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Thracian Infantry: The Essence of the Peltast and his Role in Greek Warfare

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Abstract

First mentioned by Thucydides in 431 BC, peltasts were equipped with the distinctive pelte shield, which was both a symbol and a practical tool in battle. The paper presents several depictions of peltasts on red-figure pottery, explores the evolution of the peltasts in Greek warfare, focusing on their tactics and role in the defeat of Spartan hoplites under the command of Iphicrates in 390 BC. Despite the heavy emphasis on hoplite warfare in Greece, the peltasts played a crucial role in providing flexibility and maneuverability on the battlefield. The article also touches on the adoption of peltast tactics by Greek forces, demonstrating the influence of Thracian military methods on Greek infantry during the 4th century BC.

Keywords: peltasts, Thracian military, pelte shield, hoplite, Iphicrates, Greek warfare, Thracian light infantry.

1. The Thracian peltast

The first mention of peltasts is by Thucydides (2.29.5), who describes the conclusion of an alliance between Athens and the Odrysian ruler Sitalces and his obligation to assist the Athenians with an army composed of horsemen and peltasts.¹ The peltast was the main Thracian military unit. Its name derives from the light wicker shield, *pelte* – elliptical or nearly circular, cut inward on one side, forming the shape of a crescent and covered with sheep or goat skin.² Often it was decorated with artistically crafted metal plates, and pottery shows that drawings of magical significance may have been depicted to instill fear in the enemy and to ward off evil from the soldier – for example, huge eyes with a specific shape; among the Greeks, the Gorgon was most commonly depicted. It was carried in the left hand, with the inside slipping through a strap (a *porpax*, *πόρπαξ* – two X-form crossed bands in the center of the shield) to the elbow, where it grabbed another strap at the end of the shield. Since the *pelte* shield is not mentioned by Homer, it is likely that its appearance was only after the end of the Bronze Age, probably during the Early Iron Age, when protection from the new iron weapons was sought, and probably the Thracians' solution was to make a new type of shield, which they called the *pelte*.³ Over the centuries the semantics of the term peltast has changed, but always one of its main symbols remains the *pelte*

¹ For Thracian cavalry, see Bondzhev (forthcoming).

² Detschew, 1957: 362. Finds of *peltai* in Thrace are extremely rare and may be due to the perishable materials from which they were made (Stoyanov, 2015: 429).

³ Zhekov, 2021: 85.

shield. Herodotus (7.75.1) describes the peltasts from Bithynia who took part in Xerxes' army in 480 BC, so:

The Thracians served having fox-skins [*αλωπεκίς, alopekis*] upon their heads and tunics about their body, with loose mantles of various colors thrown round over them [*ζερά, zeira*]; and about their feet and lower part of the leg they wore boots of deer-skin [*ἐμβάδες, embades*]; and besides this they had javelins and round bucklers [*πέλη, pelte*] and small daggers.⁴



Figure 1. Attic red-figure drinking cup (kylx) depicting a Thracian peltast wearing a multicolored zeira (decorated with stripes and geometric patterns), a cap with long ear and neck flaps, and boots, holding a light crescent shield (pelte) decorated with large eyes and a spear, c. 470–460 BC. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, inv. 1959.219.



Figure 2. Red-figure jug depicting a two Thracian peltasts (and a horseman) wearing a multicolored zeira (decorated with stripes and geometric patterns; under the cloak: a chiton, fastened with a belt), a cap with long ear and neck flaps, and boots, holding a light crescent shield (pelte) with visible porpax (πόρπαξ) and two javelins. Dated to c. 425 BC, found in 1965 in Apollonia (present-day Sozopol, Bulgaria). Archaeological Museum Sozopol, inv. 261. Nedev, 2019: fig. 538.

⁴ The javelin had a short range and little penetrating power (Anderson, 1991: 21). In most pottery depictions, peltasts are not shown with a sword, but in the rare exceptions, when it is present, it is not drawn; out of 130 examples only two depict swords (Lissarrague, 1990: 156, n. 26).



