

## Slogans in the Election Campaign in the Early Parliamentary Elections in Slovakia in 2023

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### Abstract

*Slovakia hold early parliamentary elections in September 2023. For any researcher, elections are an important time to research the language of politics. The electoral campaign before the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic also offered space for research on political language. The paper's main aim is to present several specific pre-election slogans as unique forms of political language and to characterise their language use objectively. The authors provide a brief overview of political discourse as a representation of ideologies and power struggles. They also deal with the description and characteristics of the election campaign and the language used in these campaigns.*

**Keywords:** political discourse, election campaigns, the language of election campaigns, slogans.

### Introduction

Language is frequently recognized as one of the earliest instruments for persuasion (Orgoňová, Bohunická 2013; Niehr 2013, 2014; Reinemann 2017). Carefully selected language can affect the assumptions, opinions, aspirations, and apprehensions of the audience, inducing people to accept incorrect claims as truths or endorse policies opposing their interests.

When contemplating the language employed in politics and political speeches, we typically envision it as a language that is prepared, accompanied, controlled, influenced, guided, justified, evaluated or criticised (Shäffner 1996). As Štefančík (2022) stated, the connection between language and politics is well established. Language is often seen as a crucial means of power. In the political context, language serves not only as a tool of communication but is also a target of political action.

In recent months public attention in Slovakia, but not only in Slovakia, has been focused on the campaigns and speeches of political leaders and their political parties regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections. The

parliamentary elections in Slovakia in 2023 were said to be the most important ones in the country's history. This period has been an opportune time for representatives of political entities to express their ideas on the future functioning of their parties and the country.

In this article, we present several specific randomly chosen pre-election slogans, used by different political parties in the Slovak parliamentary elections in 2023, as unique forms of political language and characterise their language use.

### **Political discourse**

Iqbal (2015) describes political discourse as undeniably characterised by the representation of ideologies and power struggles, often involving the exertion of hegemonic power. It manifests a continuous struggle for power, and language is doubtlessly the most effective tool to exercise this power. According to Van Dijk (1997, also Iqbal 2015), ideologies are expressed and formulated explicitly through discourse. Moreover, political ideologies play a significant role in producing and understanding political discourses and contribute to their (re)production. Therefore, the aspect of the power/language relationship must be taken into consideration. Fairclough (2000) asserts that power is enacted and exercised through discourse. He claims that it is difficult to imagine politics without it. By its nature, politics demands the formulation of choices, the weighing of options and the making of decisions. Politicians act as representatives of their party, government or political institutions, seeking to establish power, determine identities and shape society. Integrating ideologies through discursive practices plays a significant role in impartially shaping relationships.

Iqbal (2015) in her study states, that research on political discourse analysis globally highlights its importance and supports these notions. Various genres of political discourse have captured scholars' attention for investigation, including printed and oral discourse, for many years. Bhatia (2006, in Iqbal 2015)) notes that discourse analysts have extensively discussed the multidimensionality of political discourse. Political discourse analysis is a field of study which centres on interpreting and explaining political communication, across all degrees of government – local, national and international. In examining political discourse, scholars apply discourse analysis to identify meaning and messages conveyed via a range of linguistic modes (Dulebová 2011).

## **Election campaigns**

Election campaigns are a distinct form of political campaigning. In contrast to other campaigns, their goal is to achieve the most favourable electoral outcome. During such campaigns, the media takes a greater interest in political issues, resulting in an increase in news coverage and broadcasts of specific discussion programmes. This also allows political analysts more space to analyse the current domestic political situation (Sersová 2017; Cingerová, Dulebová, Štefančík 2021).

Štefančík and Petříková (2017) state that there are at least two ways of defining election campaigning. In a narrower sense, the term is understood as the direct promotion of a political party or candidates for elected public office with a view to winning votes in an election, at some point in the period preceding the act of voting. In a broader sense, the term election campaign can refer to any performance by politicians in the run-up to an election. Indeed, it is assumed that politicians are constantly making every effort to reaffirm their mandate, even in contexts that are not directly related to elections.

The period of election campaigning is the pinnacle of political communication for every candidate, politician and campaign team. Elections ascertain the future of a politician, determining whether he/she will remain in office or retire from politics altogether. Campaigning is of utmost importance in areas, where political parties lack support from voters, voter turnover is high, party systems lack firm foundations and political parties lack organized structures. In such circumstances, it is assumed that voters will make their choices according to their personal and momentary affinities for a political leader or the leadership of a political party, as opposed to identifying with the electoral programme of the candidates (Cingerová, Dulebová, Štefančík 2021).

