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Analyzing Linguistic Patterns in the Social Media Discourse of Juan Guaidó and Nicolás Maduro during the 2019 Political Conflict in Venezuela

Abstract: In this paper, the political conflict in Venezuela in 2019 is approached from a corpus linguistic point of view. The conflict between Juan Guaidó, the speaker of the parliament, and Nicolás Maduro, who won the internationally unrecognized 2018 presidential election, escalated on January 23, 2019, when Guaidó proclaimed himself the legitimate president of Venezuela. By comparatively analyzing the tweets of the two politicians three months before and after January 23, 2019, a corpus-based discourse analysis will be conducted to investigate whether and to what extent linguistic patterns (especially most frequent words and their co-occurrences, as well as n-grams) change within the respective social media communication of these political opponents. The analysis reveals changes in linguistic patterns, especially with respect to co-occurrences and n-grams, detected in the corpus data, and demonstrates that politicians use *Twitter* to present themselves, in the case of Guaidó, as the representative of the people wanting to lead Venezuela into a democratic future, and, in the case of Maduro, as the only legitimate president and defender of Venezuela against internal and external threats.

Keywords: Juan Guaidó, Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, Social Media, Twitter, linguistic patterns

1 Introduction: The 2019 Political Conflict in Venezuela

In the beginning of 2019, a government crisis culminated in Venezuela, arousing widespread international attention. At the center of the controversy was the 2018 reelection of President Nicolás Maduro, the legitimacy of which was disputed or entirely unrecognized by both the Venezuelan opposition and a number of foreign governments (including both the United States and the European Union). The conflict between the ruling president and the opposition escalated in January of 2019, when a disempowered parliament found Maduro's reelection illegitimate, and, thereafter, when the President of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó,

declared himself interim president. In this function, Guaidó's aim was to call for new elections as soon as possible. Maduro responded to these developments with repressive and violent measures that triggered a months-long supply crisis and an ongoing struggle for power, much of which was conducted on social media, especially on the platform *Twitter*.

In this paper, therefore, we would like to conduct empirical analysis of digital political discourse to help reveal different positions in this struggle for power. In this regard, the focus of this corpus-based research will be on linguistic patterns in the tweets both of Maduro and Guaidó during the Venezuelan political crisis. Of particular interest is the question of whether the politicians' respective tweets can be linguistically distinguished in the three months preceding and following January 23, 2019, and whether and how these differences are visible in corpus data.

We begin by remarking on the general research topic of social media and political discourse, illustrating this with examples from Romance languages. In the third section, the corpus linguistic study is presented in more detail and the results of the analysis are discussed. We then conclude in the fourth section with brief reflection on the findings.

2 Political Social Media Discourse

2.1 Recent studies of political social media discourse (in Romance Languages)

Since their emergence, social media platforms have led to profound changes in political communication. Politicians, political parties, and political journalists use social networks to disseminate their positions and various content directly among followers and other platform users. Linguistic patterns that were already important in past political discourse are now of even greater significance in the practice of social networks. If one thinks back, for example, to the successful presidential campaigns of Barack Obama or Donald Trump, it is the short phrases like "Yes, We Can" and "Make America Great Again" that became entrenched through constant, easy repetition. In an article on the manipulative potential of metaphors in English, Jamet and Terry highlight the importance of these

repetitions for a so-called "hammering effect" (2020, 35) of communicative manipulation. Moreover, it is precisely characteristic of social media that they favor the formation of linguistic patterns, since the function of hashtags, for example, is to represent retrievable character combinations and, thus, to network users and the messages they share. Examples of how much politicians use such hashtag-based patterns can be seen in *#MAGA* ('Make America Great Again') during Trump's election campaign, *#FranceUnie* ('France United') by Emmanuel Macron, and *#EsteVirusLoParamosUnidos* ('This Virus We Will Stop United') by Pedro Sánchez in their tweets during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in spring 2020 (cf. Hesselbach 2020).

The analysis of social media discourse (cf. Page et al. 2014), and *Twitter* discourse in particular, has led to a large number of publications on cases in Romance languages, of which only a few will be mentioned: including, for example, studies on political language in Marine Le-Pen's tweets (Visser 2018) or on *Twitter* discourse in recent Catalonian political conflict (Eibensteiner 2022). Mencke (2018), furthermore, provides an analysis of the use of "@-mentions" and hashtags in Marion Maréchale Le Pen's activity on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Wolf (2022) analyzes *Twitter* use of Macron and Le Pen in the 2019 European elections, demonstrating their respective application of framing processes in relation to the concept of Europe. Hesselbach (2020) focuses on the communicative strategies of three heads of state in Romance-speaking countries (Conte in Italy, Macron in France, and Sánchez in Spain) on *Twitter* and *Facebook* during the onset of the pandemic in Europe in 2020. In the context of the conflict in Venezuela,[1] Alizadeh Afrouzi examines the role of social media and newspapers during this crisis and shows "that both national and international press participated as external narrators in the political conflict and highlight the role of newspapers as political actors and social media as a tool in their hands" (2020, 3). Arias (2019) highlights the importance of social media for organizing the opposition and regime-critical movements in Venezuela,

[1] A recent comparative study of populism in Venezuela and Spain is presented by Connett (2023), who presents a discourse-linguistic analysis of texts by Hugo Chávez, the former president of Venezuela, and Pablo Iglesias, the former leader of the Spanish left-wing populist party *Podemos*.

in a similar vein to Morselli, Passini, and McGarty (2021), who focus on anti-Maduro protesters using *Twitter* following the 2017 elections. We can thus see there exists widespread studies on political discourse in social media, but comparative studies specifically of Guaidó's and Maduro's communication on social media in the context of this high-profile political conflict are, to my knowledge, not yet available. The aim of the present paper, therefore, is to analyze the social media discourse of the two politicians at the height of political tensions in January 2019, with particular focus on linguistic patterns.

