Dialogue in the dynamics of political practice

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An approach to dialogue is presented that combines Conversational Analysis, the study of evaluation in discourse, and a critical interactionist perspective. The research concentrates on the changes that Venezuelan dialogue has undergone in the last ten years, beginning especially with President Hugo Chávez's government. The focus of the analysis is on conflictive moments and the social actors that participate in the macro-dialogue. Dialogue is examined along four broad dimensions: the dialogue between presidents and the Venezuelan people at the moment of inauguration; the dialogue between President Chávez and his followers and opponents; the polarization between opponents and followers who evaluate the exchanged insults during the most conflictive moments; and the conflictive dialogue extended to the international level.

1. Introduction[1]

The studies of dialogue in different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences are clear evidence of its key importance in understanding communication and human interaction. In linguistics, dialogue is generally analyzed in the context of natural conversations, mainly to understand and explain how meanings and identities are co-constructed between people in different contexts who take turns while speaking (Linell 1998; Koike 2003). In other disciplines, Conversation Analysis serves as both a general theoretical and a methodological approach, since it is found at a point "where linguistics and sociology (and several other disciplines, anthropology, and psychology among others) meet" (Schegloff 1991:46). When analyzing political dialogue from the perspective of linguistics,

the challenge arises of finding out how, with the theoretical and methodological tools of linguistics, such an analysis can contribute to explain dialogue in the dynamics of discourse, and not only in conversations in situations of micro-type events. For this reason, in this study the investigator presents on the one hand her own experiences as a linguist who studies dialogue and, on the other hand, the changes that Venezuelan dialogue has undergone[2] in the last ten years as revealed through various investigations, beginning especially with President Hugo Chávez's government.

Analyzing conversation allows the interaction between different political actors and between the presidents and their people to be described in a detailed manner. In the dynamics of discourse, the micro space of conversations at particular points in time must be abandoned in order to approach the study of a dialogue that is constructed in history, in a linear progression via a sequence of events forming a chain in the process of political change. In this situation, the events in which texts are created are of great importance, as well as the political leaders involved since, as citizens, when accepting official political responsibilities, they also acquire responsibilities toward the people who led them to occupy positions of power, especially in the case of Latin American presidents where democracies are very vulnerable for historical reasons.

In Latin America, political dialogue leaves its trace in discourse by approaching or distancing itself from the hegemony represented by the United States. Although Venezuela has maintained a close commercial relationship with the United States as one of its main providers of oil, since the beginning of Hugo Chávez's government in 1998,[3] an open and direct confrontation has become well known, directed mainly at President George W. Bush as representative of the 'empire'. At the same time, within Venezuela there were internal changes in the political dialogue, which led to a great polarization between Chávez's followers and opponents due to disagreements about his political approach inspired by Simón Bolívar, liberator of the Americas in the 19th century and model of the 'Bolivarian Revolution' promoted by Chávez in Venezuela and Latin America. The objective of this chapter is to contribute to studies about dialogue at the

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2. Venezuela is a country that began its democratic era with elections by popular vote for the first time in 1958, after the fall of the dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Before the democratic period, the country was governed by *caudillos* 'regional and/or local leaders'.

3. Hugo Chávez Frías, an ex-lieutenant colonel of paratroopers, was elected by great majority on December 1998, despite having led a coup against President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992. After two years in prison he was liberated by President Rafael Caldera. His victory took place at a moment when the traditional parties *Acción Democrática* (AD) and *Democracia Cristiana* (COPEI) had been discredited after holding power in turns for more than 40 years (see Bolívar 2001b).

macro level from a theoretical and methodological point of view. From a critical perspective, the aim is to emphasize the responsibility that presidents and heads of state have in maintaining democratic dialogue, since "the ultimate foundation of democracy and of the rule of law is everyone's participation, and its security and legitimacy are provided by the conditions of dialogue in the current world" (Hoyos Vásquez 2007: 15).[4]

Although this chapter presents results of different studies, they all have Conversation Analysis in common as a starting point and *evaluation* as a central category, because it is the motivation for change in politics and in discourse. *Evaluation* can be considered as the linguistic manifestation of subjectivity and ideologies, and it is linked to the expression of opinions, values and emotions (Bolívar 1986). It also has a structural function in texts and in the dynamics of social events because in both, one can identify when communicative cycles are opened and closed. The perspective adopted here is dialogic (Bakhtin 1982) and descriptive at various levels, but it is also critical because the goal is to reveal how 'realities' are constructed in the use and abuse of power. The meaning of what is understood as 'critical' has already been summarized by Wodak: "Basically, 'critical' is to be understood as having distance from the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and focusing on self reflection as scholars doing research" (2001: 9).

The studies we refer to here focus on Venezuelan political dialogue starting in 1999, when great changes were initiated in discourse and politics. First, the dialogue between President Chávez and the people in his inauguration speech will be examined, comparing it to speeches given by previous presidents. Second, the dialogue between President Chávez and the Venezuelan people during the process of polarization is analyzed, with the goal of discovering patterns of conflictive interaction, in which threatening rhetoric and insults serve as a political strategy to gain an advantage. Third, the results of a study are presented that show the effects of insults on political polarization, according to the memories of young Venezuelan university students. Last, the study will demonstrate how Chávez's use of insults was extended to the international level during the interaction between Venezuela and countries that are closely affiliated with the United States. The details about the materials and methods employed in these studies are explained in the following sections.

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4. "El fundamento último de la democracia y del Estado de derecho es la participación de todos y su aseguramiento y legitimidad está dado por las condiciones de diálogo en el mundo actual" (Hoyos Vásquez 2007: 15).

2.   An analytical frame

2.1   Dialogue in political practice

The first assumption that guides this study about political dialogue is that dia-logue is a fundamental part of political practice and is thus based on participation and plurality. In this respect, it is important to note the change of paradigm in the scientific and humanistic disciplines (psychology, philosophy, linguistics, educa-tion, social communication, the arts, etc.) from reflection to action/interaction. Philosophers, for example, recognize the role that Jurgen Habermas has had in vindicating dialogue in the sciences, in philosophy and in society itself, because a change in direction is needed:

> from the philosophy of conscience and from the critical theory of knowledge and of society, in which reflection prevails, to the theory of communicative action, in which dialogue prevails.[5]   (Hoyos Vásquez 2007: 18)

Thus, there is a change from a monologic to a dialogic rationality:

> A theory of communicative acting is based on people in their actions as par-ticipants, in their comprehension of the world and of the others, looking for necessary agreements when mere comprehension is not enough. The monologic rationality of certain philosophical traditions is questioned, assumed by a meth-odology of the social sciences that claims to know social phenomena objectively, giving priority to its observation and, on the other hand, proposing participation, a dialogic rationality.   (Hoyos Vásquez 2007: 18–19) [6]

In the field of political discourse, the rejection of dialogue is a rejection of the actions of people in public spaces. In this regard, Kohn (2007) states:

> Arendt was one of the first philosophers to support the insoluble link between open and plural speeches and truly free political practice as the last foundations for the

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5.   "de la filosofía de la conciencia y de la teoría crítica del conocimiento y de la sociedad, en la que prima la reflexión a la teoría de la acción comunicacional en la que prima el diálogo".

