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## Political discourse and semiotics

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**Abstract:** In recent years, semiotics has put “life” at the center of the subject of study. There is the desire to be successful in the lifestyle and the desire to convey the right knowledge to the recipient or the correct use of practices in life. A semiotic theory developed by Jacques Fontanille recently showed that strategy can also be used in semiotic analysis. So, the way of life that Fontanille talks about is not just strategy. The process we call “lifestyle” has an order from small to large: There are basic signs, texts, objects, actants, practices, action phases, strategies, and finally lifestyle. In this study, we question the function of strategy, but generally of productive pursuit, in the analysis of political discourses. In our study, we reveal the approach of semiotics to political discourses that concern the whole world and discuss whether they are valid in every society. We emphasize political semiotics, which is used to understand the general structure of political discourses, and show the general functioning of political discourses with Greimas’ Actantial Model. We conclude that politicians can influence target audiences by using various methods and discourse strategies.

**Keywords:** argumentation; communication semiotics; ideology; lifestyle; strategy

**Dedicated to** the memory of Prof. Dr. V. Doğan Günay (1957–2023).

## 1 Introduction

The personalities of leaders, who are among the most important social actors, are as important as their political abilities. This is because politicians, who influence every aspect of life, are identities shaped by the combination of these two features. Politicians want to present themselves to the target group not as they are, but as they want to be seen. In this respect, factors such as social perception, the impression left on the target group, and the desire to create a positive identity in society can be seen as the most fundamental goals of politicians. It can be said that political parties/

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politicians aim to reach as many voters as possible, to introduce themselves to them in the way they want, and to gain more voters in this way. While the politician's aim in the sender's position is to present himself as s/he wishes, the voter's aim in the receiver's position can be stated as accessing the correct information.<sup>1</sup>

Political communication, which is the area of struggle for individuals or groups striving to be in power, includes all political communication activities such as propaganda, public relations, political advertising, superior–subordinate relations, “creating” news for the press, TV panel discussions, gossip, and brainwashing (Çankaya 2008: 15). These activities can also be seen as tools or techniques used by politicians and politics. Here, there are actions aimed at achieving the goals of politicians and their parties. In order for all these activities to serve their purpose, it is essential to use the discourses correctly and appropriately, because a discourse used consciously or unconsciously can affect many other situations. It is a well-known issue for those interested in politics that political discourses should be chosen carefully in this respect. Therefore, any word politicians use in their discourses cannot simply be uttered. Each word is carefully selected, and the message it will give to the voter and its effect on her/him are well thought out. This is because *how* a politician says what he says is as important as *what* he says. The power of discourse is undeniable. When creating discourses, social background knowledge, common value judgments, and cultural accumulations are extensively utilized. For example, the expression “*Devlet Baba*,” which has taken its place in Turkish politics, means that the state is protective, reliable, and honest. With this statement, all citizens in the country are presented with a unifying and protective position that aims to make them feel safe. In addition, the message is given that all citizens will be approached at an equal distance and without prejudice. In this respect, the expression “*Devlet Baba*” in the Turkish political tradition is much more than two words.

In this study, the discourses used in politics are examined semiotically. Semiotics aims to reveal the formation process of meaning. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, seeks an answer to the question of how much information can be obtained about the sender and the receiver through the transmitted discourse. In this study, we apply V. Doğan Günay's discourse analysis approach and employ the semiotic theories of Algirdas-Julien Greimas and his followers. After defining political discourse, we explain the formation of political discourse, persuading the receiver, and discourse strategies. To illustrate the definitions, we use some examples from Türkiye's current political landscape.

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## 2 Discourse and political discourse

The concept of discourse, which emerged with linguistic studies at the beginning of the twentieth century, has recently been frequently used in fields such as anthropology, sociology, political science, and linguistics. It is known how effective the power of discourse is in our age. Edibe Sözen says: “Life is in discourses, and life takes place with discourses. We no longer live in Newton’s absolute time and space; we live in a universe of uncertain, chaotic discourses” (Sözen 2014: 9). According to Günay, discourse is “not a series of sentences, but a linguistic structure formed by sentences and exceeding the sentence” (2018: 23). Based on these definitions, it can be said that it would not be correct to limit discourse to sentences because discourse is much more than what is said. It is a situation that is interpreted according to the events and facts encountered in life. It is a concept that gains meaning in a specific context and whose value is determined according to time and space. Therefore, discourse cannot be considered independent of the conditions in which it is produced.