2.2 The Importance of Social Media Discourse in the Venezuelan Political Conflict

In recent years, the development of social media platforms, including *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *TikTok*, has become an indispensable part of global political communication.[2] No exception to this, social media communication has thereby played a critical role for the two figures at the center of the 2019 Venezuelan political conflict. For example, both Juan Guaidó and Nicolás Maduro use the short-message service provided by *Twitter* to communicate their messages to their followers with both textual and multimodal information. The following table provides an overview of the politicians' *Twitter* use, history, and followers.

[2] Another example of this is that of Olaf Scholz, who created his own account, specifically as chancellor, on Twitter at the beginning of his time in office (he had already had an account before his election): "Frank-Walter #Steinmeier hat den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern in schwierigen Zeiten Orientierung gegeben und mit Herzblut das höchste Amt im Staat bekleidet. Ich bin froh, dass er dies weiterhin tun wird. Herzlichen Glückwunsch, lieber #Bundespräsident! Und: Hallo, Twitter!" (Tweet-ID: 1492866273021206535, @Bundeskanzler, 13/7/2022; 'Frank-Walter #Steinmeier has given citizens guidance in difficult times and held the highest office in the state with heart and soul. I am glad that he will continue to do so. Congratulations, dear #FederalPresident! And: Hello, Twitter!').

	Juan Guaidó	Nicolás Maduro
Account	@jguaido	@NicolasMaduro
On Twitter since …	May 2009	March 2013
Number of tweets	49,228	123,338
Number of followers	2.6 million	4.4 million

Tab. 1: Information on Juan Guiadó's and Nicolás Maduro's *Twitter* accounts (as of January 31, 2023)[3]

As can be seen, Maduro has not been using the platform for as long as Guaidó, but holds the larger number of followers. This can presumably be attributed to his more exposed position, due to his formal office as president of Venezuela.

In order to understand the importance of political communication in Venezuela, we refer to Adriana Bolívar, who describes political and communicative strategies of authoritarian populism in Venezuela. She names communicative hegemony (*hegemonía comunicacional*) as an important factor for political-populist communication:

> Este fue para Chávez un punto clave y sigue siéndolo para Nicolás Maduro. La estrategia de Chávez consistió en neutralizar todos los medios de Oposición, dificultar la tarea de quienes fueran disidentes, y crear nuevos medios para difundir la revolución, como Telesur. Al mismo tiempo, mantuvo el contacto directo con el pueblo a través de su Programa *Aló Presidente*, que se transmitía todos los domingos en cadena nacional por radio y televisión. A eso se suman las alocuciones presidenciales, las llamadas a la radio y a la televisión, su presencia activa en distintos eventos y, sobre todo, las cadenas nacionales que podían hacerse en cualquier momento por diferentes motivos. Maduro ha fortalecido esta hegemonía (2019, 25–26).
>
> 'This was a key point for Chávez and continues to be so for Nicolás Maduro. Chávez's strategy consisted in neutralizing all Opposition media, hindering the task of those who were dissidents, and creating new media to spread the revolution, such as Telesur. At the same time, he maintained direct contact with the people through his *Aló Presidente* Program, which was transmitted every Sunday in national radio and television chain. In addition to this, there were presidential addresses, calls to radio and television, his active presence in different events and, above all, the national chains that could be made at any time for different reasons. Maduro has strengthened this hegemony.'

[3] The names are presented here in alphabetical order.

Among other strategies, she mentions 'the deinstitutionalization of democracy' (*la desinstitucionalización de la democracia*), 'political polarization' (*la polarización política*), 'emotional bonding' (*la vinculación afectiva*), 'manipulation of emotions through fear' (*la manipulación de las emociones por el miedo*), and the 'legitimization of verbal and physical violence' (*la legitimación de la violencia verbal y física*) (2019, 25–27). A major component of such communicative hegemony is also the self-presentation of politicians on social media. Although the study presented here focuses on a textual analysis of Guaidó's and Maduro's tweets, it is nonetheless worth briefly considering how the two respectively portray themselves on their *Twitter* profiles.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, Guaidó shows himself together with the people (he calls himself *servidor público*, or 'public servant'), the national flag, and, as if perpetually taking an oath, his hand on his heart. All of this points to a supposed duty to serve the Venezuelan people as legitimate president of Venezuela, as stated in his profile's biography section: *Presidente (E) de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela* ('President (E) of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela').