Figure 3. Red-figure jug depicting a two Thracian peltasts (and a horseman) wearing a multicolored *zeira* (decorated with stripes and geometric patterns), a cap with long ear and neck flaps, and boots, holding a light crescent shield (*pelte*) and two javelins. Dated to c. 425 BC, found in 1996 near present-day Karnobat (Gyaurska mogila), Bulgaria. Archaeological Museum Karnobat, inv. 447. Hermary, 2010: fig. 336.⁵

In 400 BC, Xenophon (7.4.3-4) elaborates on the clothing:

There was deep snow on the plain [southeastern Thrace, present-day Türkiye], and it was so cold that the water which they carried in for dinner and the wine in the jars would freeze, and many of the Greeks had their noses and ears frost-bitten. Then it became clear why the Thracians wear fox-skin caps on their heads and over their ears, and tunics not merely about their chests, but also round their thighs, and why, when on horseback, they wear long cloaks reaching to their feet instead of mantles.

We learn about the attitude of the Greeks towards the “barbarian” troops from a speech by Brasidas during his campaign in Illyria in 423 BC, in which he encouraged his hoplites to fight lightly armed troops on a mountain terrain:

The present enemy might terrify an inexperienced imagination; they are formidable in outward bulk, their loud yelling is unbearable, and the brandishing of their weapons in the air has a threatening appearance. But when it comes to real fighting with an opponent who stands his ground, they are not what they seemed; they have no regular order that they should be ashamed of deserting their positions when hard pressed; flight and attack are with them equally honourable, and afford no test of courage; their independent mode of fighting never leaving any one who wants to run away without a fair excuse for so doing (Thuc. 4.126.4-5).

And although this is a general statement, overall the reports of Thucydides and Xenophon give the impression that Thracian warfare relied, on the one hand, on thrust and power, and, on the other – on light manoeuvrability, which in no way represent chaos, as it might seem at first glance, but a specific way of warfare, which under given conditions has all the advantages. Otherwise Thracian mercenaries would not have been in demand assisting the Greek hoplite army.

Due to the rare use of heavily armed combat units, Thracian military tactics were distinguished by their flexibility.⁶ When the Arcadians attacked the villages in Bithynia, the Thracians defeated the heavily armed Greek hoplites in the following manner:

⁵ See also Georgieva, 2005. For a full list of suggested datings, see Ivanov, 2024: 81.

⁶ Plutarch (*Life of Aem. Paul.* 18.5) describes a heavily armed Thracian soldier during the battle of Pydna in 168 BC: “First the Thracians advanced, whose appearance, Nasica says, was most terrible, – men of lofty

The Thracians who escaped them, however, began to gather – and many had escaped, inasmuch as they were light troops as against hoplites . . . At daybreak they proceeded to form their lines all round the hill where the Greeks were encamping, their troops consisting of horsemen in large numbers and peltasts . . . And they made attacks upon the hoplites without danger to themselves, inasmuch as the Greeks had neither bowman nor javelin-thrower nor horseman; so they would come running or riding up and throw their javelins, and when the Greeks charged upon them, they would easily get away; and different parties kept attacking at different points. Hence on the one side many were being wounded, on the other side not a man (Xen. *Anab.* 6.3.4-8).

2. The peltast in Greek warfare

The Greeks associated Thracians with emblems of the barbarian other and foreign excess and thus they often depicted the peltast as the antithesis of the heroic hoplite. The hoplite phalanx, formed eight men in depth, consisted of heavily armed warriors with helmet, cuirass, greaves, large heavy shield (*aspis*), sword (*xiphos*) and heavy spear for thrusting (*dory*) – an armament of 15-20 kg. Classical Greek armies preferred to use heavy infantry, although some mountain communities always used light-armed troops for raiding. The light-armed soldier was generally despised as unorganized and ready to flee, unlike the hoplite.⁷ It was only during the Peloponnesian War when the Athenians employed some mercenary Thracian peltasts.⁸

Probably because of the proximity to the Thracians, those inhabiting the Greek settlements in the Thraceward region were among the first to recognize the effectiveness of Thracian styles of warfare and adopt Thracian tactics themselves. Athens itself was also considered a geographic neighbor to the Thracians, because of its presence in the Thracian Chersonese.⁹ For example, at the end of the 5th century BC, Xenophon demonstrated a strong grasp of the essence of the peltasts, recommending to Seuthes II that his forces march in a staggered formation overnight – the heavier troops should start the march first, followed by the light infantry peltasts, and finally the cavalry.¹⁰ This arrangement ensured that all the troops would arrive together in the morning, preventing the variations in speed from causing the forces to become separated (*Anab.* 7.3.37-39).