6.   "Una teoría del actuar comunicacional parte de las personas en su actuar como participan-tes, en su comprender el mundo y a los demás, buscando acuerdos necesarios cuando la mera comprensión no baste. Se cuestiona la racionalidad monológica de cierta tradición filosófica, asumida por una metodología de las ciencias sociales que dice conocer objetivamente los fe-nómenos sociales, privilegiando su observación y se propone, en cambio, la participación, una racionalidad dialógica" (Hoyos Vásquez 2007: 18–19).

construction of a deliberative and participative democracy, in which dialogue is an intrinsic way of exercising the autonomy of judgment.   (Kohn 2007: 39)[7]

Thus, 'dialogue' and civil 'participation' are key concepts in the study of political discourse, in order to promote cooperation by consensus and to avoid the monologue that excludes and constrains. The previous discussion is supported by Kohn:

> Arendt was no doubt one of the first thinkers to signal the danger of interiorizing the "monologic" structure of power in the different political systems, including liberal democracies; to her, the absence of public dialogue implies the suppression of civic participation and thus the disappearance of truly political practice.
> (Kohn 2007: 31–32)[8]

Therefore, it is evident that in order for political practice to exist, it is necessary to observe dialogue, and the concept of 'plurality' becomes fundamental. According to Kohn (2007: 37–38), based on Arendt (1968, 1976, 1993), in order for plurality to exist, it is important for three things to be understood regarding civic participation: (a) participation in public life "is an artificial attribute that individuals acquire when they accede to the public sphere and that is secured by democratic institutions"; (b) "politics demands the search of a common space of public participation in which the different perspectives may be articulated"; and (c) "dialogue must be carried out without the need to introduce an element of constriction with the goal of obtaining a consensus."[9]

In this way, rejection of any type of totalitarianism is emphasized, whether of the right or the left of the political spectrum, and the need to strengthen democratic institutions is confirmed in such a way that through dialogue it is possible to converse about differences together in order to create solutions with everyone's participation.

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7.   "Arendt fue una de las primeras filósofas en sostener el indisociable vínculo entre discursos abiertos y plurales y la acción política – verdaderamente libre – como fundamentos últimos para la construcción de una democracia deliberativa y participativa, en la que dialogar es un modo intrínseco de ejercer la autonomía del juicio" (Kohn 2007: 39).

8.   "Arendt fue sin duda una de las primeras pensadoras en señalar el peligro de la interiorización de la estructura 'monológica' del poder en los diferentes sistemas políticos, incluyendo a las democracias liberales; para ella, la ausencia de diálogo público implica la supresión de la participación ciudadana y por lo tanto la desaparición de la acción verdaderamente política" (Kohn 2007: 31–32).

9.   "(a)...es un atributo artificial que adquieren los individuos cuando acceden a la esfera pública y que es asegurado por las instituciones democráticas"; (b) que "la política exige una búsqueda de un espacio común de participación pública en el que las diversas perspectivas puedan articularse"; y (c) que el diálogo debe llevarse a cabo "sin que sea necesario introducir un elemento de constricción con el fin de conseguir un consenso".

2.2   Dialogue and dialogicity

Other than the concept of dialogue in political practice, the concept of dialogue as dialogicity is necessary because every interaction is assumed to be dialogic, although not necessarily dialogal (Bakhtin 1982). From this point of view, dialogue encompasses the interactive process that is part of verbal and non-verbal social relationships, and it is also a social construction that is expressed in spoken, written and multimodal texts (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, 2003). The concept of dialogue allows for the explanation of the interaction in the internal part of the text (Bolívar 1986, 1994a, 1994b, 1997a, 2001a) as well as the intertextual interaction. In this way, for example, the interaction between political parties throughout time (Bolívar 2001b) can be explained through the examination of the texts that were exchanged among them and also of complex macro-exchanges at a global level (Bolívar 2007). Dialogue that is socially constructed can thus be observed in the course of the development of events.

2.3   Dialogue and grammar

Linguists need to ground themselves in a grammar that observes the way in which meanings are created in social interaction, which implies that a paradigmatic rather than a syntagmatic grammar must be used (Halliday 1994; Eggins 1994). A paradigmatic grammar starts from the semantic functions needed for interacting in situations and does not start from forms, because although forms perform these functions and are what lend credibility and viability to our science, it is the functions and the meanings exchanged and created during discourse that are central. A grammar is needed that helps explain why, at a given moment, one selects one linguistic option over another, and what processes[10] of the experience people favor when creating their identity and when allocating roles to themselves and to others. Also, and especially during dialogue, the grammar of interpersonal relationships that are expressed in mood and modality must be accessed in order to examine, for example, the problem of roles and attitudes toward knowledge and others.

2.4   Dialogue and context

Along with the decision of selecting one type of linguistics over another, a notion of context that accompanies that decision must be considered. For this reason, Firth's

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10. According to Halliday (1994), experience is created as a function of processes, which can be fundamentally material, mental, verbal, existential or behavioral.

(1951) definition, which contains in a general way almost all of the fundamental elements for description, serves us well, although this notion has been constantly analyzed and discussed for many years (Duranti & Goodwin 1992; van Dijk 2001). Firth's definition of situational context includes the following categories:

a. the relevant features of the participants: persons and personalities:
   i. the verbal action of the participants; and
   ii. the non-verbal actions of the participants;
b. the relevant objects;
c. the effects of the verbal action.   (Firth 1951:43)

Consequently, linguists can explain dialogue attending to the most relevant personalities, what they say and do with words and with their actions, as well as the effects that they produce in others.

2.5 Dialogue and interaction

In order to maintain cohesion with the previously mentioned directions of study, a focus on textual analysis that examines interaction among participants is necessary because it is at the level of interaction where decisions are made about what to say and how to say it. For this reason, the interactional analysis of the discourse seen in my own studies focuses first on the interpersonal component following proposals of systemic functional linguistics. At the level of discourse, Conversational Analysis serves as a reference because, as a primary genre (Bakhtin 1982) that has been carefully studied (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Pomerantz & Fehr 1997), conversation allows for a detailed analysis of language "as a mode of interaction which relies upon context for the interpretation of action that at the very same time shapes, expands and changes that context" (Goodwin & Duranti 1992:30).

2.6 The initial categories of discourse

From this perspective, the focus of the analysis is placed on the participants and their responsibility to initiate, continue or close communicative cycles. Beginning with the assumption that the fundamental categories of discourse are 'social interaction', 'two participants' and 'the text' that results from the interaction, the social interaction is important because meanings cannot be interpreted out of the context and the dynamics in which they are created. The notion of 'participants' is necessary because two interlocutors are needed to produce text, and 'the text' is important because it materializes the interaction and can be described in two planes: the interactional, which concerns the relationship between the participants, and the

autonomous, which concerns the content of the text (Sinclair 1981; Bolívar 1986; Hunston 2000). In this approach, two additional notions are fundamental: 'posture' and 'change'. Posture refers to what is commonly called 'modality' (modalization and modulation, or one's attitude toward the utterance and toward others, expressed with evaluations of different types). Change is what motivates interaction.

2.7   Evaluation as a central notion

In order to explain change in the texts as well as in social and political dynamics, the notion of 'evaluation' is needed, which is the central notion in the model of discourse analysis that this investigator has been working with for several years. During interaction, information is exchanged as well as, fundamentally, evaluations about the world, about ourselves, about others, about what must be and should be done, and who should do it. Consequently, evaluation has a central role in the construction of the world and of texts. Evaluation becomes the category that promotes an explanation of internal changes in texts and also changes in social dynamics (Bolívar 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2005a). For purposes of the analysis, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between evaluative language in general (the potential of linguistic resources), which may be studied with several theories of evaluation (Hunston & Thompson 2000; Bednarek 2006), and the role of evaluation in the construction of texts where it has a structural function. The latter was described by Labov (1972b) and was demonstrated in the analysis of written text in the press and other contexts in which the implications for the description of discursive genres are observed (Bolívar 2001a, 2006).

2.8   The critical analysis of dialogue

There is still one more notion to add in this brief theoretical scaffolding, which concerns Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA offers an opportunity to explain the construction of meaning and society (cfr. van Dijk 1993, 1996, 1998; Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Wodak & Meyer 2001, 2003), and allows for the confrontation of the dual roles that linguists have as researchers and as people who want to live in a better world (Bolívar 1997b). According to CDA, which claims that discourse is a social practice, it is impossible to leave ideologies aside because they are present in nearly every discourse. The task is to discover how they are structured and how they function in daily life, especially to maintain or reject realizations of domination and abuses of power (van Dijk 1998b).

Ideologies are manifested in and through texts during interactions. In order to study texts, they must be seen in relation to the events of the world, as Firth (1951)

said. To study evaluation in discourse, one can analyze micro exchanges in conversations, and also 'triads' (sequences of sentences with different discourse functions) in written text (Bolívar 1986, 1994a, 1994b) or 'macro-exchanges' in the macro dialogue where one identifies communicative cycles at the level of the development of events. During political confrontation, it is assumed that the greatest responsibility resides in the leaders who have been legitimized by popular vote to assume power. These leaders are constantly evaluated by what they say or do not say or do. It is very likely that in the dialogic sequence, they are initiators of actions and topics and also evaluators who close these cycles with the last word about what is good or bad, positive or negative, desirable or undesirable for their people and their country. Their evaluations are particularly important during times of change, when the democratic balance is threatened in the history of a country (Fairclough 1992, 1995).