## **Language in the election campaigns**

The language used in political campaigns is a crucial area of study for experts in the field of political science, linguistics or political linguistics (Štefančík 2022). The language used in election campaigns is diverse, varying depending on the political party's ideology and candidates' beliefs, as well as the communication strategy employed by the election team. This stands in contrast to the language of legal norms or individual public speeches of politicians (Barac 2016). This is because the primary objective of political parties is to sway a maximum number of individuals from vari-

ous socio-economic backgrounds during elections. The purpose of this persuasion is to incentivise voters to make a specific choice, which, in this case, is their electoral decision. It is thus inconsequential whether the campaign's language is positively or negatively tuned or if it is designed to appeal to emotions or reason. The purpose of political language in an election campaign is consistently to persuade.

In today's digitalized world, political party leaders have various possibilities to present their ideas and plans and to persuade voters. However, in addition to using various types of media, they are constantly relying on face-to-face meetings with citizens, ie. potential voters. According to Barac (2016), language in an election campaign appears primarily in several textual or verbal forms. Their common characteristic is that they all exist in the public sphere and are addressed to the public. Barac summarized these textual forms of election campaigns into for most important and frequently occurring forms: election slogan, election programme, pre-election discussions, and pre-election party meetings. In addition to these four basic forms, we must not forget the texts found in the virtual world, i.e. on the Internet and social networks, which are extremely widespread and probably the most effective in terms of reaching the population, in this case, the voters.

### **Slogans in the 2023 pre-election campaign in Slovakia**

A campaign slogan is a special form of political language. Marketing or advertising agencies, together with politicians, usually spend a lot of energy and time coming up with an interesting, catchy and appealing slogan. A slogan can create passion in voters and „kick-start“ their energy into political participation. It clearly shows the direction a politician or political party will take and presents the priority issues of the post-election vision.

The slogan is one of the shortest forms of political communication that voters encounter mainly on leaflets, brochures, billboards and posters, or on political party websites or social media. Compared to other text formats, slogans are characterised by their specific structure and functions in political communication. Because they are short, they must be concise and understandable to different social groups. As a rule, they are no longer than ten words.

The importance of an election slogan is that it should primarily appeal to potential voters who are not interested in studying election manifestos in detail or who do not sufficiently understand the differences between political parties. The slogan also has the function of summarising the main electoral

priorities of the political party and presenting them to the public in a simplified way.

During the election campaign in Slovakia in 2023, a multitude of billboards were displayed on the streets, each striving to grab the attention of voters regarding pertinent issues. However, it remains to be seen whether the slogans on the billboards truly reflect intriguing and vital topics for the voters.

The most frequent keywords that appeared on billboards were „*Stabilita, skúsenosti, koniec chaosu*“ (Stability, experience, end of chaos). This slogan was used by Smer SSD. This slogan was meant to give the impression that this party can provide stability and order after years of an unstable political situation. The word „experience“ was also mentioned on the billboard by the representatives of Modrí – Most Híd: „*Skúsenosti sú kľúčom k budúcnosti*“ (Experience is the key to the future). In this context, we can pose the question of whether stability and experience are the issues that the voters really need. A social psychologist from the Slovak Academy of Science, Gabriel Bianchi, in a TV programme on TV JOJ (2023), argues that people do not even have demands or expectations of what they want from political parties. Ordinary voters cannot formulate what a party's programme should look like. They are angry because they have to wait at the doctor's, they are afraid that they might lose their jobs, so the slogans that hit the mark and evoke sympathy the best are the most complex ones. But those people need something completely different. They need change to get to that doctor, no amount of stability or sustainability is going to get them there. A very similar slogan was used by Smer SSD „*Stabilita, poriadok a sociálne istoty*“ (Stability, order and social security). In Slovakia, for a long time, at least for the last three elections, health care, living standards and unemployment have been among the most serious perceived by the people. The interpretation of the above-mentioned slogan can lie in people connecting stability with a higher, or at least not worse, standard of living.

The word „chaos“ was also used by the party Demokrati: „*Koniec chaosu*“ (End to chaos) Although Smer SSD and Demokrati are politically quite different in the case of slogans, the two entities meet in that they both promise politics without chaos. By „chaos“ they both refer to and criticise the governance of the previous government, namely the political party OĽANO. On the other hand, OĽANO does not stay behind in criticism. Their slogan „*My vás mafii nedáme*“ (We will not give you to the mafia) truly mirrors what this party was and still is fighting against. If we take a closer look at the presentation of this movement, they present themselves as a movement that fights corruption. Since 2018, Igor Matovič, the leader of the movement, has aimed to draw corruption into the term „mafia“. There-

fore, this slogan follows the original one that the movement adopted. However, this topic does not carry as much relevance now as it did in 2018.