Similar to Guaidó, the depiction of Maduro in Fig. 2 reveals a reference to the people as a means of legitimizing his political power. Maduro, moreover, leaves no doubt that he is the legitimate president of Venezuela: both the text superimposed on the image (*Presidente Maduro* 'President Maduro') and the image of Maduro wearing a sash are intended to visually emphasize that he is the only president of the country, as he also specifies in his biographical information (*Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela 2019–2024* 'President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela 2019–2024'). His raised arm and outstretched finger, furthermore, can also be interpreted as Maduro revealing the way forward for the country, a reading reinforced by the indication of the precise period of the legislature (2019–2024).

Both politicians – or, more precisely, their political strategists – are of course aware of the power of such depictions. The popularity of social media among politicians can be explained in large part by its impressive reach – perhaps also achievable by TV broadcasts, for example, but a circulation of which classic political print media, such as newspapers, cannot approximate. This is also clear from Tab. 1. While Maduro's account counts four million followers, Guaidó reaches 2.6 million people through his *Twitter* communication. Furthermore, politicians routinely declare

Fig. 1: Juan Gaidó on *Twitter* (https://twitter.com/jguaido, November 28, 2019)

that they and their followers benefit from there being no intermediaries, especially political journalists, between them and the recipients of their messages on *Twitter*, and that the political statements thereby reach their supporters directly and unaltered.

Both aforementioned points (i.e., the importance and the outreach of social media) also justify an increased interest of linguists in digital political discourses. The need to formulate and argue linguistically concisely and succinctly, the limited number of characters permitted in a tweet, and the use of linguistic patterns that are typical of (both spoken and written) political discourse define a distinct digital text type. This will be examined in more detail, in the following section, as regards the political conflict in Venezuela.

Fig. 2: Nicolás Maduro on *Twitter* (https://twitter.com/nicolasmaduro, November 28, 2019)

3 A Corpus-Based Approach

We now address the question of whether an event, such as Juan Guaidó's self-declaration as interim president of Venezuela, holds a demonstrable impact on the language used in social media posts by these two political opponents. For this purpose, corpus linguistic discourse analysis will be conducted, following Bubenhofer (2009, 18), who argues that 'discovering patterns in language use is the central operation of corpus linguistic discourse analysis' ("Muster im Sprachgebrauch zu entdecken ist die zentrale Operation einer korpuslinguistischen Diskursanalyse"). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to first make visible the linguistic patterns in Guaidó's and Maduro's social media discourses, before then drawing a comparison between both politicians.

3.1 Method

We employ a corpus-based approach to answer these research questions. Since Guaidó's January 23, 2019, self-proclamation as president assumes a central role in this political conflict, all tweets three months before and after that day are included in our analysis. Only the two politicians' own respective tweets (no retweets, e.g.) were taken into consideration for the research.[4] Likewise, no consideration was given to multimodal elements (which *Twitter* permits in the form of image or video files), so that it is only textual data from the tweets that will be processed. The following example will be used to explain the analysis: a tweet by Guaidó, in which he creates a text-image relationship by directly addressing a military general while providing an image of him, and thereby exposing him to public pressure.

It would be another research desideratum to study further multimodal relations (text-image or text-video) in social media, as these, too, of course influence users, and especially in political contexts. We will, instead, narrow our focus on the purely textual properties of tweets, as mentioned above, so that, in the example of Fig. 3, only the range of "Vamos a escri-

[4] Not considered relevant to the study is that social media teams, which often take care of individual politicians on social networks, may also have sent some of these tweets. The decisive factor for the analysis, however, is that messages were published under the account of Guaidó or Maduro, as these then reach their respective large audiences.

Fig. 3: Tweet by Guaidó (@jguaido) from January 19, 2019 (Tweet-ID: 1097901080233607170)

birle […] que entre la ayuda humanitaria. #SoldadoEscucha"[5] will be taken into consideration.

The first step was to collect all tweets from Guaidó and Maduro in the three months preceding and succeeding Guaidó self-declaration as interim president. The following table shows the distribution of the number of tweets by Guaidó and Maduro over this six-month period (October 23, 2018, to April 23, 2019):[6]

	23/10/2018 – 22/01/2019	**23/01/2019 – 23/04/2019**	**Σ**
Guaidó	182 (26 %)	528 (74 %)	710
Maduro	256 (42 %)	358 (58 %)	614

Tab. 2: Number of tweets by Guaidó and Maduro from October 23, 2018, until April 23, 2019

[5] "Let's write to him [...] let humanitarian aid come in. #SoldierListen."

[6] The research data is available under the following link: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10694169.

From the table, the size of the total corpus appears evident. With 710 tweets, Guaidó's subcorpus is slightly larger than that of Maduro, with 614 tweets. The ratio is very striking, however, when one considers the period before January 23, 2019. In this period, Maduro is more active on *Twitter* (with 256 tweets), while Guaidó has only roughly 70 % of the number of Maduro's tweets at that time (182 tweets). A first and very important insight can thus be gained by looking at what happened following January 23, 2019. While Maduro posts about 100 more tweets in the three months after than before, Guaidó's data demonstrates clearly the importance of social media for this infamous power struggle. After his self-proclamation as president on January 23, 2019, the number of Guido's tweets almost triples: from 182 to 528. This dramatic tack in the frequency of these two politicians' *Twitter* usage can also be seen in Fig. 4, which shows how Guaidó publishes a significantly higher number of tweets in the immediate lead-up to January 23, 2019.