Although different approaches are known in the critical analysis of discourse, such as 'multidisciplinary', 'historical', 'mediated', 'dispositive analysis', etc. (see Wodak & Meyer 2001), and although they have all made relevant contributions to our understanding of how knowledge is constructed, my analysis is considered as 'critical interactional' because this label reflects my own contribution more accurately. From my perspective, to understand political dialogue, it is important to emphasize the processes of change and the agents that lead them, because the powerful are those who make decisions or influence the contents of the discourse and the evaluations that predominate.

3.   The data and procedures

The theoretical decision to focus on the political actors has important methodological repercussions because their actions and words determine the data that are collected and the means of collection. Although there are many methods in discourse analysis, the method itself is very important to legitimize the research, especially regarding political discourse, because it is almost impossible to take a completely objective stance. For this reason, critical analysts are very careful when defining theoretical notions (as has been done here) and the methods or procedures, as should any discourse analyst (Whetherell et al. 2001).

3.1   Changes in the dialogue and the focus of the studies

As stated in the introduction, this study gathers and summarizes several of my own investigations with the goal of showing processes of change in Venezuelan political dialogue. Dialogue will be examined in four broad dimensions: (a) the dialogue

between presidents and the Venezuelan people at the moment of inauguration; (b) the dialogue between President Chávez and the Venezuelan people who follow or oppose him, as constructed through the press; (c) the dialogue in the polarization between Chávez's followers and opponents who evaluate the exchanged insults during the most conflictive moments; and (d) the conflictive dialogue extended to the international level.

The first dimension of the analysis concerns the change from the style that Chávez initiated during his inauguration and the style of presidents who preceded him. The studies reported in this section focus on the pragmatics of political pronouns (Bolívar 1999), on the involvement with or distancing from the interlocutors (Bolívar 2001e) and on the expression of personalism (Bolívar 2001d). In this pragmatic dimension, the studies presented here center on the particular genre of the inauguration speech. The analysis is linguistic at the levels of grammar, semantics and pragmatics, with attention to the variables of register, mode, tenor and field, following systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1994; Eggins 1994), and is supported by corpus linguistics, particularly in the detailed examination of collocations and concordances using the program *WordSmithtools* (Scott 1998). The units of analysis are the pronouns and lexicon related to them.

In the second dimension of the analysis of dialogue mediated through the press, the units of analysis are different and the focus of interest is political polarization. The dialogue observed is conflictive and it becomes necessary to introduce the concept of macro-exchanges in order to explain the interaction that is constructed through the voices of a greater number of political actors. The units of analysis are the complete texts that correspond to turns in a macro-dialogue. In particular, some research from the years 2001 to 2005 is referenced (Bolívar 2001c, 2002, 2003a, 2005a, 2005b). The procedures to identify the macro-interchanges can be summarized as follows:

a.   a particular problem is selected, to observe how the participants introduce changes;
b.   the focus is placed on an event in which a political actor initiates a conflictive action;
c.   texts are gathered in the same chronological order in which they are produced (in various settings as determined by the sequence of production);
d.   complete macro-exchanges are collected;
e.   in each exchange, the functions of Initiators, Followers or Closure (I, F, C) are identified;
f.   the actions, topics and evaluations are tracked and followed;
g.   the linguistic and discursive strategies are analyzed. Priority is given to interpersonal relationships (mood, modality and [im]politeness);
h.   the effects of the discourse on the participants (identity, affiliation) are studied.

In this type of analysis it is not possible to anticipate which types of texts will be used in the investigation, nor the duration of the event. Consequently, the analyst must be prepared to examine a variety of texts in chronological sequence, and the interrelationship of these texts is determined through signs of intertextuality and thematic coherence. With this procedure, patterns of interaction at the macro level can be identified in which offensive words are relevant, affecting not only the individual or social image of people but also the destiny of a country.

In the third dimension, concerning the effects that conflictive interaction produces in people, of interest are the insults remembered by young people as a way to evaluate the types of verbal aggression that were manifested during the political polarization. In this type of study, surveys are used to collect data, and the focus of the analysis is evaluative. The participants in this particular study were 150 young university students.

In the fourth dimension of analysis, the internal polarization in Venezuela moves to confrontations between Hugo Chávez and other countries that are allied with the United States. The analysis of macro-exchanges is applied in order to see the scope of dialogue at an international level. This part is not completely reflective of investigations that have already been realized, since it is based on data collected from the national and international press in the same way that was done with the macro-exchanges in Venezuela, and includes aspects of research in progress.

4.   Changes in the dynamics of discourse

4.1   The discourse of Venezuelan presidents

In the dynamics of Venezuelan politics, a great discursive change can be noticed beginning with Hugo Chávez's inauguration in 1999. When reading his oath, he altered the current Constitution's original text and referred to it as "this moribund constitution", which was consistent with the promises made during his electoral campaign to change the Constitution and eliminate the country's traditional political parties, *Acción Democrática* (AD) and *Democracia Cristiana* (COPEI). These parties, during the 40 years before Chávez became president, took turns in power every five years, led the country to experience an enormous economic and social deterioration and squandered the riches that came from the oil industry. From a discursive point of view, altering legal text in the Constitution with a negative evaluation presented a problem because it became evident that a departure from the traditional style of speaking to the people should be ratified according to an established protocol via a constitutional act. In addition, Chávez's inauguration speech initiated a conversational style that was much more informal than

that of his predecessors, who would write speeches that were read to the public. Figure 1, taken from Bolívar (2001e), illustrates the changes in the use of the personal pronouns *yo, nosotros, ustedes, ellos* ('I, we, you – plur., they', respectively), found in the speeches of Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP), Rafael Caldera (RC) and Hugo Chávez (HCH).[11] In the HCH speech, a notable increase in references to himself is observed, with the use of the explicit *I* (2 in CAP, 2 in RC, and 93 in HCH). This increase is partially due to the change from the oral to the written register, the length of the speeches (11,430 words by HCH versus 4,821 by CAP and 4,805 by RC), and also the differences in personal style.
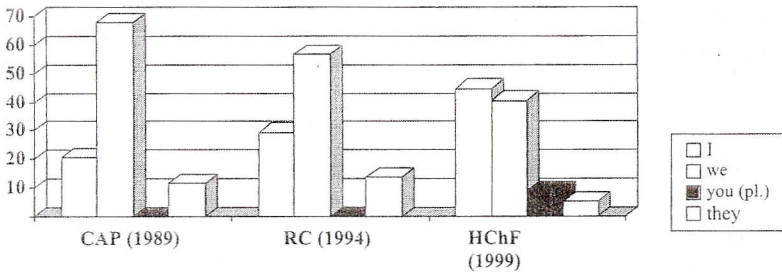

Figure 1. Chronological progression in the use of political pronouns

The use of the pronouns *I* and *you* (plural) by Presidents CAP and RC was very scarce during their speeches, and the fact that they distanced themselves from their interlocutors with the use of an excluding 'we' (Bolívar 1999) is notable because the speeches were focused on the policies and actions of the government more than on the interests of others. In HCH's speech, it was expected that, because of his conversational and apparently more approachable style, there would be a greater occurrence of *you* (plural) and *we*, which indeed occurred in quantitative but not in qualitative terms. The detailed analysis of the scales of pronominal distancing indicated that, despite the increase of the first and second person plural pronouns (*we* and *you*), the references to himself and the exclusion of the Venezuelan people in general persisted. Some references included foreign visitors at the inauguration and the people of Latin America and the Caribbean region

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11. This study refers to the second term of government under Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP) and to the second term of Rafael Caldera (RC). During CAP's second government, Hugo Chávez led a coup on February 4, 1992, for which he was sent to jail. CAP did not finish his second term because he was accused of embezzlement. RC was the founder of the COPEI party, which he directed for many years until he was expelled from the party. During his second term, he was accompanied by a coalition of small parties united under the name *Convergencia* ('Convergence'). He was responsible for liberating Hugo Chávez from prison.