As for political discourse, which is the focus of this article, any discourse can turn into political discourse depending on the space in which it is produced. More precisely, discourse can be characterized according to the context in which it is produced rather than its content. In addition, Günay (2018a: 68), comparing Dominique Maingueneau with Ferdinand de Saussure, reveals the relationship between discourse and the space in which the discourse is produced. Saussure says that everything in language is a sign and that a sign consists of a signifier and a signified. Maingueneau’s definition of discourse analysis also follows this analogy of binary structure: Text (signifier) and social space (signified) are like the front and back of a piece of paper. In this case, discourse is formed when the text is produced in the social space related to its own special situations (modality of utterance, subject, etc.), as illustrated in Figure 1.

The same utterance can be informative, political, or narrative discourse in different social spaces. Political discourses concern many fields, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, and linguistics. The purpose of political discourses is to influence the voters and provide a behavior change in the desired direction. In the declamation of a leader, the elements such as the effect of the environment, the tone of the light, the color of the clothes worn, the temperature level of the environment, and the music are also effective, as well as the rhetorical

<b>Saussure</b>		<b>Maingueneau</b>		<b>Figure 1:</b> Relationship between discourse and social space (Günay 2018a: 68).
	Signifier		Text (utterance)	
Sign	-----	Discourse	-----	
	Signified		Social space	

power of the leader (Aslan 2022: 198). In the discourses produced, certain codes are given in certain situations. It is ensured that the target group understands these codes. Codes fulfill an identifiable social or communicative function based on an agreement between their users and a shared cultural background. They can be transmitted through the appropriate media and/or communication channels (Elden et al. 2005: 479–480). The discourses produced for these purposes are developed around ideological contexts such as freedom, a promise of the future, and democracy. Thus, political codes containing cultural, social, ethnic, and religious messages are presented to the voters.

Various types of political discourse include discussion programs on television, election rallies, press conferences, and voter-candidate interviews. Political discourses vary according to their characteristics and purposes. With her/his discourse, a politician may aim to persuade voters to be loyal to the party and to vote, to activate the party loyalty of volatile voters, and to force people to adopt general political or social attitudes to garner support for the existing policy (Rozina and Karapetjana 2009: 111–112). Therefore, the politician, who has to establish stable social communication with society, has to provide all the necessary conditions for her/his purposes.

### 3 Declamation and nicknames in political discourse

In advertisements, some words are used to evoke a particular product. Some products such as Arçelik for “durable television” and Volvo cars for “safety on the road” can be given as examples. There are also words that politicians often use. It can be said that these words symbolized that party leader in a way. We can give some examples of this situation from Türkiye: We can provide some examples from Türkiye or this situation: Bülent Ecevit uses “Dear,” Recep Tayyip Erdoğan “Ey!” or Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu uses “Myself.” These are the words that identify with people themselves. It is possible to observe some changes in such declamations over time. The word “Dear,” which is a polite expression, has been replaced by words such as “Ey!” and “Person,” which are derogatory, exclusionary, and perhaps othering expressions. This change in discourse is also an indicator of the transformation in politics. As mentioned above, politics is in life, and therefore it is affected by culture, economy, and technological developments. For this reason, political life and political language can be instructive for those who want to learn more about history.

There are also nicknames attributed to politicians. To give a few examples, setting aside nicknames such as “Great Leader” and “Ata” used for Atatürk (these expressions are words that indicate leadership accepted by the nation rather than

nicknames, because the Turkish people gave these titles to their leader), “Basbuğ” for Alparslan Türkeş, “Karaoğlan” and “Conqueror of Cyprus” for Bülent Ecevit, “Selo” for Selahattin Demirtaş, “King of Dams,” “Shepherd Sülo,” and “Father” for Süleyman Demirel, “Mujahid” and “Hodja” for Necmettin Erbakan, and “Reis” for Erdoğan are words accepted by the people and integrated with these people. None of these nicknames came about randomly. The characteristics of the leaders, their gestures and facial expressions, attitudes and behaviors, body language, and political discourses effectively determine the nicknames given to them. Some of these nicknames are given by party leaders, some by the press, and some by the public.