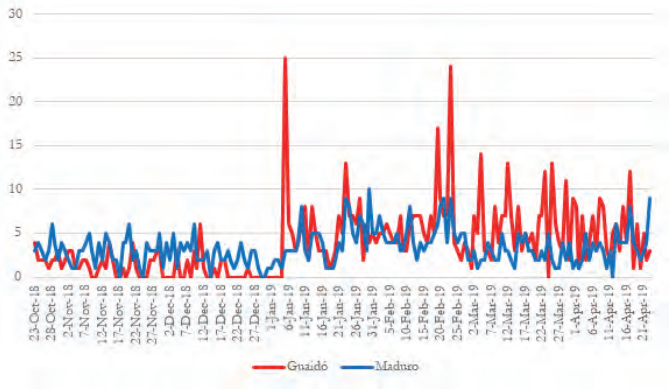

Fig. 4: Timeline of posted tweets by Guaidó (red) and Maduro (blue) between October 23, 2018, and April 23, 2019

The size of the corpus, in terms of the number of tokens, should also be mentioned at this point, with the sum of tokens shown referring to the partial sums of the periods before and after January 23, 2019.

	Guaidó	Maduro
total number of tweets	710	614
total number of tokens	29,647 (= 7,221 + 22,426)	25,460 (= 10,692 + 14,768)

Tab. 3: Number of tokens by Guaidó and Maduro from October 23, 2018, until April 23, 2019

While the total amount of tokens for both Maduro and Guaidó is between 25,000 and 30,000, and the analysis is therefore reasonably comparable, Guaidó in particular shows a distinctly uneven distribution of tokens. It is clearly visible that the tweets following January 23, 2019, reveal a greater number of tokens, which may be due to his needing to explain his policies to the people of Venezuela in more detail than did the standing president. In line with Bubenhofer (2009, 112), according to whom patterned structures can be defined as recurrent linguistic units (e.g., in the form of collocations, co-occurrences, and n-grams) in texts, in this study, we first identify the most frequently occurring nouns and their co-occurrences. In the analysis of recurrent patterns, the decomposition of texts into so-called n-grams, which generally refers to the fragmentation of a text into *n* parts, provides another useful approach. Bubenhofer defines the term as follows:

> "Das n steht für eine beliebige Zahl > 0; die Bezeichnung leitet sich von den Namen für Ein-, Zwei- oder Dreiwortausdrücke, ‚Unigramme', ‚Bigramme', ‚Trigramme', ab. Normalerweise werden n-Gramme nur als eine Reihe von direkt aufeinander folgenden Wörtern verstanden (Manning/Schütze 2002, 192ff.)" (2009, 118).
>
> 'The n stands for any number > 0; the name is derived from the names for one-, two-, or three-word expressions, 'unigrams', 'bigrams', 'trigrams'. Normally, n-grams are understood only as a series of words directly following each other […]'.

An n-gram analysis, therefore, will be used here to identify further syntagmatic speech patterns as a final step.

3.2 Results

All four subcorpora of the aforementioned study were analyzed using the R package *stylo* for stylometric analysis (Eder et al. 2013) and the software program *CorpusExplore*r (Rüdiger 2018). In a first step, the most frequent

words (MFW) and their co-occurrences form the focus of the analysis, followed by an examination of the most frequent n-grams in the corpus.

3.2.1 Most frequent words (MFW) and co-occurrences

To get an impression of the stylistic relation between the discourses of these two politicians, an analysis can be performed using the package *stylo* in R. In this case, the program calculates (here for the 1000 MFW = *most frequent words*) the proximity or distance of the four subcorpora, based on the classical delta distance measure[7] to each other. The result can then be seen in Fig. 5.

From the plot, one can see that Guaidó's texts, from before and after January 23, remain stylistically closer to each other (with respect to the

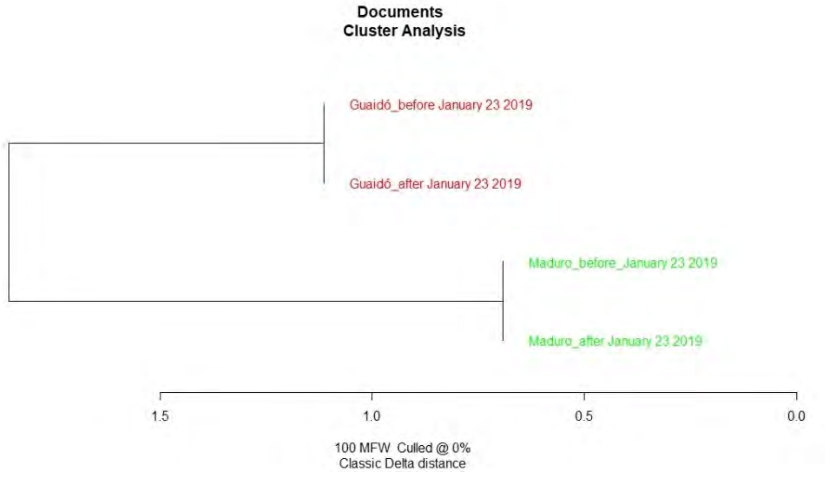

Fig. 5: Illustration of the stylometric analysis of the four sub-corpora (based on the 100 MFW and the Classic Delta distance measure)