Originally, for the ancient authors, the peltasts were only Thracians or Hellenes inhabiting *apoikiai* in Aegean Thrace. Peltasts became a regular presence in Greek infantries from the last quarter of the 5th century BC on, but they never replaced the hoplite phalanx as the primary military arm of virtually every Greek *polis*.¹¹ Thracian-style infantry tactics were instrumental to

stature, clad in tunics which showed black beneath the white and gleaming armour of their shields and greaves, and tossing high on their right shoulders battle-axes [*ρόμψαία* = *rhomphaia*] with heavy iron heads.” For the Thracian *rhomphaia*, see Paunov, 2005.

⁷ Hanson, 1989: 13-17; 1998: 13-18. Thuc. 4.94.1

⁸ Thuc. 2.27; 4.129.2; Snodgrass, 1967: 98; Best, 1969; Anderson, 1970: 113-114; Williams, 2004.

⁹ Southern *poleis* later adopted Thracian military practices. See Best, 1969: 12-13; Isaac, 1986: 85-86, 103-4.

¹⁰ Thracian peltasts favored night attacks (Pritchett 1974: 170-171; Hdt. 6.45.1; Xen. *Anab.* 7.2.22; Polyaeus 2.2.6, 8, 10).

¹¹ Sears 2013 287. In the first half of the 4th century BC, many ancient orators equated peltasts with mercenaries (Best, 1969: 126-133), and the massive use of mercenaries was seen as one of the main factors in the intensification of internal struggles in the *poleis* and their economic exhaustion due to the need to pay them wages (Thuc. 7.27: “the pay of each man was a drachma a day”). At the same time, according to the orators, mercenaries were the cause of the decline of the *polis* troops, composed of hoplite citizens, which for them were the foundation of the *polis* as a state-political system (Zhekov, 2023: 83).

Greek military developments in the 4th century BC,¹² when the hoplite came more and more to be supplemented by the light-armed peltasts, which were effective against heavy infantry unsupported by other arms but were vulnerable against a variegated force. Greeks themselves were often prized as mercenaries in the 4th century BC precisely because they were heavy infantrymen – a type of soldier underrepresented in the armies of the Persians and other non-Greek powers.¹³

The peltasts achieved their most famous military feat under the command of Iphicrates, who succeeded marshaling peltasts so skillfully that they became accustomed to fighting in formation when the situation demanded it. This was no small feat for troops accustomed to fighting loosely as individuals.¹⁴ Thus in 390 BC, after several years of campaigning, Iphicrates and his peltasts defeated an entire *mora* of Spartan hoplites – about 600 of Greece's most formidable heavy infantry – near the port of Lechaion at Corinth (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5).¹⁵ The hoplites looked down on the light-armed mercenaries, boldly passing by the peltasts' position with their right sides unshielded. Without cavalry or hoplite support, the peltasts attacked in small groups, throwing javelins before retreating effortlessly. Despite suffering losses and injuries, the Spartans tried to respond by sending their youngest hoplites after them. However, the peltasts led the young Spartans far from the protection of the phalanx, then turned and cut down the isolated hoplites.¹⁶ Although the Spartans had cavalry, the horsemen chose not to pursue the peltasts, instead staying with the phalanx to maintain a solid front and negate the advantage of their fast horses (4.5.16). The Spartans eventually withdrew in disgrace, having lost around 250 of their 600 hoplites. This victory brought Iphicrates widespread fame, as it shattered the myth of Spartan invincibility. It was considered unthinkable that skilled hoplites, especially the elite Spartan warriors, could be defeated by light-armed troops, particularly ignoble Thracian mercenaries.¹⁷ After this point, within a decade, almost all warring Hellenic *poleis* formed contingents of peltasts; so did even the Spartans, who were the biggest proponents of traditional tactics using only a hoplite phalanx.¹⁸ This conservatism of theirs is echoed by Xenophon (*Hell.* 4.4.17): before the second battle of Lechaion, mentioned above, the Spartans mocked the Arcadian hoplites, who they said feared the peltasts of Iphicrates “just as children fear hobgoblins”. Xenophon explicitly stresses that up to this point the Lacedaemonians despised the peltasts, but despised their allies even more because they feared the peltasts.

