repetitive and ambiguous versions by AI and MT.

2.5. Directness and dysphemism

As we mentioned above, Trump tends to speak bluntly and without much filtering, often expressing his opinions and thoughts in a straightforward manner. This directness can be seen in his speeches, tweets, and interactions with the media, where he doesn't shy away from controversial or provocative statements, using harsh or derogatory language to express ideas or opinions (Muhammad, 2021). A typical trait of his seems to be insulting nicknames for his political opponents, criticising individuals or groups using strong language, and employing hyperbole to make his points (Johnson, 2021).

Let's look at the following examples in the speech, where two of his proverbial foes are mentioned:

8) The media is the biggest problem we have as far as I'm concerned, single biggest problem. The fake news and the Big Tech.

Trump often attacks the media and Big Tech (the major technology companies that dominate the industry) as a political strategy to rally his base and deflect criticism. By framing these institutions as adversaries, he can portray himself as an outsider fighting against entrenched elites and institutions. He sees negative coverage as a threat to his image and agenda, prompting him to discredit the media's credibility and claim that platforms like Meta, Google or Apple have a bias against conservative voices, censoring or suppressing their content (Taylor, 2018). The sentences above lack grammar refinement because of the incorrect presence of the article "the" before "fake news", the untimely sentence "as far as I'm concerned", the inelegant repetition of "single biggest" and the simplicity in its ending. A more correct version could read like this: "In my view, the media represents our most significant challenge, particularly the issues stemming from fake news and the dominance of Big Tech." However, this correction probably would not fit Trump's peculiar and unique style.

Let's deal with the translations:

AI: *La prensa es el mayor problema que tenemos, según mi opinión, el mayor problema único. Las noticias falsas y las grandes tecnológicas.*

MT: *En mi opinión, los medios de comunicación son el mayor problema que tenemos. Las fake news y las Big tech.*

HT: *Por lo que a mí respecta, los medios de comunicación son el mayor problema que tenemos. Las fake news y las big tech.*

The first version, as usual, offers a word-by-word translation of the original, while the second resorts to the incorporations from English *las 'fake news' y las 'Big Tech'* ("the fake news and the Big Tech") and aligns with expressions commonly used in today's Spanish political discourse according to Fundéu, and so does the third, which adheres to Spanish grammar rules more closely, particularly in the use of articles and quotation marks, and adds the idiomaticity of the expression *Por lo que a mí respecta* ("As far as I'm concerned").

Let's see another example:

9) For years, Democrats have gotten away with election fraud and weak Republicans. And that's what they are. There's so many weak Republicans. [...] They're weak Republicans, they're pathetic Republicans and that's what happens.

The sentence makes sweeping generalisations about Democrats and Republicans without providing specific evidence or examples to support these claims. Phrases like “pathetic Republicans” and “that’s what happens” evoke strong emotions and convey a sense of disdain towards the Republicans being criticised. A more rhetorically and grammatically adept version would be: “For years, Democrats have gotten away with electoral fraud and have weakened Republicans. And the thing is, there are a lot of weak Republicans. [...] These Republicans are weak, they are pathetic, and that’s how we’re doing.” Still, perhaps at this point it would be fair to say that by insulting both parties in his original way is a strong appeal to *pathos* that the improved, more comprehensible version does not achieve.

Let’s see the three translations:

AI: *Durante años, los Demócratas han salido impunes con el fraude electoral y los Republicanos débiles. Y así es como son. Hay tantos Republicanos débiles. Son Republicanos débiles, son Republicanos patéticos y así es como sucede.*

MT: *Durante años, los demócratas se han salido con la suya con el fraude electoral y los republicanos débiles. Y eso es lo que son. Hay tantos republicanos débiles. [...] Son republicanos débiles, son republicanos patéticos y eso es lo que pasa.*

HT: *Durante años, los demócratas han salido impunes del fraude electoral y han debilitado a los republicanos. Y es que hay una gran cantidad de republicanos débiles. [...] Son republicanos débiles, son patéticos, y así nos va.*

The first translation falls short due to its literal word-for-word approach, resulting in awkward phrasing and reduced comprehensibility. Additionally, punctuation errors, such as the unnecessary capitalization of *Republicanos* and *Demócratas*, detract from its grammatical correctness in Spanish. The second translation, while more concise, lacks the cultural nuance and idiomatic expression present in the third version, like *así nos va* to capture Trump’s tone and frustration.