It is known that nicknames arouse sympathy and/or antipathy among the target group. When “political charisma” is added to the qualities of party leaders, such as rhetoric and leadership characteristics, they will inevitably be called by a nickname (Oğuz 2018: 84–94). Nicknames can also be given for reasons such as people feeling close to a party leader, seeing them as being closer and more sincere to their view of life, feeling admiration, or, by contrast, wanting to exclude them, slandering or belittling them. If these nicknames have a place in the eyes of the public, they can be very effective in political campaign processes.

## 4 The construction of political discourse

Today, individuals can easily access all kinds of information and tend to make decisions and form opinions within the framework of the information they encounter. This is thanks to the internet and social media. In addition, thanks to the internet and social media platforms, individuals have become not only information seekers but also producers and marketers of information and have the power to influence and direct the ideas of others. Since individuals can get immediate feedback, they can also exchange ideas with each other. Since social media has a significant impact on users, politicians who aim to manage and direct the public’s perceptions need to share sensible posts to create a good perception (Erdal 2018: 182–203), because the shares made on these platforms have essential effects on individuals’ opinions. The internet and social media have become today’s most important platforms regarding virtual persuasion and perception management. A politician shares something for the sake of sharing and uses every word professionally to create a good impression among the voters. These people also receive professional support from social media and political communication consultants and actively use the internet and social media.

The meaning-making process is the most crucial point to be considered in persuading the target group. Politicians and/or parties recognize that language and the art of persuasion are vital in political discourse, and employ their magical powers and resources (Kamalu 2022: 17–27). For this reason, they use both written and visual

persuasion methods. However, written persuasion methods are not sufficient anymore. Other factors, such as the colors, clothes, and images used by politicians, are also involved, because the sender of the message has to think about how the receiver can perceive the message. Therefore, social and cultural contexts are essential in the meaning-making process. Van Leeuwen states that factors such as speech, writing, pictures, and colors should be examined in the social context and that all these have different social and cultural meanings (Van Leeuwen 2005: 4). The symbols in the message that the politician wants to convey can be interpreted differently according to the target group's demographic, cultural, and educational status. Therefore, in all cases, the intended communication may not be realized at the desired level. In this respect, for effective and quality communication:

- it should be determined how sensitive the public is to the emotion, thought, or message to be conveyed, how much it appeals to them, and how it meets their expectations,
- the desired communication or promotion should be made to the public at the most appropriate time for the local and general conjuncture,
- the expectations of the target group should be analyzed very well, and it should be determined which emotion and thought should be conveyed to which target group with which content,
- the message should be simple and understandable for everyone,
- the communication tool chosen for the message should be suitable for the target group,
- the publication time and repetition of the message must be sufficient to create the desired effect on the target group (Erdal 2018: 182–203)

In order for all these to be realized at the desired level, a particular sequence must be followed. According to Keller and Swaminathan, six steps must be fulfilled in order for a person to be persuaded:

1. Exposure: The person must see or hear the communication.
2. Attention: The person should notice the communication.
3. Understanding: The person must understand the intended message or arguments of the communication.
4. Efficiency: The person should respond positively to the intended message or arguments of the communication.
5. Intentions: The person should plan to act in the desired way in communication.
6. Behavior: The person must act in the manner desired in communication (Keller and Swaminathan 2019: 187).

Considering the above criteria, there must be successive processes in order for a person to be persuaded. This shows that good strategic planning is necessary for

successful communication. If any step in this process is disrupted, persuasion will not occur. This also applies to political persuasion. Politicians are fully prepared to persuade voters of their party's "point of view" and come to power because they can speak persuasively with voters and the political elite (De Wet 2010: 103). If politicians do not construct their discourse in a planned way, all the processes that they spend time and effort on can be wasted. For example:

- A political advertisement may not reach the expected number of voters because it is not sufficiently announced.
- The public may not want to listen to an ineffective conversation.
- Political parties or leaders may not be understood by the public because they cannot express themselves adequately.
- People may not have positive attitudes and behaviors due to irrelevant or unconvincing discourses.
- People may be indifferent to promises that do not address the needs and expectations of the people.
- The public may not adopt the party/leader that is not in their minds.