Iphicrates' experience with Thracian peltasts helped him to develop in 374/373 BC a versatile infantry soldier – a cross between a Greek hoplite and Thracian peltast.¹⁹ The goal of Iphicrate's military reforms were to make the infantryman more maneuverable and agile.²⁰ Both Diodorus (15.44) and Nepos (*Iph.* 1) agree that the large and unwieldy hoplite shield, the *aspis*, was replaced by the smaller Thracian-style *pelte*. The size of the spear was increased: Diodorus says by half, but according to Nepos, the length was doubled. The sword was lengthened to up to

¹² Anderson, 1970; Griffith, 1981. Sears, 2013: 234-289. See also Webber, 2011.

¹³ Best, 1969: 110-119.

¹⁴ Anderson, 1970: 121. Sears (2013: 121) suggests that most mercenary peltasts were Thracians.

¹⁵ Konecny (2001) estimates the size of Iphicrates' peltast force at around 1500.

¹⁶ Iphicrates appears to have learned from his previous experience with this Spartan tactic, turning it to his advantage (Sears, 2013: 285).

¹⁷ Sears, 2013: 276-277; 2015: 314. See also Parke, 1933: 52-55; Best, 1969: 87-88; Sealey, 1976: 395; Hamilton, 1979: 261-270; Hanson, 1998: 95; Konecny, 2001: 79-127; Roisman & Yardley, 2011: 434-435; Konijnendijk, 2014; 2018: 101. For a comprehensive historiographical overview of the battle, see Konijnendijk, 2014. For a tactical visualisation of the battle, see Webber, 2022: 3-4.

¹⁸ Zhekov, 2021: 89.

¹⁹ 374 BC is proposed by Best (1969: 102), 373 BC by Everson (2004: 172).

²⁰ Best, 1969: 87-110; Lazenby & Whitehead, 1996; Zhekov, 2013; 2021.

twice. The soldiers wore light and easy to untie boots, and the standard chain-mail or brass armor was replaced by a lighter linen cuirass.²¹

3. Conclusion

The peltasts, recognized for their agility and lighter armament, provided a significant counterbalance to the heavy hoplite forces. It is highly likely that the term peltast is of Hellenic origin rather than Thracian, as the Thracians likely did not feel the need to specifically define their own type of troops. While in the 4th century BC the term gradually became synonymous with mercenary, during the Hellenistic era it became an integral part of the armies of the Hellenistic states. The term lost any ethnic or other semantic associations with mercenaries or foreigners, and became a designation for a specific type of infantry equipped with distinctive weaponry and performing specialized tactical tasks.

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²¹ Sears, 2013: 282–283. Everson (2004: 173) assumes that Iphicrates got acquainted with the usage of linen cuirasses during his campaign in Egypt. Although Xenophon is the main source on the military and political career of Iphicrates, he does not report his reform with the peltasts, which is attested only in the 1st century BC by Diodorus and Nepos. One of the reasons might be his personal dislike of Iphicrates. For all other reasons, see Zhekov, 2021: 90–91.

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Constructing Power and Gender: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Claudia Sheinbaum's Inauguration Speech

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Abstract

This study applied a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) technique for the analysis of Claudia Sheinbaum's inaugural speech as the first woman president in Mexico. The analysis is based on Van Dijk's (2015) model, and it examines how discourse strategies, used in discourse at both the micro and macro levels, can construct collective identity, political ideologies, and social representations through the construction of in-group and out-group construction, positive self-representation, negative out-group representation and ideological polarization. The findings indicated that Claudia Sheinbaum used discourse strategies in order to construct an inclusive discourse by talking about certain social groups and problems which that had not been explicitly mentioned in previous inaugural speeches in Mexico, such as indigenous communities and gender equality. In analyzing Sheinbaum's speech in the context of a historically male-dominated political system, this study will provide insights into how the current Mexican political discourse shapes leadership, authority, and collective identity.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, Claudia Sheinbaum, political discourse, power relations, Mexico.

1. Introduction

Political discourse plays a key role in shaping identity, power relations, and ideological meanings (Wodak, 2012). From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is understood not only as a reflection of social reality but also as a tool that actively constructs and legitimizes social relations and power structures (Van Dijk, 2015). In the contemporary Mexican context, Claudia Sheinbaum's political discourse provides a useful lens with which to examine the evolving dynamics of Mexican politics. Claudia Sheinbaum is a Mexican politician, scientist, and scholar who has played a central role in the country's recent public life. She is the first woman to assume the presidency of Mexico and a key member of the *Cuarta Transformación* (The Fourth Transformation is a Mexican political movement focused on combating corruption and reducing social inequality, promoted by Mexico's former president Andrés Manuel López Obrador).