2.6. Misuse of rhetorical schemas

Trump’s approach to rhetoric is marked by a departure from traditional conventions, as he frequently employs and abuses rhetorical schemas in unorthodox ways. One notable aspect is his direct address to the audience, bypassing conventional channels of communication to establish a more immediate connection. As we intimated in the first category, when discussing the simplicity of his discourse, this directness is often accompanied by

emphasis through repetition, a technique that, while effective in reinforcing key points, can also border on overuse, diminishing its impact. Hyperbole and exaggeration are also hallmarks of Trump's rhetoric, as he often employs these devices to amplify the significance of his claims for dramatic effect. While hyperbole can be a powerful tool, Trump's tendency to exaggerate facts has led to the distortion of truth and the erosion of credibility.

Let's see a couple of examples, first of repetition:

10) They said, "Sir, in four years, you're guaranteed [sic]." I said: "I'm not interested right now. Do me a favour, go back eight weeks. I want to go back eight weeks. Let's go back eight weeks."⁵

An improved version of this, for comprehensibility would be: "They told me, 'Sir, in four years, you're guaranteed to win the election'. I replied, 'I'm not interested in that at the moment. Please, do me a favour and rewind eight weeks. I want to go back to eight weeks ago. Let's go back eight weeks'." Still, by now it is clear how Trump is not interested in stylistic questions or good rhetoric. The translations follow:

AI: *Dijeron*: "Señor, en cuatro años, estás garantizado". Yo dije: "En este momento no estoy interesado. Hazme un favor, retrocede ocho semanas. Quiero retroceder ocho semanas. Volvamos ocho semanas".

MT: *Me dijeron*: «Señor, en cuatro años está garantizado». Yo dije: «Ahora mismo no me interesa. Hazme un favor, retrocede ocho semanas. Quiero retroceder ocho semanas. Retrocedamos ocho semanas».

HT: *Me comentaron*: «Señor, dentro de cuatro años tiene asegurado el puesto». Respondí: «En este momento no me interesa. Hacedme un favor, retrocedamos ocho semanas. Necesito volver atrás ocho semanas. Retrocedamos ocho semanas».

The third version stands out as the most correct due to its clarity, idiomatic expression, appropriate verb choice, and consistency in tense and person. It effectively conveys Trump's message in Spanish without sacrificing coherence or readability. The use of *Me comentaron* captures the informality

⁵ In this sentence from Trump's speech, he recounts a conversation where someone tells him that he is guaranteed to win the election in four years. Trump responds by saying he is not interested in that now and instead asks the person to go back eight weeks. He emphasises this by repeating "eight weeks", indicating a desire to postpone the issue of his election and to imply that matters in hand are more important.

of Trump's speech, while *asegurado el puesto* accurately translates "guaranteed" without ambiguity. Maintaining consistency in verb tense and person enhances comprehension, ensuring that the translation effectively conveys Trump's statement while adhering to grammatical correctness and idiomatic expression in Spanish. Additionally, the first version's use of English inverted commas adds a raw quality that may not align with standard punctuation conventions in Spanish, further stressing the superiority of the third version.

Now, and as the final example in our study, we are showing one way in which Trump makes use of hyperbole and exaggeration:

11) We've created the greatest economy in history. We rebuilt our military. We get you the biggest tax cuts in history. Right? We got you the biggest regulation cuts. There's no president, whether it's four years, eight years or in one case more, got anywhere near the regulation cuts.

This sentence exemplifies Trump's rhetorical style, characterised by a strong appeal to *ethos*, confidence in leadership, and *pathos* to mobilise his audience. By asserting accomplishments like "the greatest economy in history" and "the biggest tax cuts in history", Trump aims to establish credibility and instil a sense of pride and achievement among his supporters. This confident tone, coupled with claims of unprecedented successes, serves to bolster his image as a capable leader and rally support for his agenda. Furthermore, by emphasising that "no president" has achieved comparable regulation cuts, Trump seeks to reinforce his position as a transformative figure who delivers tangible results. Overall, the sentence effectively combines appeals to *ethos*, confidence, and emotion to garner support and motivate action, including potentially controversial actions such as marching over the Capitol. A more elegant version could read: "We have forged the most remarkable economy in history. We have revitalised our military, secured the largest tax cuts ever seen, and slashed regulations on an unprecedented scale. No president, whether serving four, eight, or even more years, has come close to our accomplishments in regulatory reform." The three different Spanish versions follow:

Al: Hemos creado la mayor economía de la historia. Reconstruimos nuestro ejército. Te conseguimos los mayores recortes de impuestos de la historia. ¿Verdad? Te conseguimos los mayores recortes de regulaciones. No hay presidente, ya sea durante cuatro años, ocho años o en un caso más, que se haya acercado siquiera a los recortes de regulaciones.