(Bolívar 2001e). This phenomenon may in part be explained by the characteristic personalism of Latin American presidents (Bolívar & Kohn 1999a, 1999b; Bolívar 2001d) or by the policies of Latin American integration that President Chávez anticipated during his inauguration when referring to his intentions to collaborate with other governments in the region, as in the following example:

> In Colombia we must do everything that is possible for there to be peace; I have said it, I told President Pastrana, I said it publicly, we discussed it in La Habana with President Fidel Castro. I am willing, Andrés (allow me to address you like this as we do in private) to go anywhere and to talk to anyone we must in order to talk and try to contribute with a small bit; a small bit that could very well save a drop of blood in that dear country that is Colombia.   (Bolívar 2001d: 124)[12]

Chávez's 'infelicitous' act (Austin 1962) as incoming president, in this role as 'initiator' that was legitimized by popular vote, began an official discourse of transgression. It is a discourse that violates the established norms or norms that are perceived by the majority as 'politically correct' (Watts 2003), in the internal as well as the external diplomatic relations of a country. One of the conditions for the self-legitimization of leaders in democratic dialogue is that they use a language that the majority considers acceptable or appropriate (Martín Rojo & van Dijk 1997: 532); thus it can be stated that this moment of the inauguration was key in interpreting the conflictive events that developed from this point on.

4.2   Insult as a political strategy

Due to his popularity, great changes were made at the beginning of Hugo Chávez's government. The Constitution, the name of the country and the relationship of powers were changed, and social programs were initiated, such as *Barrio Adentro* (a program that provides services to traditionally excluded groups). But when the democratically elected president began to change the course toward a 'revolution' for which the people had not voted, the situation became conflictive. Moreover, it is also relevant that the President intensified the threatening style that had characterized him during his electoral campaign, and he turned the threats and insults into a strategy of political struggle.

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12. "En Colombia tenemos que hacer todo lo posible para que haya paz; yo lo he dicho, se los dije al Presidente Pastrana, lo dije públicamente, lo conversamos en la Habana con el Presidente Fidel Castro. Yo estoy dispuesto Andrés (permíteme llamarte así como en privado lo hacemos) a ir donde haya que ir y hablar con quien haya que hablar para tratar de aportar un granito de arena; un granito de arena que bien puede ahorrar una gotita de sangre, en ese pueblo tan querido que es el pueblo de Colombia."

According to Speech Act Theory and studies of politeness in Spanish (Haverkate 1994; Bravo & Briz 2004; Bolívar & Álvarez 2004), the use of insults is an act that is characterized as being highly threatening to the image of the participants in the interaction, especially for those who receive them, because insults are identified by their perlocutionary value due to the effect that they produce. In order for a word to be classified as an insult it must be recognized by the hearer as such, which means that any word that could potentially be an insult or something that is considered an insult for some, will not be so for everyone.[13] In each culture, however, there are tacit, general agreements about what can or cannot be polite or impolite and insulting or offensive (see Watts 2003).

In political discourse, insults are common practice with several discursive and political functions; for example, to diminish and humiliate the adversary, eliminate contenders from the political circle, create cohesion in one's own group, distinguish differences from the opposing group, and mostly to legitimize oneself, delegitimize others, manifest resistance or exert coercion to impose a political project (see Bolívar 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005e). Despite the fact that interaction can reach highly threatening and violent levels, political actors search for ways to come to agreements, as shown by research on debates in the Spanish (Martín Rojo 2000) and British (Ilie 2001) parliaments. Problems arise when responsibilities are diminished concerning who must act to prevent verbal aggressions from becoming physical ones that could lead to death.

In several studies, by following macro-exchanges between President Hugo Chávez and other political and social actors, it was possible to identify patterns of offensive interaction that provide an insight as to the way in which the political polarization between Hugo Chávez's followers and opponents was intensified. The studies also allowed us to see how discourse imposed a way of governing in which offensive speech has become relevant in the national and international spheres. President Chávez's threatening rhetoric and the generalized use of insults by the Venezuelan population has been a topic of study for linguists and researchers in other disciplines (Madriz 2000; Montero 2003; Barrera Linares 2003; Lozada 2003; among others). It has been possible to describe how offensive speech has found a space in political dialogue, after a period of considering it a novelty on the part of the general public (Montero 2003).

When following the exchanges of insults through the press, it was found that in the year 2000, three patterns of offensive interaction were created (Bolívar 2001c):

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13. Insults that are not insults are known as 'ritual insults' and they occur especially in communities of young people, adolescents, or minority groups as a way to reaffirm their identity or their group affiliation (see Labov 1972b; Bolívar 2002).

a.   *opening with insult + response with insult + closure with insult;*
b.   *opening with insult + answer with insult and/or physical aggression* (for example, because of the criticism made by the press on the increasing 'authoritarian' and 'militaristic' tone of the President, he called the journalists 'all-time deceivers', and they answered with accusations and street demonstrations, which ended in insults and aggressions toward the journalists);
c.   *opening with insult + response with insult + closure with taking a position and group affiliation.*

Varieties of texts were found for each of these patterns and, when examining them in sequences, they showed a thematic cohesion regarding offensive words and expressions.

4.3   The polarization of the press

In 2000 and 2001, when the traditional parties lost their power, the press assumed the role of the parties and, in many cases, led the opposition to Chávez. An example of the way in which the polarization was created in the media is the following macro-exchange, examined in greater detail in Bolívar (2005b). This macro-exchange summarizes the experience and process of how the journalists show their solidarity with the political cartoonist Pedro León Zapata, a humorist who is also a well known painter and respected for his critical attitude toward the previous governments. He published a cartoon that President Chávez interpreted as an insult and to which he likewise responded with an insult.

Macro-exchange 1:

Venezuelan journalists and President Chávez participate in a macro-exchange that takes place from October 20 to November 5, 2000.

Opening
Zapata publishes a political cartoon in the newspaper *El Nacional*, on October 20, 2000, alluding to the growing militarism in politics, with the caption, "I like a society that stands at attention and follows orders", accompanied by a drawing of Simón Bolívar's sword with Chávez's face on it.

Continuation
On the same day, the evening of October 20, in a national radio broadcast from Margarita Island, President Chávez responds to Zapata by asking, "Pedro León,

how much do you get paid for this?" with which he implied that the latter was 'bought' by the opposition. The exchange was widely commented on in the media and the newspapers published cartoons supporting Zapata.

The humorist Zapata responds to Chávez through the newspaper with another caricature that says, "And speaking like the madman Hugo Rafael (the President's full name) how much did Zapata pay you for this huge propaganda?" (*El Nacional*, October 30, 2000).

Closure

The Union of Press Workers (*El Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Prensa*) publishes a large notice that gathers all the cartoons that had been published in other newspapers supporting Zapata. The title of the notice says, "To Master Zapata, with affection" (*El Nacional*, November 5, 2000).

In 2003, Zapata continued with his caricatures and became labeled as "pro-coup" and "traitor to the people" (*El Nacional*, January 30, 2003). This pattern reveals in part how the political polarization began in the country, and reached its most critical moment on April 11 to 13, 2002, when a crisis of governance occurred, and Chávez was out of power for 48 hours[14] (see Montero 2003; Bolívar, Chumaceiro & Erlich 2003; Erlich 2003).

4.4   The militarization of dialogue

Another pattern of interaction in the conflictive dialogue caught people's attention in 2003. This one lasted longer and was more complex because it incorporated verbal and non-verbal elements and violent material actions, as well as the participation of a great number of social and political actors. The structure of this macro-exchange can be summarized as follows:

a.   opening with insult and physical violence;
b.   continuation with a refusal of the insult or celebration of the insult;
c.   closure with legitimization of the impolite act and the violence.