These examples can be multiplied. Such situations should be considered in advance, followed meticulously, and examined, and strategies should be developed accordingly. For this reason, conducting detailed research on the target group addressed to create the desired effect on them will be useful.

## 5 Political discourse strategies

Politicians use various methods to reach and persuade the target group. Therefore, they have to construct strong discourses. For this reason, they make use of arguments based on ethnic, religious, cultural, and historical events. Today, the place of communication strategies in political communication studies is crucial, and this situation has become an indispensable part of politicians' toolkits. Therefore, as in many other fields, semiotics is also used in political communication studies. In every period of history, politicians have used many methods while constructing their discourses. Some of the prominent strategies in political discourses are mentioned below.

### 5.1 The power of simplicity

The simple but effective use of language in politics is significant. Therefore, using the language in this way can also be preferred as a strategy. In other words, the more

straightforward the language used is, the more effectively the message can be transmitted to the target group. Ockham's razor, also known as the "law of frugality" or "law of simplicity," supports this situation (Fernández 1999: 121–125). A problem-solving principle introduced by William of Ockham (1287–1347) is expressed in this phrase: "The simplest explanation is probably the right one." It is argued here that when faced with a problem, the simplest way is probably the best solution. The less hypothetical route should be preferred. This point of view is similar to Aristotle's principle that "more perfect requires less processing." In other words, choosing the simple, clear, and understandable solution may be wiser rather than trying complex, roundabout ways. This is also true for politicians. For example, instead of giving complex economic figures at a meeting, explaining the issue in a language that the public can understand, with generally accepted information, may be more effective and understandable.

## 5.2 Emotional bonding

It should not be overlooked that logical situations affect voting behavior, and emotional factors can play an active role. Research since the 1950s has shown that voters' motivations to be emotionally affected, and their logical inferences significantly impact their political decision-making processes. Therefore, whether the target group is conscious or unconscious, they are affected by emotional states and can change their behavior.

Common values of nations, such as respect for the national anthem, the flag, and ethnic identities, are of great importance in the effectiveness of emotional messages. Today, in addition to informative and promotional advertisements in political campaigns, subliminal messages that will contribute to the image and increase the impact power of propaganda are also included (Akyüz and Kazaz 2015: 207). Experienced stories, historical events, environmental conditions, socioeconomic conditions, rituals that the people continue from generation to generation, and some symbols that belong to the society play an active role in the decision-making processes. An object, a common symbol, logo, clothing, or cultural value are common values shared by societies living together (Çanakpınar 2021: 70). It is known that emotions are used extensively in political campaigns. Emotions such as fear, enthusiasm, anger, pride, sadness, happiness, hope, unity, brotherhood, and dignity are handled by politicians in line with negative and positive effects (Akdağ and Özdemir 2021: 920). Thus, voters may vote for the parties they identify with.



### 5.3 Using emblems/slogans

Slogans or emblems contain coded meanings. Thus, they present ideologies, ideas, or political streams both explicitly and implicitly. Such uses are associative and are naturally derived from cultural sources. The emblem or logo and slogan of a political party are semiotic resources that clearly convey the party's own positive evaluations of itself and indirectly evaluate opposition negatively (Kamalu 2022: 17–27). Although this is not always the case, the aim of political parties is mostly to give a message to the voters and to produce slogans in this direction. For this reason, slogans, logos, or emblems are loaded with meanings to imply certain cultural codes. The image, color, shape, and content of the produced emblem are critical. According to research conducted at New York University, people remember 10 percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they read, but 80 percent of what they see (Olgundeniz and Parsa 2014: 98). For this reason, the selected logos must be remarkable and memorable. In addition, the features of the chosen slogan/logo should serve the ideology of the relevant politician or party, either explicitly or implicitly. For example, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) emblem is the light bulb. While the bulb expresses light, luminosity, and transparent management, the flame in the bulb describes movement and effort. Based on this, it can be thought that the party's policy is transparent politics, peace, trust, effort, and labor.