MT: *Hemos creado la mayor economía de la historia. Reconstruimos nuestro ejército. Conseguimos los mayores recortes fiscales de la historia. ¿Verdad? Les conseguimos los mayores recortes de regulación. Ningún presidente, ya sea de cuatro años, ocho años o en un caso más, se acercó a los recortes de regulación.*

HT: *Hemos creado la mayor economía de la historia. Hemos reconstruido nuestro ejército. Hemos conseguido los mayores recortes fiscales de la historia. ¿No es así? Os hemos conseguido los mayores recortes legales. Ningún presidente, ni en cuatro años, ni en ocho años, ni en ninguno más, se ha atrevido a recortar tanta legislación.*

The third version emerges as the most natural and idiomatic due to its adherence to standard grammatical structures and common expressions in Spanish. Firstly, it maintains a consistent use of verb tenses (*Hemos creado, Hemos reconstruido, Hemos conseguido*), ensuring coherence and fluidity. This consistency enhances readability and makes the sentence easier to follow. Moreover, the use of pronouns adds a personal touch, fostering a sense of direct engagement with the audience. In contrast, the other two versions exhibit flaws that detract from their naturalness and idiomatic quality. The first version introduces inconsistency in verb tenses (*Te conseguimos* vs. *No hay presidente*) and lacks clarity in its pronoun usage. Additionally, the phrase *ya sea durante cuatro años, ocho años o en un caso más* feels awkward and could be simplified for better readability. Similarly, the second version suffers from similar issues, including inconsistency in verb tenses (*Conseguimos* vs. *se acercó*) and a less natural choice of pronouns (*Les conseguimos* vs. *Ningún presidente*). Furthermore, the phrase *ya sea de cuatro años, ocho años o en un caso más* sounds convoluted and could be simplified for better comprehension.

Additionally, there are nuances that make the third version much more natural, as with the use of *Os* (you all), which is more personal and direct for a Spanish audience, particularly in Spain. In contrast, AI uses *Te* (you singular) and MT uses *Les* (formal/plural), which may not resonate as well.

Finally, the human translation deploys, to our view, a clearer and more impactful concluding sentence: "*Ningún presidente, ni en cuatro años, ni en ocho años, ni en ninguno más, se ha atrevido a recortar tanta legislación.*" This structure emphasises the uniqueness and boldness of the actions described.

CONCLUSIONS

Trump's discourse is marked by extravagant simplicity, syntactic fragmentation, and a recurrent appeal to emotion, which, despite often undermining logical consistency, proves remarkably persuasive. His rhetoric, though grammatically erratic and semantically unstable, resonates deeply with certain audiences, making it particularly difficult to translate. Emotion, or *pathos*, plays a crucial role in his communication style—he frequently invokes fear, anger, and resentment to galvanise support, often at the expense of rigor and rationality. His approach departs from traditional rhetorical norms, stretching the limits of political communication and complicating the task of translation. His frequent grammatical inconsistencies, limited vocabulary, and disjointed discourse create a paradox: while his speech may appear incoherent, it remains powerfully effective.

Consequently, the challenge of translating Trump's discourse into Spanish is not merely technical but conceptual and rhetorical. His language operates on multiple levels—linguistic, emotional, cultural, and ideological—posing challenges for different translation methods. Machine Translation (MT) tools like DeepL prioritise grammatical fluency, often producing translations that are formally correct but tonally inaccurate. Artificial Intelligence (AI) models such as ChatGPT are more flexible in capturing conversational patterns, but their outputs often introduce a degree of refinement that smooths over the rawness and ambiguity of the original. Human Translation (HT), though slower and inherently interpretive, remains the most effective in preserving the rhetorical force of the original speech. Translators must constantly decide whether to preserve Trump's linguistic idiosyncrasies or adapt them for clarity, a choice that is never politically neutral.

Rather than determining the superiority of one approach over another, this study suggests that each plays a distinct role. MT and AI provide structural scaffolding, but HT is crucial when a speaker's influence stems not from clarity, but from rhetorical performance. In Trump's case, the challenge is especially pronounced: his discourse is designed less to inform than to provoke, to polarise, and to reinforce a distinct political *persona*. Translating such speech requires more than linguistic accuracy—it demands attention to context, intention, and impact.

Ultimately, the act of translating Trump reveals broader tensions between fidelity and intelligibility, between literal meaning and rhetorical effect. The difficulties observed here are not anomalies but reflective of a larger shift in contemporary political discourse—one in which language functions as much to manipulate as to communicate. His rhetoric serves as an example of how

speech can both mobilise and divide, raising questions about the role of translation in a political landscape where persuasion increasingly relies on affect rather than argument. The challenges encountered in translating his discourse into Spanish illustrate the complexities and nuances of political communication in a globalised world.

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