The pattern was gathered in a corpus of texts that included written press, slogans, graffiti and speeches given by the President and the Vice-President. Due to its complexity, it led to several studies (Bolívar 2003a, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). What is

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14. On April 11, 2002, a large crowd marched to the Government's Palace asking for the President's resignation. During the march, 19 people were killed by snipers. The President's resignation was read by General Lucas Rincón in front of TV cameras. He was restored to power by the military 48 hours later. For some people this event represented a 'lack of power'. For others it was a 'coup'. From that moment on, Chávez began to call his adversaries 'pro-coup' (*golpistas*).

most relevant about this macro-exchange is that it took place during the national strike from December 2001 to February 2002, in which the opposition deployed all of its forces, but the government also showed its militaristic tendencies more directly. From the governmental point of view, the dialogue was focused on the unfairness of the strike; from the perspective of the opposition, it focused on the abuse of power and the transgression of political, social and cultural norms. The macro-exchange 2 summarizes the development of the events.

Macro-exchange 2:

The main participants are a General, Venezuelan citizens on the streets, different sectors of society who express their opinion verbally or in writing, journalists and the President of the Republic.

Opening
January 17, 2003
During the national strike, General Acosta Carlés, following the President's orders, broke into the buildings of the Polar and Coca Cola companies. During this event, the General reprimanded the women who protested the illegal entry and, while having a drink, he belched in front of the journalists who were covering the news event (General: drinks and emits a belch. Journalist: *¿eso no es mala educación?* 'Isn't that bad manners?' General: *No no señorita se me salió…* 'No, no, Miss, it just came out…').

Continuation
January 17, 18, 19, and 20, 2003
The media and several sectors of society sanctioned and repudiated the violence and the belch as an impolite act (slogan of the opposition's march: *¡Ni un eructo más!* 'Not another belch!').

The President's followers justified and celebrated the belch and violence (chant during the official's march: *Carlés, Carlés, erúctales otra vez!* 'Carlés, Carlés, belch for them again!').

The coup that Chávez led in 1992 becomes a *golpe de opinión* 'coup of opinion' in the words of the Vice-President[15] (*El Nacional*, February 5, 2003, p. A3).

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15. The coup led by Chávez in 1992 was considered an attack against democracy and, for this reason, he was in prison for two years. From the moment when the Vice-President said the words "coup of opinion", this coup progressively became a heroic act, which is currently celebrated by the government as a glorious day.

Closure

January 23, 2003 to February 11, 2003

The President ratified the General to his post. Despite the sanctions and protests of different sectors of society, President Chávez decorated the general in recognition of his patriotic work. (Graffiti: *¡Carlés General del Pueblo!* 'Carlés, General of the People!')

In this second macro-exchange, verbal language is combined with other types of language but, despite the complexity that is created when following the events, it is always possible to identify the openings and closures of the conflictive moments as in conversation. Later on, General Carlés received the nickname of *General Eructo* 'General Belch', and he was attacked by opponents in a private club. He became Governor of the Carabobo State, one of the states where a significant part of the Venezuelan industrial development is concentrated.

The analysis of this macro-exchange shows that closures are fundamental for the construction of dialogue because whoever closes has the power to decide what is legitimate or not, valid or not, impolite or not, democratic or not. In the case of the belch, the problem goes further than interpreting the act as 'lack of culture', 'bad manners' or 'it violates the code of ethics', as some sectors evaluated it, because what is at the center is a military and political strategy in which offensive words and violence are weapons to achieve political goals (see also Madriz 2000; Montero 2002; Chumaceiro 2004).

The previously summarized macro-exchanges represent only a sample of the varied situations in which verbal actions are combined with material actions in political and social Venezuelan politics. From these, an impression about the way in which the polarization was emphasized between the 'officialism' and the 'opposition' as two blocks that are resistant to dialogue can be obtained.

4.5   The effects of polarization

Offensive words affect people's conduct as well as their personal esteem. Thus the objective arises of finding out how offensive words affect the construction of identities and political dialogue from the point of view of those who have participated and observed the process of political polarization (Bolívar 2005d). For this reason, a survey was first conducted with a total of 150 young university students, male and female, from three universities at two different moments in time. In 2002, the survey was administered to students at the Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV, Group 1) in Caracas, the oldest university that is known for its defense of university autonomy against all the governments and, in 2004, the survey was given to students from two more universities: the Universidad Pedagógica Experimental

(UPEL, Group 2), which has campuses in several regions of the country; and the Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela (UBV, Group 3), created during President Chávez's government. In 2004, students from the UCV (Group 4) were again interviewed.

The students from UCV (Group 1) were interviewed after April 11, 2002, when the governance crisis took place, while Chávez was temporarily out of power[16] and after the referendum of revocation that took place on August 15, 2004. At this time, according to what the new Constitution declares and also according to the number of citizens that is legally necessary for such an act to be sanctioned, the President submitted for consideration whether or not he should remain in the government. The students from the UPEL and the UBV were interviewed only after the referendum, with the goal of searching for similarities or differences with those of the UCV.

The interviews consisted of only one question: What insults do you remember that were said by the opposition to the government and by the government to the opposition? The participants had to write down the words or expressions that they had heard or best remembered.

Table 1 below summarizes the general information about the investigation. Column 1 shows the interviewed group and the date, column 2 displays the total number of insulting words reported, and column 3 details the number of words attributed to the government as having been said to the opposition (G/O) and by the opposition toward the government (O/G). The last column indicates the number of participants and their university affiliation. The numbers correspond only to the words that were remembered by both male and female students; the words that were remembered by only male or only female participants were not included, although there were interesting differences that serve as a motivation for further research.

There are several notable results in Table 1. First, there are a great number of insults remembered by the UCV community after April 11, 2002. Second, although the same number of participants were interviewed from the UPEL in November 2004, as from the UCV in 2002, there were fewer insults remembered by the UPEL students, which could be attributed to the fact that the political situation was different or that the UPEL community was located in the interior of the country (UPEL-Maracay) where the effects of the conflict may have been diminished or were quickly forgotten. The number of insults that were remembered by UCV students after the referendum (a total of 223 different insults), however, is greater than those reported by the students of the Universidad Bolivariana (a total

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16. The events of April 11 have not yet been officially clarified.

of 114 different insults), despite the fact that the number of participants was very similar. This pattern could indicate that the UCV students had a more alert attitude toward the confrontation or that they were better informed of the political events. However, what is most noticeable is that, despite the differences between the groups and the time elapsed, the four groups coincide in their memories of a greater number of insults issued by the opposition to the government, than by the government to the opposition.

Table 1. Number of insults remembered equally by male and female participants in the four groups

Groups	Total of different words	Words remembered by male and female participants	Participants and university
Group 1 (May 2002)	263	G/O: 24 O/G: 42	50 (UCV)
Group 2 (November 2004)	184	G/O: 16 O/G: 17	50 (UPEL)
Group 3 (November 2004)	114	G/O: 11 O/G: 19	28 (UBV)
Group 4 (November 2004)	223	G/O: 14 O/G: 18	22 (UCV)

Table 2 contains the first 16 textual words that were written by the participants from the UCV, attributed to the opposition against the government. Complex expressions and slogans are not included but, nonetheless, this sample allows us to observe the type of offensive words that they all remembered. Although a large number of words were considered insulting, what is most interesting is how they were used to discredit the Other. An analysis of the words shows how the insults generalize the negative perception of a part of the Venezuelan population (*asesinos, marginales, resentidos, comunistas, chavistas, hordas, chusma, corruptos, turbas, bolivarianos, ladrones* 'assassins, slum-dwellers, resentful, communists, chavists, hordes, rabble, corrupt, mob, bolivarians, thieves') and how the President is discredited (*dictador, loco, asesino* 'dictator, looney, assassin'). Along with the insults there is a negative evaluation of any affiliation with a disfavored social group (*marginales, chusma* 'slum-dwellers, rabble'), the political affiliation (*comunistas, bolivarianos* 'communists, bolivarians'), the moral quality of the governors (*ladrones, corruptos, mentirosos* 'thieves, corrupt, liars'), the President's intellectual capacity (*loco* 'looney') and the feelings of his followers (*resentidos* 'resentful'). Some words that were once a reason for pride in Venezuelan tradition became insults (*bolivarianos* 'bolivarians'). Authoritarianism and violence were rejected (*dictador, hordas* 'dictator, hordes').