On the other hand, the emblem of the Republican People's Party (CHP) is six arrows. These six arrows represent Atatürk's principles of Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Secularism, Statism, and Revolutionism. From here, it can be thought that the party's plans will be shaped in line with Atatürk's principles. The emblem of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is three crescents. The three crescents represent the Turkish Union, the Islamic Union, and Turkish World Domination. From here, it can be easily foreseen that Turkish unity and solidarity are given importance. In summary, it can be said that party emblems are forms of political discourse.

The AKP's "Target 2023," and the CHP's "Everything will be fine" slogans have become integrated with the relevant parties that have a place in the memory of the Turkish people. The slogan "Target 2023" may contain messages such as "We will be in power in the future," "We have much work to do," and "We will put our signature under many innovations in 2023." The slogan "Everything will be fine" may contain messages such as "If you choose us, we promise you a perfect future, the bad process will get better." Both slogans were chosen to make the parties preferable in the eyes of the voters. These processes are indispensable parts of political conflict.

## 5.4 Othering

One of the most used strategies in politics is othering. There is always an “other” in question, and in almost every discourse, the mistakes and deficiencies of the “other” are expressed. Then, the different and outstanding aspects of the “othered” are emphasized. Thus, politicians present themselves as “ideal, wanted, longed for.” Belittlement or humiliation of a group, negation, classification, distance, discrediting, belittlement as a human being, attribution of negative features, labeling, leaving alone, showing weak, and blaming are kinds of othering (Çanakpınar 2021: 74). Although this type of belligerent, aggressive, and divisive discourse sometimes leads the user to her/his goal, it can occasionally also be risky.

Metaphors, pronouns, and adjectives can also be othering tools because metaphors shape our thinking about politics and can affect our perception of the world (Rozina and Karapetjana 2009: 120). While President Erdoğan says “we” for his party in his discourses, he often prefers to use the word “they” for the opposing party. In addition, Erdoğan’s characterization of “Mr. Kemal” for CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu has been used for a long time with the meanings of ridicule, contempt, and humiliation. However, in his speech at the Nation’s Voice Meeting in Balıkesir, Kılıçdaroğlu accepted this ascription and then said, “Yeah, I gave my whole life to be Mr. Kemal. Being Mr. Kemal is not easy; for this, first, you must be moral, you must not be treated unfairly, you must be just [...] Who are you? Who is Mr. Kemal?” He succeeded in turning Erdoğan’s rhetoric into praise. Thus, the power gained through discourse passed from one political leader to another.

## 5.5 Manipulation

The use of language is essential in politics, as in all areas of life. It is known that political discourses are focused on convincing the target group to take action in the desired direction. Exaggerated and powerful language is used to impress the target group. According to Dennis Wrong (1980), there are different ways to influence people, which can be intentional or unintentional. Manipulation is among the strategies politicians use as an effective tool of political rhetoric.

Manipulation can be defined as hiding the intention of the one in power from the receiver, that is, hiding the effect the one in power wants to produce (Pardo 2001: 97). In other words, it can also be expressed as directing a piece of known information, making additions or deletions, and changing it in line with the person’s goals and objectives. Manipulation is changing people’s ideas, perceptions, and behaviors without making them feel it. In this case, the causative modality, which is expressed as “to make someone do something,” is in question (Günay 2018b: 236). There are

various manipulation techniques in politics. Political advertisements are also manipulations used by politicians to awaken the target group's interest. Politicians know what and how to manipulate very well, they achieve their goals by persuasion, not by violence or force. Thus, the manipulated person does not feel any external compulsion or obligation; they think that they have made their own decision. Herbert Schiller says that manipulation occurs with myths and the skillful placement of these myths in the human mind (Akin et al. 2019: 22). Thus, the target group is directed in the desired way.

Cherry picking (also known as “suppressing evidence” or “missing evidence”), which is defined as “a style of data analysis used when a researcher has inadequate data” (Morse 2010: 3), is one of the manipulation techniques that politicians use. Especially when politicians make serious decisions that will concern the whole country, they give examples from other countries and highlight the sides that support their ideas by going through the similarities. For example, a slight improvement in the economy, education, and health is shown as perfect. However, this situation is tolerated and left in the background when a severe decrease occurs. As it is seen, politicians focus only on the part of the events that will benefit them and reject or criticize the other parts.