Sheinbaum's speech shows a continuity of the ideological framework that her predecessor (AMLO) established, as well as an attempt to articulate her governing vision. This article analyzes Claudia Sheinbaum's inaugural speech in order to explore how, through specific linguistic features, she constructs political legitimacy, understood as the public recognition and acceptance of her authority as Mexico's first female president. The study focuses on salient lexical choices, evaluative language, and the lexical representation of women. It examines how these

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linguistic choices not only reinforce her political authority but also contribute to the construction and communication of broader national narratives.

- Claudia Sheinbaum's political discourse provides a useful lens with which to examine the evolving dynamics of Mexican politics
- The results demonstrate that at the cognitive level, the inaugural speech associates the audience with the political movement through inclusion, social justice, collective progress, and democracy.
- The concept of ideology can be presented from different perspectives, and its meaning depends precisely on this.

2. Literature review

The analysis of political discourse has been a recurrent topic in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) due to its role in shaping public opinion, legitimizing power, and constructing social realities (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2013). From the perspective of CDA, it is important to understand language dynamics and how they operate in political speeches because discourse influences how audiences perceive social actors, events, and policies. For instance, a study conducted by Addae et al. (2023) about the speeches of President Mahama of Ghana utilized both Van Dijk's and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis frameworks. The study demonstrates that politicians employ discursive structures such as pronouns, metaphors, rhetorical questions, and modality to hide their ideology and maintain unequal power relations. Their research findings suggest that through political discourse, political leaders are able to present their core beliefs while maintaining authority over their audiences.

Similarly, Kadim's (2022) analysis of Donald Trump's campaign speeches used Van Dijk's discourse strategies to examine how Trump constructs a positive image of "us" (North Americans) in opposition to "them" (non-North Americans, particularly immigrants). In this article, the findings indicate that these discursive strategies are ideologically based and promote division, racism, and social conflict. Furthermore, Sengul (2019) argues about the relevance of using CDA in analyzing political communication as a way for researchers to identify the hidden ideologies and power relations present within discourse.

3. Theoretical framework

According to Van Dijk (2015), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach that focuses on how discourse functions in different social contexts. It explores how social power is abused, articulated, and reproduced through discourse, as well as how social inequalities are created, represented, and challenged within social and political structures. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) emphasize that CDA is dedicated to uncovering the socio-political dimensions of language use, especially in relation to power, ideology, and inequality. This suggests that CDA adopts a critical stance, as it seeks not only to understand but also to highlight and challenge social inequalities and the positioning of actors as a form of politically committed research.

However, CDA should not be viewed as one homogenous set way to conduct analysis. CDA is an open-ended framework for the study of discourse that uses a variety of means to analyze discourse across a variety of regimes or aspects of discourse. While Van Dijk (2015) argues that CDA should be understood as a critical perspective that can be applied in different areas of discourse studies, Mullet (2018) approaches it as an organized framework that allows researchers to examine discourse across multiple dimensions, linking linguistic features with broader social contexts at different levels. Therefore, CDA is particularly useful for exploring the ideologies behind discourse and understanding how language plays an essential role in creating and

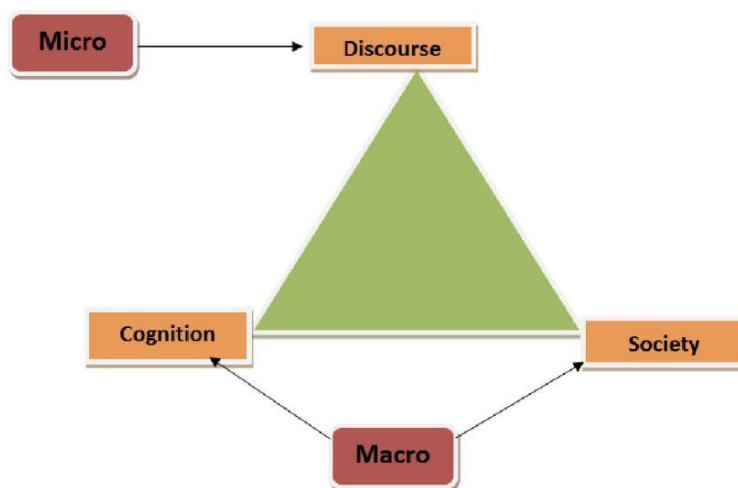
transforming social inequalities. The present study uses CDA as an approach, as it allows critical examinations of how linguistic choices in political speeches contribute to the construction of legitimacy, negotiate power relations, and articulate ideological perspectives.