Table 2. The insults by the opposition that were most remembered equally by male and female participants from the UCV interviewed after April 11, 2002 (n = 50 participants)

Insults	female	male	Total
Asesinos 'assassins'	12	6	18
Marginales 'slum-dwellers'	10	5	15
Resentidos 'resentful'	08	06	14
Comunistas 'communists'	07	06	13
Mentirosos 'liars'	07	05	12
Dictador 'dictator'	05	06	11
Loco 'looney'	04	08	11
Chavistas 'chavists'	07	03	10
Hordas 'hordes'	05	04	09
Asesino 'assassin'	03	05	08
Chusma 'rabble'	05	03	08
Brutos 'brutes'	05	02	07
Corruptos 'corrupt'	04	03	07
Turbas 'mobs'	03	04	07
Bolivarianos 'bolivarians'	04	02	06
Ladrones 'thieves'	03	02	05

On the other hand, the participants remembered the insults said by the government to the opposition, as seen in Table 3. Here the wealthiest social group is mentioned (*escuálidos, oligarcas* 'squalids, oligarchs'), the moral values of that group are criticized (*cúpulas podridas, corruptos, ladrones, mentirosos* 'rotten inner circles, corrupt, thieves, liars') and their political stance is evaluated (*golpistas, conspiradores, fascistas, antichavistas, traidores, vendepatrias* 'pro-coup, conspirators, fascists, anti-Chávez, traitors, traitors to the country'). Affiliation with the Acción Democrática party becomes a reason for insult (*adecos* 'AD follower'). As in Table 2, the mood or feelings lead to an offense (*afligidos* 'grief-stricken').

These insults, remembered by all the participants, reveal the frame of two worlds separated by words, whose members resort to the same discursive and semantic strategies. On the one hand, a positive presentation of the self and a negative presentation of the other (van Dijk 2003) are made evident; on the other hand, there is a stigmatization according to the affiliation with a given social group, moral or intellectual qualities, or feelings. The social, political and affective divisions were recorded in what can be called the 'language of polarization'. The words remembered by the UCV participants were not inventions; they were actually said by social and political actors in different contexts: in the media, in newspapers, on the web, in the streets, with family, at the university. These words have been recorded and now form part of the linguistic and cultural repertoire

Table 3. The insults from the government to the opposition most remembered by male and female participants from the UCV after April 11, 2002

Insults	Female	Male	Total
Escuálidos 'squalids'	21	23	44
Oligarcas 'oligarchs'	16	20	36
Cúpulas podridas 'rotten inner circles'	13	10	23
Corruptos 'corrupt'	09	07	16
Golpistas 'pro-coup'	05	09	14
Afligidos 'grief-stricken'	05	06	11
Conspiradores 'conspirators'	04	07	11
Fascistas 'fascists'	06	05	11
Ladrones 'thieves'	04	03	07
Adecos 'AD followers'	03	04	07
Antichavistas 'anti-Chávez'	03	02	05
Traidores 'traitors'	03	02	05
Mentirosos 'liars'	03	02	05
Vendepatrias 'traitors to the country'	03	02	05

Table 4. Insults from the opposition to the government equally remembered by male and female participants from the UPEL, UBV and UCV after the revoking referendum on August 15, 2004

Group 2 (UPEL)	Group 3 (UBV)	Group 4 (UCV)
Locos 'loonies'	*Marginales* 'slum-dwellers'	*Asesinos* 'assassins'
Asesinos 'assassins'	*Ladrones* 'thieves'	*Ladrones* 'thieves'
Golpistas 'pro-coup'	*Loco* 'looney'	*Ratas* 'rats'
Dictadores 'dictators'	*Asesinos* 'assassins'	*Comunistas* 'communists'
Chusma 'rabble'	*Violentos* 'violent'	*Corruptos* 'corrupt'
Chavistas 'Chavists'	*Dictador* 'dictator'	*Mentirosos* 'liars'
Ladrones 'thieves'	*Tierrúos* 'ground dwellers'	
Comunistas 'communists'	*Comunistas* 'communists'	
Corruptos 'corrupt'	*Hordas* 'hordes'	
	Brutos 'brutes'	
	Chimpancés 'chimpanzees'	

of Venezuelans, of the collective imagery and of political history (Bolívar 2001c; Barrera Linares 2003; Montero 2003; Bolívar, Chumaceiro & Erlich 2003; Lozada 2003; Hernández 2003).

In the interviews performed in 2004, it was found that two years after the events that affected all of Venezuela in 2002, the students remembered many of the insulting words of that period and incorporated new words that provided evidence of the changes in the political dynamics and in the polarization. Table 4

contains the insulting words remembered by the students of the three groups in-
terviewed after the referendum of August 15, 2004, another highly conflictive mo-
ment in the nation's politics.

Table 4 provides two types of information. On the one hand, the type of
insults remembered by all the participants in each group decreases and, on the
other hand, some words are remembered more than others. Note the words high-
lighted in bold: *asesinos, ladrones, comunistas* 'assassins, thieves, communists',
which were remembered by male and female participants at the three universities
and are generally attributed to all the opponents (as can be seen with the use of
the plural). The groups also tended to remember the words differently. The UPEL
group remembered *locos, golpistas, dictadores, chusma, chavistas y corruptos*
'loonies, pro-coup, dictators, rabble, chavists and corrupt', which encompass the
meanings of the same semantic fields as in 2002 concerning political, moral and
intellectual qualities. The UCV group focused on moral or ethical aspects: *ratas,
corruptos, mentirosos* 'rats, corrupt, liars'. A different pattern of memories is noted
in the UBV group because, other than the words on which they all agree, the
participants from this university remembered offensive words that refer to condi-
tions of poverty (*marginales, tierrúos* 'slum-dwellers, ground dwellers'), violence
(*violentos, hordas* 'violent, hordes'), intellectual capacity (*brutos* 'brutes') and, in-
directly, skin color and social class (*chimpancés* 'chimpanzees').

Because the interviews recorded the insults remembered by university students,
and not those used in contexts of interactions in real spoken situations, one could
think that the recorded words were interpretations and not the authentic words that
were heard. Any word that is considered offensive, even if it was invented during the
interview, however, has discursive value because it deals with the representation of
each person's world experiences. While the references of the UCV participants con-
centrate on moral or ethical aspects, the UBV experiences refer to biographical and
more personal aspects of the people affected. It is notable that the UBV participants
also remember insults to the President (*loco, dictador* 'looney, dictator'), especially
the words that allude to his mental state and authoritarianism.

When approaching the data from the other side of the political confrontation,
the pattern of memories changes, focusing on four words that were remembered
consistently by all the participants, male and female. As seen in Table 5, these four
words are *escuálidos, golpistas, fascistas, oligarcas* 'squalids, pro-coup, fascists, oli-
garchs', all of them used by the President of the Republic in his speeches to the
country and in the program *Aló Presidente*.[17]

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17. The program *Aló Presidente* has been produced and run by the President since May 29,
1999. The program has an important political function in legitimizing the revolution (see
Bolívar 2003b).

Table 5. Insults from the government to the opposition remembered equally by male and female students in November, 2004

Group 2 (UPEL)	Group 3 (UBV)	Group 4 (UCV)
Escuálidos 'squalids'	*Escuálidos* 'squalids'	*Escuálidos* 'squalids'
Golpistas 'pro-coup'	*Fascistas* 'fascists'	*Golpistas* 'pro-coup'
Oligarcas 'oligarchs'	*Golpistas* 'pro-coup'	*Oligarcas* 'oligarchs'
Fascistas 'fascists'	*Oligarcas* 'oligarchs'	*Fascistas* 'fascists'
Corruptos 'corrupt'	*Traidores* 'traitors'	*Corruptos* 'corrupt'
Cobardes 'cowards'	*Ladrones* 'thieves'	*Traidores* 'traitors'
Mentirosos 'liars'		*Ladrones* 'thieves'
		Cobardes 'cowards'

Undoubtedly, the events from April 11, 2002 marked a given time period, and it is important to realize that the events are not self-determining but are directed by social and political actors who are responsible for words and actions. It is true that the insults recalled from the opposition to the government have been increasingly varied, but it is also true that the words of authority of those who govern are better engrained in the collective memory and last longer in time. They also contribute to the creation of identities and, although they can serve the purpose of creating internal cohesion in a group, they locate the opponents in a single stigmatized block, which is apparently monolithic, incapable of harboring other ideas that are not those imposed by the speaker. It could be claimed that the research regarding what remains in memory shows how reality is reduced to seven words. On the one hand, one sees 'squalids', 'oligarchs', 'fascists', 'pro-coup' and, on the other, 'thieves', 'assassins', 'communists', or two groups that discredit each other.