Many of the slogans have been intertwined with a common aim of a better future, promoting unity and collaboration. Phrases such as „moving together“ and „coming together“ are used to illustrate this shared objective. *„Dostaňme Slovensko na správnu cestu“* (Let's get Slovakia to the right way) was a slogan used by Hlas SD. The slogan also contains a linguistic device of metaphor. „The right way“ is a journey metaphor pointing out the journey to a better future for people. Other slogans emphasising a better future are *„Dôstojná budúcnosť pre všetkých – Budúcnosť tvoríme spoločne“* (A future with dignity for all – Creating the future together) used by the second most powerful party in the elections Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia), *„Zaslúžite sa mať lepšie“* (You deserve better) used by Kresťansko Demokratické Hnutie, *„Za lepšiu budúcnosť a dôstojnejší život“* (For a better future and a life with dignity) by political party Princíp. However, these short statements or phrases about a better future lack clarity and fail to provide specific details regarding the proposals put forth by the political parties.

Very similar to the clarity and detail-lacking statements are questions used in slogans on the billboards. Hlas SD is a typical example of a political party that uses this way of addressing voters. At the very beginning of the election campaign, their slogan was *„Idete do toho so mnou?“* (Are you coming with me?) This was followed by another question: *„Chcete lacnejšie potraviny?“* (Do you want cheaper groceries?) The use of questions in slogans on election posters and billboards give political parties a degree of reassurance that they are not promising anything with their statements, they are just asking people for their opinion. Currently, a number of smaller, recently established political parties lack a formal programme. It is not uncommon for parties in this early stage to be without such documents. The inquiry suggests a level of interest in the topic, but they will refrain from proposing a solution as the party has not yet established a programme and therefore has a window of opportunity to prepare a comprehensive plan.

A very specific slogan was used by the political party Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS) *„Je čas na krúpobitie“* (It's time for hail). For an ordinary citizen unfamiliar with the party's candidates and their respective activities, this slogan lacks appeal. Its purpose is to promote a SaS candidate whose objective (as per his promotional material) is to safeguard peace and guarantee security and safety for the citizens of Slovakia.

The slogan *„Silný štát“* (Strong state) used by the political party Hlas SD may be looked at as a paradoxical one. The question arising here is whether the people, the voters want a strong state or the rule of law.

Deciphering the rule of law is not a simple feat. This is precisely why political parties utilise statements that can be easily understood and explained to the general populace, regardless of their level of education. However, such statements do not always align with the true intentions of the party.

The far-right party Republika drew attention to the unstable political system after the government of Igor Matovič and Eduard Heger. This party uses the slogan “*Urobíme poriadok*” (*We will make order*), while the narrative of order has been in the communication strategies of the far right for many years (Štefančík, Stradiotová 2021). In the past, they have persuaded voters that they will bring order not only in parliament but also in the settlements of poor Roma, which are located on the peripheries of villages in central and eastern Slovakia (Štefančík, Stradiotová 2022).

Based on the above examples, it can be concluded that election campaign slogans employ rich and concise language, despite using very brief statements. Their purpose, at this point, is not to provide voters with comprehensive information, but rather to creatively highlight specific social issues and ultimately persuade them to vote for their party.

## Conclusion

The language used in political campaigning exhibits a great deal of diversity, it is found in various forms both oral and written. These texts dedicated to pre-election advertisements give linguists a huge amount of information to scrutinise regularly. However, the language of an election campaign is different from the language of bureaucrats or diplomats. As noted by Štefančík and Petriková (2017), every election campaign in Slovakia has introduced words into the political vocabulary which can be classified as either flag words or stigmatising words. Flag words are words with a positive emotional connotation. These words serve as a guide for the potential recipient and an integrative tool in defining the imaginary collective subject WE. On the other hand, the stigmatising words help us to delineate the boundaries between the subject WE and THEY. These stigmatic words also express a certain attitude of a party, but with the difference that through them the competing party and politician are presented in a negative light. Their function is to damage the reputation of the competitors. Thus, in the language of political parties, flag words carry a positive meaning and stigmatising words have a negative meaning.

The ongoing research and studies in the field of political linguistics are continuously providing new insights for readers. These results are signifi-

cant for comprehension of statements made by representatives of different political parties. This comprehension can prove difficult in certain cases due to the use of complex linguistic structures in the current political climate. As our research shows, Slovak experts in the field of political linguistics have plenty of research material. Typical populists have become government politicians. The question now is whether they will continue their populism or tone down their vocabulary. But by changing their populist rhetoric, they risk losing voters and strengthening other radical parties.

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