Today, the most potent manipulation tool is social media. Arguments based on scientific articles are presented on the most used social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube. It has become obligatory for politicians to use social media as well. For example, the Chairman of the Future Party, Ahmet Davutoğlu, draws attention to the fact that they will use social media more actively with his statement, “Where the youth is, we are there.” A further example is how the Gezi Park Protests, which started on May 27, 2013, reached the masses thanks to the social media website Twitter (now rebranded as X). It is known that social media platforms can direct the masses with their algorithm structures. The media can shape public opinion, initiate a social movement, or cause the growth of any ideological movement. In 2019, Twitter chairman of the executive board, Jack Dorsey, who disapproves of the use of social media for political purposes, said, “We’ve made the decision to stop all political advertising on Twitter globally. We believe political message reach should be earned, not bought” (Dorsey 2019), and announced that advertisements with political content had been removed.

Gaslighting, which is among the strategies used by politicians, can be defined as destructive manipulations that push the individual to question her/his perception of reality, logic, and even mental health. According to Paige L. Sweet, gaslighting is “a type of psychological abuse aimed at making victims seem or feel ‘crazy’, creating a ‘surreal’ interpersonal environment” (Sweet 2019: 851–875). By arousing suspicion in

individuals or groups, self-doubt is ensured. Thus, individuals begin to question their truths and contradict themselves and eventually become controllable as weak and powerless individuals. With this strategy, it becomes easier to manage the individual, who thinks that they are dependent on the manipulator and that there is no other way out.

A video shared on Twitter (Kılıçdaroğlu 2022) demonstrates effective use of political semiotics. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Chairman of the Republican People's Party, shared a Tweet on Twitter on October 3, 2022, saying, "Some things require courage, and my fellow travelers have that courage!"<sup>2</sup> This video shared from the study of his house transforms Kılıçdaroğlu's home into a kind of public realm. On his desk (see Figure 2), there are prayer beads, which are an essential tool in Islamic society. From this, it is understood that there are also religious people in the target group. In addition, a book by Ziya Gökalp (known for his works on nationalism and Turkism), *The book of Turkishness* is visible on the table. The public is reminded of national feelings and this constructs a national consciousness. In addition, tea, a specific drink in Turkish society, has its place on the table, with its presentation in Turkish tradition. While Kılıçdaroğlu is drinking his tea, he is wearing an ordinary shirt to create the image of "I'm one of you, too." A book with the title *We can achieve* on the back shelf conveys that "we can overcome anything together." Kılıçdaroğlu's video Tweet employs elements such as national consciousness, religious values, and a sense of unity, which are very important in political communication.



**Figure 2:** A detail image from Kılıçdaroğlu's Tweet, "Some things require courage, and my fellow travelers have that courage!" (Kılıçdaroğlu 2022).

<sup>2</sup> "Bazı şeyler yürek ister, o yürek benim yol arkadaşlarımda var!"

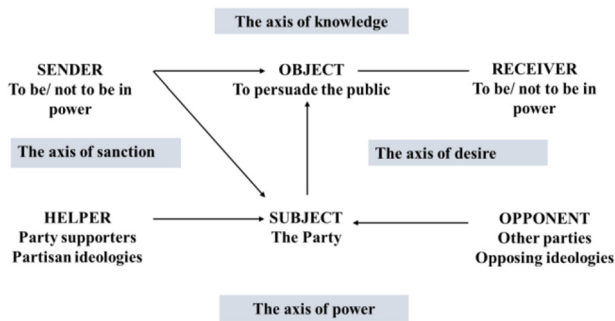
## 6 Deciphering political discourse: political semiotics

Anything that refers to something other than itself is a sign. Semiotics, which aims to analyze meaning, examines sign systems such as languages, codes, and tokens (Guiraud 1994: 17). In this respect, everything that surrounds us is a sign that needs to be interpreted. Semiology, which comes into play in the process of making sense of the environment in which people live, can be generalized as a method and a branch of science that examines the meaning in a corpus and deals with the formation of meaning (Günay 2018b: 52). Meaning is provided by establishing relationships, and opposition is the most critical relationship in producing meaning in language.