Table 6 below contains other insults that were remembered by the male and female university students who were interviewed from the UPEL, UBV and UCV after the referendum. It is important to examine these words because they provide an indication of how political confrontation affects the conception of these students' self identities and those of others.

As is clearly evident in Table 6, the focus of the insults changes. In the first set of insults attributed to the opposition against the government (O/G), there is an agreement between the UPEL and the UCV groups, also perceived by the UBV group, when they label those who support the government as *analfabetas, malandros* and *ignorantes* 'illiterate, scoundrels, ignorant'. These terms denigrate their social and moral conditions as well as their own capacity as students. On the other hand, the participants from the UPEL and the UCV attribute the insults *terroristas* and *asesinos* 'terrorists, assassins' to the government, while those of the UBV do not, better remembering the word *guerrilleros* 'guerrillas'. It is interesting that the students of the UBV, and not those from the other universities, remembered and recorded the words *pendejos* 'dumb' and *plastas* 'pieces of excrement', both

Table 6. Other insults issued by the opposition to the government (O/G) and by the government to the opposition (G/O), mentioned by male and female participants after the referendum

Group 2 UPEL (O/G)	Group 3 UBV (O/G)	Group 4 UCV (O/G)
Analfabetas 'illiterate'	*Malandros* 'scoundrels'	*Ignorantes* 'ignorant'
Monos 'monkeys'	*Ignorantes* 'ignorant'	*Analfabetas* 'illiterate'
Revolucionarios 'revolutionaries'	*Gorilas* 'gorillas'	*Tramposos* 'real cheats'
Malandros 'scoundrels'	*Lambucio* 'scrounger'	*Pistoleros* 'gunmen'
Ignorantes 'ignorant'	*Negros* 'Blacks'	*Fraudulentos* 'fraudulent'
Oficialistas 'officialists'	*Índios* 'Indians'	*Tirano* 'tyrant'
	Analfabetas 'illiterate'	*Malandros* 'scoundrels'
	Incultos 'uncultured'	*Maricos* 'fags'
		Choros 'crooks'
		Sucios 'dirty'

Group 2 UPEL (G/O)	Group 3 UBV (G/O)	Group 4 UCV (G/O)
Terroristas 'terrorists'	*Plastas* 'pieces of excrement'	*Terroristas* 'terrorists'
Asesinos 'assassins'	*Pendejos* 'dumb'	*Asesinos* 'assassins'
Embusteros 'liars'	*Guerrilleros* 'guerrilla'	*Globoterror* 'world terror'
Diablos 'devils'	*Frustrado* 'frustrated'	*Oportunistas* 'opportunists'
Minoría 'minority'		*Diablos* 'devils'
Imperialistas 'imperialists'		

used publicly by the President of the Republic. Among the insults attributed to the opposition against the government, it is noted that the participants of the UBV remember words that allude to racism and discrimination (*negros, indios* 'Blacks, Indians'), which were also partially recorded by the students from the UPEL with the word *monos* 'monkeys', in which racism and class discrimination converge. Among the participants from the UCV there were no words remembered that alluded to racism, but there were words that alluded to sexism (*maricos* 'fags'). What predominates in the memories of the students from the UCV is a greater variety of words denoting moral transgressions (*tramposos, fraudulentos, choros, sucios* 'real cheats, fraudulent, crooks, dirty'). There are also allusions to the political state and authoritarianism (UPEL: *revolucionarios, oficialistas* 'revolutionaries, officialists'; UCV: *tirano* 'tyrant'). The insults attributed to the government against the opposition are words used by the President and his closest collaborators (*diablos, imperialistas, minorías, globoterror, oportunistas* 'devils, imperialists, minorities, globe terror, opportunists'), all with clearly political overtones.

4.6 Insults across national boundaries

In the same way that Chávez in Venezuela confronted the traditional parties AD and COPEI, the media, the bishops, the labor unions, PDVSA (*Petróleos de*

Venezuela Sociedad Anónima)[18] and others[19] to strengthen his political project, he has had disagreements and confrontations in Latin America with several countries: Chile (supporting Bolivia with the passage to the sea); Mexico (because its government sided with the United States regarding the *Tratado del Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas* [ALCA] 'Free Trade Agreement of the Americas' proposed by George W. Bush) and with groups in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, Mexico (for accusations that denounce his interference in the internal politics of these countries). But what has given him international fame are the insults that he has directed to the former President Bush of the United States, as a response to the criticism formulated by the American government, especially when he is discredited as a "demagogue" and "de-stabilizer".

> In Venezuela, a demagogue awash in oil money is undermining democracy and seeking to destabilize the region," states Bush in the report entitled *National Security Strategy 2006*, a document that updates the one issued in 2002, after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.[20]
>
> (*El Nacional*, March 17, 2006: A14)

Chávez's insults have made news around the world because he has issued them in programs that reach a global audience; for example, in the 61st General Assembly of the UN, when he began his address with the phrase "*Ayer estuvo el diablo aquí. En este lugar huele a azufre.*" 'Yesterday the devil was here. It smells like sulfur in this place' (*El Nacional*, September 21, 2006). Other insults that have traveled around the world due to their high degree of threat to Bush's personal and political image have been *alcohólico, borracho, ignorante, burro,* you are a donkey, *cobarde, asesino, genocida de lo peor* 'alcoholic, drunk, ignorant, ass, you are a donkey, coward, assassin, exterminator of the worst', expressed in *Aló Presidente.*[21]

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18. PDVSA is currently controlled by the government and a large part of its income goes toward social programs and aid to allied countries.

19. Chávez currently has more control of the power than any other president in the past. Despite accusations of fraud during the elections and of a growing militarism evident in the discourse with words like *batallas* 'battles' instead of *campañas* 'campaigns', *ataques* 'attacks' instead of *argumentos* 'arguments', *lanceros* 'spearmen' instead of *participantes* 'participants' (see Montero 2002; Chumaceiro 2004), the opposition has been weakened as well as the democratic dialogue.

20. "En Venezuela, un demagogo inundado de dinero del petróleo está socavando la democracia y tratando de desestabilizar a la región" afirma Bush en el reporte titulado Estrategia para la Seguridad Nacional 2006, un documento que actualiza el emitido en 2002, después de los atentados terroristas en Nueva York y Washington."

21. See the website for "20minutos.es", for 2006/03/21/97.

Due to limitations of space, it is not possible to describe the details of the macro-exchanges at the international level, but the presence of a pattern of inter-action that has the following characteristics can be described:

a. provoking action by Chávez / criticism to Chávez's politics;
b. positive and/or negative evaluations by followers and opponents;
c. Chávez's insults to those who evaluate him negatively;
d. reinforcement of Chávez's insults by ministers and the chancellor;
e. a call for demonstrations supporting Chávez's politics and the revolution;
f. declarations by the government (the others are those who attack and offend the Venezuelan people).

In the macro-exchanges at the international level, it is evident that Chávez is a politician who tries to legitimize himself as a Latin American and world leader. His anti-North American and anti-liberal policies lead him to ally with those who oppose the United States, although he is careful in making clear that the leaders are very different from the people. His policy of exporting the Bolivarian revolu-tion includes economic help to Others, including the poor living in the Bronx in New York, who receive cheap oil from Venezuela. In his arguments with the presidents of other countries, he makes sure to clarify that his war is against the 'empire' and not against the people. For example, after the criticism that President Vicente Fox made in the IV Summit of the Americas, which took place in Mar de Plata in November 2005, Chávez called Fox *entreguista* 'submissive' and *cachorro del imperio* 'lap-dog of the empire'. These insults led to a diplomatic conflict that ended with the withdrawal of the ambassadors of both countries. The Venezuelan government did not apologize and maintained that its war was not against the people of Mexico, but rather against Bush.

> Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States. I'm very sorry, but I could not refrain from responding to the President of Mexico. I respect the majesty of the President of Mexico, just as he is obliged to respect the majesty of the Venezuelan President. I respect the majesty of all the presidents except one, George Bush, because he is a true madman, a murderer, a genocidist, someone who threatens the whole world, who does not know his own world, cannot be respected.   (Unión Radio. Net, 20/11/2005 13:38)[22]

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22. "Pobrecito México, tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos" "Lo lamento mucho, pero yo no podía dejar de responderle al Presidente de México. Yo respeto la majestad del presidente de México como él está obligado a respetar la majestad del presidente venezolano. Respeto la majestad de todos los presidentes menos de uno, George Bush, porque es un ver-dadero loco, un asesino, un genocida, no se puede respetar a quien amenaza al mundo entero, quien desconoce su propio mundo" (Unión Radio. Net, 20/11/2005 13:38).

Not only Bush has been a target of Chávez's insults, but also the British ex-Prime Minister was subjected to them because he sided with the United States. In the micro-exchange presented below, the British Prime Minister, visiting Washington on May 25, 2006, made explicit comments about Hugo Chávez that denote his acknowledgement of the insults received and also allow us to see the ways in which political alliances are maintained in discourse:

> Excerpt (1):
> Tony Blair: The one thing I will say about President Chávez is that he's got the best line of insults I have ever come across in any world leader, some of the things he said about me I haven't heard said about me since I was in school, really…
> Audience: (laughter)
> Tony Blair: Nor in the House of Parliament =
> Audience: (more laughter)
> Tony Blair: = but no seriously I think the question for all of them is that…[23]

The micro-exchange can be analyzed from the perspective of conversation analysis as a dialogue between an interlocutor and his audience, in which both co-construct a topic and certain identities (Linell 1998; Koike 2003; Benwell & Stokoe 2006): those people who are present and those who are absent. This exchange can be interpreted as a sequence of turns in which verbal and non-verbal elements are combined, since there is a speaker, whose utterances are evaluated as reflected by the laughter, which, at the same time, indicates a positive reception of his words. Laughter has a key structural role in the sequence that allows Blair to extend his comment and reinforce his evaluation of Chávez. As Tannen (1989: 12) says, "Not only is the audience a co-author, but the speaker is also a co-listener". The analysis of the structure of the conversation highlights the value of the notion of sequence in dialogue (Linell 1998), because if the order were changed there would be a different text (Bolívar 1986).[24] Although Blair does not use explicit insults toward Chávez, he belittles him indirectly through an implicature that reduces him to the level of a school age child, and also provokes the laughter of the audience present.

   This micro-exchange, in which it is also possible to see the opposition between 'they'[25] and 'we', typical of ideological discourse (van Dijk 1996, 1998, 2003), makes more sense in relation to other exchanges in which the temporal

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23. My transcription of the original conference on May 25, 2006. Also reported in Spanish in Venezuela by *El Nacional*, 27-05-06, p. A-12.

24. I base this on the assumption that the interactive (linear) level is where decisions are made that provide the structure to a text. See Bolívar (1986, 1994).

25. In this case "they" refers to Presidents Chávez, Castro from Cuba and Morales from Bolivia.

reach of the context is greater. That same year in February, Blair had severely criticized Chávez in the British Parliament for not respecting international norms, to which Chávez responded with insults. The words that Blair had never heard were, among others, *váyase al zipote* 'go to hell', *sinvergüenza* 'shameless', *peon del imperialismo* 'imperialism pawn', which Chávez said in Venezuela during a ceremony for petrochemical engineering graduates in the state of Zulia. On this occasion he reminded Blair of his alliance with Bush ("Mr. Danger"), against Iraq and also asked him to return the Falkland Islands to Argentina:

> Go to hell! Don't be shameless Mr. Blair, don't be immoral Mr. Blair, you are precisely one of those who have no morals for which to make a call for people to respect the rules of the international community, siding with Mr. Danger. 26

In May 2006, Chávez made a two-day visit to London, not acting as Chief of State, but to meet with people of the British left in a meeting organized by the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. During this visit, Chávez did not meet with Blair, but he made declarations about his mission to contribute to *"torcerle el rumbo al mundo para detener la marcha del capitalismo"* 'twist the way of the world to stop the course of capitalism'. Also, he warned about the consequences of the attacks of the United States against Iran, calling Bush *"un asesino y genocida que debería ser condenado"* 'a murderer and exterminator who should be condemned' and he warned that if the United States attempts to harass Venezuela, *"no habrá crudo ni para Venezuela ni para nadie"* 'there won't be crude oil for Venezuela or for anybody' (*El Nacional*, May 15, 2006, p. A-10). These actions make evident the divisions in the world and reveal matters that help to understand the motivations behind the insulting dialogues. Political alliances are present in the struggle for power and for great energy resources.

According to Fairclough (2000: 175), as opposed to Thatcher, "Blair avoids polemic and the construction of enemies in his speeches, and is polite rather than a gladiator in interviews – he has developed a style which agrees with New Labour's consensus politics, but also excludes substantive dialogue." It is evident in the discourse that there are different ways of insulting. While Blair offends Chávez 'politely', Chávez does it openly, directly, and with explicit insults that affect the personal esteem and the political and cultural image of the leaders more directly.

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26. ¡Váyase al zipote! No sea sinvergüenza señor Blair, no sea inmoral señor Blair, que usted es precisamente uno de los que no tienen ninguna moral para hacer una llamada nadie a respetar las reglas de la comunidad internacional, alineado con Mr. Danger. See the rebellion.org website for 10/02/2006.

Mr. Danger is the nickname that Chávez gives President Bush. Mr. Danger is the name of an evil North American character in a famous novel (*Doña Bárbara*) written by Rómulo Gallegos.

For this reason, the style of the presidents is key in maintaining democratic dialogue and healthy international relations.

5.   Conclusions

The analysis that has been presented demonstrates how, in the dynamics of discourse, democratic dialogue can be studied in several dimensions. We have offered a very general view of the dialogue between the Venezuelan presidents and their people during their inaugurations, in which the presidents address their constituents with the intention of dialoguing. However, there is no evidence of achieving the desired goal because they are guided by the personalism that characterizes presidents in the Latin American region, or they allow themselves to be tempted by authoritarianism, militarism or the dreams of integration that go back to the 19th century. We have also gained insight as to the way in which Hugo Chávez's government changed from a democratically-elected government to one in which the President holds the greatest power. The changes in offensive speech have been relevant, as is shown in the interviews administered to university students. Political dialogue in Venezuela is characterized as a dialogue that leaves very little room for true democratic participation because the opponent is discredited, discriminated against and excluded for not allying with the government.

The patterns of conflictive interaction that occurred in Venezuela have progressively been transferred to international relations. We find the strategic pattern of insults used to obtain political advantage and to belittle or annihilate adversaries. This aggressive use of insults inspires admiration in some people because it is acknowledged as a different, creative, brave and astute way of promoting change, but in other people it creates rejection because the democratic dialogue becomes vulnerable, inhibited and interrupted (as in the case of the withdrawal of the ambassadors). Those who defend threatening rhetoric or excuse the insults to the personal, political and cultural image of the political leaders, as happens in a sector of the Venezuelan population that follows and admires President Chávez, possibly do so thinking that the moral strength of his arguments is enough to ignore the bold and offensive language. But it cannot be forgotten that every change comes through discourse, and that realities are constructed or destroyed with words, which, in democratic dialogue, must be respectful of others.

What we have attempted to demonstrate is that the study of dialogue in the dynamics of discourse can provide valuable information about the ways in which dialogue is constructed in the struggle for power, and how efforts are made to maintain and reinforce it in the current world, despite all the contradictions that appear through linguistic tools, conversation analysis and critical interactional analysis.