[7] The classical delta is a distance measure described by Burrows (2002) – hence named the *Burrows Delta* – and can be used for stylistic comparisons of texts, and subsequently for determining authorship attribution. The algorithm is based on the relative frequency of types in different texts. If the difference measure is small, the closer the texts are in terms of style. For the exact calculation of the delta distance measure and its (stylometric) application, cf. also Burrows (2002) and Büttner et al. (2017).

feature of the most frequent words) than to those of Maduro. The same stands for Maduro, whose tweets following January 23 are more similar to their predecessors than to Guaido's tweets from the same time. Hence, it can generally be stated that following January 23, 2019, there were no abrupt changes in the tweets and linguistic characteristics thereof, as the politicians' messages remained relatively stable. If we take a closer look, however, at the high-frequency substantives, for example, we can note some interesting observations, as seen in Tab. 4:

	Guaidó		**Maduro**	
	before January 23	after January 23	before January 23	after January 23
1.	*venezolano* (36)	*país* (116)	*pueblo* (82)	*pueblo* (169)
2.	*país* (35)	*usurpación* (95)	*patria* (78)	*Venezuela* (128)
3.	*régimen* (33)	*ayuda* (80)	*Venezuela* (75)	*patria* (121)
4.	*pueblo* (24)	*venezolano* (79)	*año* (67)	*año* (55)
5.	*@AsambleaVE* (24)	*pueblo* (74)	*mundo* (38)	*paz* (48)

Tab. 4: The five most frequently occurring substantives in the corpora of Guaidó and Maduro, before and after January 23, 2019.

Looking at the results, we can see that, both before and after January 23, both politicians thematize the country (*Venezuela*, *país* 'country'; Maduro: *patria* 'homeland') and its people (*pueblo*, *venezolano*). While we do not notice significant difference in Maduro's tweets, we indeed observe in Guaidó's case that two nouns – *ayuda* ('help') and *usurpación* ('seizure of power') – appear with high frequency in his tweets following January 23, 2019, as can be seen in the following examples:

(1) Unidos en una sola voz dentro y fuera del territorio venezolano, logramos el reconocimiento del mundo entero, la confianza, la legitimidad y en 2 días logramos lo que ellos en 6 años no hicieron. ¡Autorizamos la *Ayuda* Humanitaria! # VzlaConLaANPorLaLibertad (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1088854491611516928, January 25, 2019)

'United in a single voice inside and outside Venezuelan territory, we achieved the recognition of the entire world, trust, legitimacy and in 2 days we achieved what they did not do in 6 years: we authorized Humanitarian Aid! #VzlaConLaANPorLaLibertad'

(2) ¡Somos muestra de fuerza y organización! Con cada manifestación ciudadana nos acercamos a nuestra merecida libertad y la urgente *ayuda* humanitaria. Levantamos en paz nuestra protesta y nos preparamos para el sábado en toda Venezuela y el mundo. ¡Vamos bien, muy bien! #VamosBien (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1090675094488256512, January 30, 2019)
'We are a sign of strength and organization! With every civil demonstration we get closer to our deserved freedom and urgent humanitarian aid. We raise in peace our protest and we prepare for Saturday all over Venezuela and the world. We are doing well, very well! #VamosBien'

(3) Ratificamos a los gobiernos de México y Uruguay nuestra posición de restituir el orden constitucional en Venezuela. Tenemos una ruta clara: 1. Cese de la *usurpación* 2. Gobierno de transición 3. Elecciones libres ¡Únanse a nuestro llamado democrático! (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1091308378046062592, February 1, 2019)
'We are ratifying to the governments of Mexico and Uruguay our position to restore constitutional order in Venezuela. We have a clear path: 1. Cessation of the *usurpation* 2. Transitional government 3. Free elections Join our democratic call!'

(4) ¡Punto aprobado! Acuerdo que reconoce al Grupo de Lima y los países de Europa su apoyo, así como el rechazo a cualquier diálogo o grupo de contacto que alargue el sufrimiento del pueblo. Único objetivo: cese de la *usurpación*, gobierno de transición y elecciones libres. #SesiónAN (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1092886581759918080, February 5, 2019)
'Point approved! Agreement recognizing the support of the Lima Group and the countries of Europe, as well as the rejection of any dialogue or contact group that prolongs the suffering of the people. Only objective: cessation of usurpation, transitional government, and free elections. #SessionAN'

An example of an almost metalinguistic explanation is demonstrated when Guaidó first explains the meaning of the word *usurpador* in a tweet. At first glance, it seems the following example can be read purely textually, as a semantic definition of the word *usurpador*:

(5) Un *usurpador* es una persona que reclama y toma el poder de forma ilegítima, que actúa fuera de autoridad, que se apodera de un derecho que legítimamente no le pertenece #ElUsurpador10Enero (@jguaido, Tweet-ID: 1072313434119778312, December 11, 2018)
'A usurper is a person who claims and seizes power illegitimately, who acts outside of authority, who seizes a right that does not legitimately belong to him #ElUsurpador10Enero'

This is a particularly remarkable tweet, as, at a second glance, there is a delegitimizing function that can be observed. In context, it is obvious that in this tweet he relates *usurpador* to Maduro, even without explicitly mentioning him. This reference is not entirely necessary, however, insofar as the corresponding frame is already set to the viewers of the tweet, which is one of the reasons he uses the word *usurpador* with such high frequency in the aftermath of January 23.