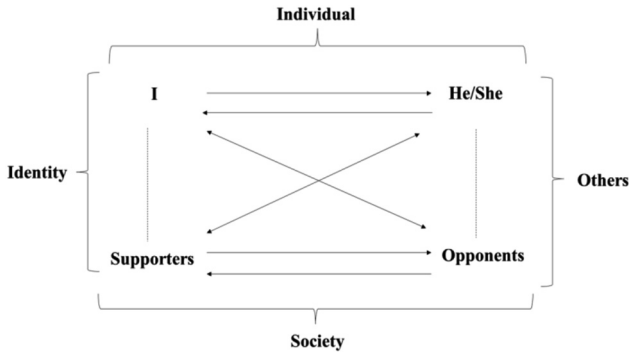
Greimas deals with realizing narrative in his actantial model. According to Greimas, the actants in any narrative can be a person, an object, or an abstract notion. Figure 3 illustrates a model of political communication based on Greimas's actantial model.

In Figure 3, the political party is the subject. The subject tries to reach his object (convincing the public). Here, the supporters of the party and partisan ideologies are helpers. On the other hand, other parties and opposing ideologies are opponents. While the subject struggles to be in power, the helpers help him, and the opponents try to prevent the subject from reaching his object. This model can be adapted for all political communication processes.

Semiotics is frequently used in political communication. Political advertisements are among the best examples of this. Positive and negative political advertisements are among the most preferred political marketing tools, especially in the context of marketing communication in campaign processes. While the aim is to draw a positive picture of the future in the minds of the target group by drawing



**Figure 3:** Actantial model of political parties' discourses.



**Figure 4:** Semiotic square of politics.

attention to the positive aspects of the candidate and to create a perception of looking good toward the future in positive political advertisements, there are attacks against the personal characteristics, ideas, and thoughts of the opponent or the opposing party in negative political advertisements (Aydın and Süslen 2018: 154). In politics, oppositions are deliberately created. Where the politician positions himself as “I,” there is always a “You,” and “You” has negative attributes in all cases. With these oppositions, the politician positions himself in a good place in the eyes of the target group, while presenting the opponent as troubled and responsible for all negativities. With this discourse, they form a particular group together with the target group, and those outside this group (others/the opposing party) are excluded. In this way, he tries to arouse sympathy for his party, which he affirms with his rhetoric. Based on this, the general structure of political discourses can be shown in the semiotic square illustrated in Figure 4.

As seen in the semiotic square in Figure 4, there is an individual on one side and society on the other. While the politician constructs their identity, they marginalize the other party. There is an “other” created in every political discourse. The politician tries to create their identity by using the “I–They” opposition. An identity is formed with like-minded supporters, and the others are left out.

## 7 Conclusions

The primary purpose of political discourse is to influence the target group positively, to persuade them, and ultimately to change their behavior (voting behavior). In order to achieve this goal, logical and emotional strategies are used. As a result of these strategies (such as metaphor, interrogative sentences, us–them opposition, use

of emotive language, and intertextuality) consciously presented to the receiver, a process of making a decision or changing the current decision is experienced in the target group. Semiotics, which is always in relation to other disciplines, is also a part of political communication. Due to its dynamic structure, it has been used increasingly by politicians in recent years to grow their power of influence in political communication.

Based on all these, knowing the social structure, historical background, and cultural structure in which the political discourse is produced is essential because the dynamics of each country are arranged according to its sociopolitical and socioeconomic situation. In this respect, politicians need semiotics to construct meaning in today's sociopolitical interaction.

It is thought that the discourses of politicians play an important role in increasing the motivation of the voters, ensuring their loyalty to the party, and gaining floating votes. Based on this information, it can be seen that politicians, whose aim is to positively influence and persuade the target group, benefit from strategies such as emotional bonding, various manipulation techniques, and the use of emblems and slogans. Politicians come to the forefront with their language, their clothes, or the symbols they use.

As a result, politicians influence the target group by using methods of persuasion and discourse strategies in their discourse. Therefore, politicians who want to stay in power or who want to be in power should use discourse strategies and methods of persuasion effectively. For this reason, it can be said that understanding the values, beliefs, and convictions of the target group and building the discourses in this direction will result positively for politicians.

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involving semiotics, language, and linguistics, literary criticism, and art. Although we lost Prof. Günay, on 16 May 2023, he was as much a contributor to and developer of this paper from the beginning as the other two co-authors. May his soul rest in peace.

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