As we can see, such high-frequency lexemes are the topics talked or tweeted about. In the following, we will situate these in context. That is, we will investigate *how* they are talked or tweeted about and, therefore, compare the occurrences before and after January 23, which appear statistically frequently with the frequent nouns. First, we analyze the noun *pueblo*, which, as seen in Tab. 4, demonstrates a consistently high frequency in the tweets by both politicians.

(a) *Pueblo*

If we pursue the question of whether there exists linguistic change in the tweets after January 23, 2019, we can see from the analysis of Guaidó's tweets that different co-occurrences appear after that day. While prior to January 23, the adjective *venezolano* occurs primarily together with *pueblo*, it can be seen that, while *venezolano* continues similarly frequently, now words such as *reconocimiento* 'recognition', *voluntad* 'will' or 'wish', and *compromiso* 'engagement', 'agreement', or 'commitment' also increasingly appear together with *pueblo*. In addition, the representation in Tab. 5 shows that words such as *democracia* 'democracy' now also appear in the discourse, corresponding to Guaidó's self-image as a Venezuelan president legitimized by parliament:[8]

[8] The larger or thicker a word appears in the displayed word cloud, the greater the significance value that this word occurs in a sentence together with the examined lexeme. The significance is calculated here using the Poisson distribution.

Guaidó	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 5: Co-occurrences for *pueblo* in Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

A change in terms of co-occurrences with *pueblo* can be traced even more clearly in Maduro's tweets. In this case, we see that before and after the relevant date, here, too, the adjective *venezolano* exhibits high frequency. While before January 23 there is talk of 'support' (*respaldo*) for the people, after that day a very different discourse is traced. Allusions point then to a confrontation initiated by the United States, by which the Venezuelan people are threatened, but, due to their resilience, able to fend off. The adjectives *aguerrido* 'battle-hardened' and *estadounidense* 'US-American' directly reveal this, as well as the call to the people to unite for a 'mobilization' (*movilizado*, *movilización*) in the 'streets' (*calles*):

Maduro	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 6: Co-occurrences for *pueblo* in Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

(b) *Venzuela /venezolano*

In the next case, the noun *Venezuela* and adjective *venezolano* will be analyzed in more detail, in order to better trace political discourse of the nation. In the case of Guaidó, it is clear that, both before and after January 23, the semantic field of freedom or liberation (*libre*, *libertad*, *liberar*) and democratization (*democracia*) remains central, as can be seen in Tab. 7. In this regard, no profound difference can be detected. What can indeed be seen, however, is that a greater number of different co-occurrences (within the same semantic field) become evident following January 23.

Guaidó	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 7: Co-occurrences for *Venezuela /venezolano* in Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

New co-occurrences now appear, such as *Dinamarca* ('Denmark') and *reconocimiento* ('recognition, acknowledgement'), referring to Denmark's recognition of Guaidó as president of Venezuela. Another interesting pattern that emerges here is the hashtag *#PlanPaís*, alluding to the idea that Guaidó as president – in contrast to Maduro – possesses a concrete plan for the future of the country.

In the case of Maduro's tweets, differences in the content of co-occurrences with regard to *Venezuela* and *venezolano* are particularly evident. Especially in the context of *Venezuela*, Maduro's tweets before January 23 are above all full of discourses on domestic issues supposedly driving his government forward, such as different 'missions' (*Misión Cultura*, November 1, 2018; *Misión Vida*, November 13, 2018; *Gran Misión Vivienda Venzuela*, November 16, 2018). We see a clear change in the tweets after January 23. They now increasingly refer to a supposed 'threat' (*amenazas*) from abroad (not from within the country), and, most especially, by the United States in the form of then-President Donald Trump, whom he repeatedly accused of blocking (*bloqueo*) financial and medical aid. The results of this analysis can be seen in Tab. 8:

Maduro	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 8: Co-occurrences for *Venezuela /venezolano* in Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Examples of such tweets, in which Maduro presents discourse in defense of Venezuela, are shown below, in the examples (6) and (7):

(6) Nuestro pueblo ha salido a las calles de Caracas y de toda nuestra Patria con la firme determinación de defender la paz de *Venezuela* y decirle a Donald *Trump* y al imperio norteamericano: ¡Yankee Go Home! # VenezuelaEnDefensaDeLaPaz (@NicolasMaduro, Tweet-ID: 1099427402109861889, February 23, 2019)

'Our people have gone out into the streets of Caracas and throughout our homeland with the firm determination to defend the peace of Venezuela and tell Donald Trump and the U.S. empire: Yankee Go Home! #VenezuelaInDefenseOfPeace'

(7) Hago un llamado a los gobiernos dignos e independientes del mundo, para que manifiesten su rechazo a las virulentas amenazas que hace Donald *Trump* contra *Venezuela*, acción que viola la Carta de las Naciones Unidas y los derechos internacionales.

(@NicolasMaduro, Tweet-ID: 1092497399942180865, February 4, 2019)

'I call on the worthy and independent governments of the world to express their rejection of the virulent threats made by Donald Trump against Venezuela, an action that violates the Charter of the United Nations and international rights.'

In both examples, it is evident that Maduro presents a conflict specifically with the government of the United States. By overcoming this threat, together with the Venezuelan people, and with reference to international rights (of the United Nations), it is to become clear that Venezuela will

win the fight against both external and internal enemies, on a purely legitimate basis. In this context, it must be understood that Maduro further sees these domestic problems as having been caused by external conditions: their being controlled by the 'U.S. empire' (*imperio norteamericano*).

(c) *#FANB*

In the last example to be considered here, we turn to analyze a particular expression that does not demonstrate a frequency-based basis. It is very important, nevertheless, for the social media discourse considered in this article. We thus move to examine co-occurrences for a typical use of the hashtag, in this case one regarding the military of Venezuela. The reference to the military and the use of the hashtag *#FANB* (*Fuerza Armanda Nacional Bolivariana* 'National Bolivarian Armed Forces') is of particular importance for this political conflict, as the respective Venezuelan president acts as their commander-in-chief. The conflict, thus, cannot be won without the support of the military.

The fact that a change can be observed in linguistic terms with regard to the military after January 23, 2019, is clearly evident when analyzing the tweets of the two politicians. In Guaidó's case, the topic does not play a major role before January 23. In fact, it is not once mentioned (and therefore has no co-occurrences), as can be seen in Tab. 9. With his self-proclamation as president of Venezuela, however, communication changes sharply, and the military indeed becomes the focus. What is striking about this is that nouns such as *orden* 'order', *constitución* 'constitution', and *garantías* 'guarantee, surety', as well as verbs like *acatar* 'to obey, to abide' and adjectives like *humanitaria* 'humanitarian' appear in connection with the hashtag *#FANB*. It is thus clear that Guaidó appeals to the military's loyalty to the constitution and claims to seek a democratic, peaceful transition to be accompanied by the military.

Guaidó	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 9: Co-occurrences for *#FANB* in Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

A similar picture emerges in terms of quantitative differences after January 23, in the corpus data of Maduro's tweets. While words such as *independencia* 'indepedence', *gloriosa* 'glorious', and *chavista* (relating to Hugo Chávez) had already appeared in connection with *#FANB*, a clear increase can be seen after January 23: allusions, for example, to the 'defense' (*defender*, *defensa*) of the 'nation' (*nación*) or the 'state' (*estado*) can in particular be found, as can be seen in Tab. 10. Furthermore, the graph shows that the high occurrence of the possessive determinate *nuestra* 'our' (in pattern-like noun phrases, such as *nuestra #FANB* or *nuestra gloriosa #FANB*) is meant to emphasize that the military remains a fundamental part of the Venezuelan people, and that it will thereby be a joint effort made to defend the country and its citizens.

Maduro	
before January 23	after January 23
	

Tab. 10: Co-occurrences for *#FANB* in Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Based on the analysis of the above data, we note that a change after January 23 can indeed be observed, especially with regard to the MFW and their co-occurrences in the aforementioned examples. In the following, we will investigate whether our hypothesis can also be confirmed through the analysis of n-grams.

3.2.2 n-grams

With the help of n-grams, one can draw conclusions about the probability of the appearance of a next element, which is why large online search engines operate with this method. If we now apply a 5-gram analysis to the four sub-corpora, clear differences emerge, as can be seen in Fig. 6.

On the one hand, we can observe that Guaidó's and Maduro's texts can be distinguished in terms of the 100 most frequent 5-grams. On the other hand, however, a clear distance in Guaidó's corpus data can be found: the distance between Guaidó's two sub-corpora corresponds *grosso modo* to the distance between Guaidó's texts before January 23 and Maduro's texts before and after January 23, which on their own are stylistically more homogeneous in terms of the 5-grams. Once again, this demonstrates a very distinct change in the language of Guaidó's tweets following January 23.

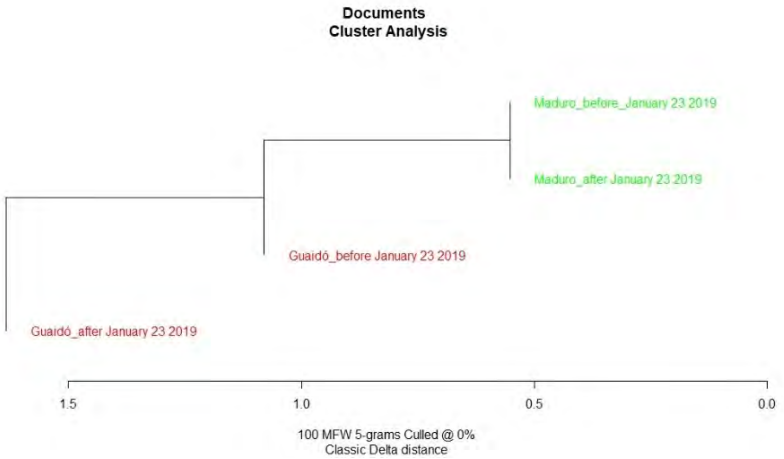

Fig. 6: Illustration of the stylometric analysis of the four sub-corpora (based on the 100 MFW 5-grams and Classic Delta distance measure)

If we now look at the most frequent 5-grams in the individual sub-corpora, we find differences between the two politicians here, as well. In Tab. 11, the four most frequent 5-grams are given for Guaidó's two sub-corpora:

	Guaidó	
	before January 23	after January 23
1.	*la libertad y la democracia*	*el cese de la usurpación*
2.	*el regimen de Nicolás Maduro*	*ingreso de la ayuda humanitaria*
3.	*libertad y la democracia de*	*el ingreso de la ayuda*
4.	*colapso de los servicios públicos*	*lograr el cese de la*

Tab. 11: Four most frequent 5-grams in Juan Guaidó's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Prior to January 23, linguistic patterns could be found in Guaidó's tweets that can be interpreted in opposite ways: the desire for freedom and democracy (*la libertad y la democracia*) is set against Maduro's authoritarian regime (*el regimen de Nicolás Maduro*). Guaidó's frequent use of

these multi-word expressions indicates that, after January 23, his tweets primarily emphasize humanitarian aid (*ingreso de la ayuda humanitaria*) and ending Maduro's illegitimate seizure of power (*el cese de la usurpación*), according to Guaidó. In the context of his self-proclamation as president of Venezuela, Guaidó thus attempts to underpin his claim to legitimacy as well as to work for the people and provide them with help from abroad, which Maduro had refused to do.

In Maduro's texts, a linguistic change can also be detected. Particularly interesting as a 5-gram before January 23, 2019, is the expression *Plan de la Patria 2019–2025* ('Plan for the Homeland 2019–2025'), with which he wants to make clear that he was elected by the people for a full term, until 2025, and thereby considers himself the democratically legitimized president of Venezuela. The distribution of the most frequent 5-grams in the two sub-corpora containing Maduro's tweets is shown below, in Tab. 12:

	Maduro	
	before January 23	after January 23
1.	*la construcción de un mundo*	*recuperación del Sistema Eléctrico Nacional*
2.	*años de la siembra de*	*los enemigos de la Patria*
3.	*en el marco de*	*el imperio de los EE.UU.*
4.	*Plan de la Patria 2019-2025*	*en defensa de la paz*

Tab. 12: Four most frequent 5-grams in Nicolás Maduro's tweets, before and after January 23, 2019

Once again, we can observe that, after January 23, 5-grams occur that aim at Venezuela's enemies (*los enemigos de la Patria*) and, in particular, the supposed imperial ambition of the United States (*el imperio de los EE.UU.*). In this semantic context, it is not surprising that Venezuela's defense discourse (*en defensa de la paz*) is again employed by Maduro. Maduro's creation of an enemy, or adversary, fulfills what Danler in German calls an *Anti-Volk* ('anti-people'):

> Das Volk entsteht aber auch, in dem das Anti-Volk diskursiv erschaffen wird. Das Anti-Volk ist der *Andere*, nicht der Gegner, sondern der Feind, vor dem das wahre Volk

> bewahrt und beschützt werden muss […]. Der Feind, also das Anti-Volk, muss eliminiert werden, wodurch sich der Populismus als antipluralistisch und somit als das Gegenteil von Demokratie herausstellt (2020, 132).
>
> 'But the people is also created in which the anti-people is discursively created. The anti-people is the *other*, not the adversary, but the enemy, from which the true people must be preserved and protected [...]. The enemy, i.e., the anti-people, must be eliminated, whereby populism turns out to be anti-pluralistic and thus the opposite of democracy'.

It is precisely this discursive creation of such an *anti-people*, which for Danler is one of the basic criteria for populism that we observe in the tweets above examined.

3.2.3 Summary

The primary aim of this study has been to consider the political conflict in Venezuela to identify linguistic patterns in Guaidó's and Maduro's respective corpora, and to examine the extent to which these might have changed following Guaidó's self-proclamation as legitimate president of Venezuela on January 23, 2019. It could be shown that both politicians use *Twitter* to convey their political messages to supporters. Through employing reoccurring linguistic patterns, both politicians have attempted to achieve the hammering effect, as described by Jamet and Terry (2020, 35), so as to influence discourse in their favor and to thus achieve an outcome to the conflict beneficial to their interests.

Guaidó presents himself as the democratically elected and thus legitimate president of Venezuela, who wants to replace Maduro's regime, which he criticizes, and thereby transform Venezuela into a free, democratic country. Maduro, on the other hand, presents himself as the representative of the legitimate order, who, after January 23, perceives a Venezuela threatened by powers both internal and external, and who, united with the military and people of Venezuela, defends the homeland.

4 Conclusion

In this article, we have used a very specific example – namely, the political conflict in Venezuela in 2019 – to show how the analysis of linguistic patterns can be applied, following Bubenhofer (2009), in a corpus-based discourse analysis of the tweets of Juan Guaidó and Nicolás Maduro. We

have used the analysis of co-occurrences of high-frequency or significant words, as well as n-grams, to demonstrate that these two politicians purposefully use *Twitter*, or social media communication in general, to spread political messages among their followers. The presented study cannot be considered exhaustive, of course, as one could study other patterned units (for example, by using an analysis of metaphor or phraseological entities). In addition, multimodal linkages also certainly play significant roles in the discourse and in the content's reception by followers. Nevertheless, with this article we hope to contribute to the politolinguistic research that can help to better understand, based on empirical analysis, the social media discourse during the political conflict in Venezuela in 2019, and the associated attempts to win communicative hegemony (Bolívar 2019).

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