3.1 Van Dijk's framework

Within CDA, there are distinct frameworks that provide guidelines for the analysis of diverse materials. Van Dijk's model is the most common to use in this type of studies. It focuses on key notions such as power, dominance, hegemony, and ideology (Al-Mas'udi & Al-A'mery, 2021). According to Van Dijk's model, discourse analysis involves two main dimensions: the micro and macro levels, as well as the relationship between discourse, cognition, and society, which are closely interconnected. Building on this framework, Al-Mas'udi and Al-A'mery (2021) highlights the significance of these dimensions in the analysis of political discourse. While the micro-level focuses on the use of the language and interaction, the macro-level addresses aspects such as power, dominance, and social inequality.

Van Dijk's model implies that discourse acts as a bridge between society and cognition, understanding how these mental models mediate the way people produce and interpret language. Considering this perspective, this study analyzes the language used in Claudia Sheinbaum's speech, employing the stages of Van Dijk's model of analysis; see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Van Dijk's model



Note. Taken from Fairclough and Van Dijk Models of Critical Discourse Analysis by Bjaiya Al-Mas' udi (2021).

3.2 Ideology and discourse

The concept of ideology can be presented from different perspectives, and its meaning depends precisely on this. For the purpose of this study, which focuses on ideology and discourse, the term “ideology” is defined as a set of beliefs and values that are present in all language use, which are not inherently negative and are often hidden in discourse through language choices, even if they are not consciously aware of them (Yang, 2023). As Yang (2023) further emphasized “ideology is one of the most fundamental and crucial concepts in critical discourse study” (p. 53). However, in order to fully explore this relationship, it is also necessary to define the concept of

discourse, as it is through discourse that ideological meanings are articulated and made socially meaningful.

As stated by Purvis and Hunt (1993) discourse refers to language in use as a social practice through which meaning is constructed, communicated, and shaped by social context, power relations, and linguistic choices. So far, literature shows that there is a close relationship between ideology and discourse; this relationship reveals a mutual dependence, where language not only reflects social realities but also creates them (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2011; Wodak, 2012). According to Van Dijk (2011), ideologies are integrated in the use of language and discursively manifested in “group relations”; these are evident in common patterns such as lexical choices within an ideology schema that is represented in text and talk. For example, the prototypical use of pronouns “us” and “them” with the purpose of creating an ideological polarization.

Furthermore, Van Dijk (2011) highlights another complex meta-strategy. This strategy is called the *positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation*, which suggests that individuals tend to represent their groups in a positive light while out-groups are represented negatively, especially when these are perceived as opponents, competitors, or adversaries, often simply based on differences. According to Van Dijk (2011) this is represented within *the ideological square* which explain how ideological discourses tend to present social groups in a polarized manner, creating a distinguish between “us” and “them”. In CDA, paying attention to ideological strategies such as the representation of “us” and “them” and positive/negative representations is essential, as they show how political leaders use language to shape identities, influence people’s perceptions, and support certain ideologies and power structures through language. These concepts provide the theoretical basis for the following analysis of Claudia Sheinbaum's inaugural speech.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

This research employs a qualitative design based on Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze Claudia Sheinbaum’s inauguration speech delivered at the *Inauguration Ceremony of her as Constitutional President of the United Mexican States* on October 1st, 2024. The following research question guided the analysis of this speech:

How does Claudia Sheinbaum’s inauguration speech construct ideological orientations through ingroup-outgroup linguistic representations?

4.2 Materials

The analysis was carried out using the official transcript of the inaugural speech of Claudia Sheinbaum as president of Mexico. This speech was delivered on October 1st, 2024. Both materials (video and transcript) were obtained from the official government website.¹ The speech lasted forty-seven minutes and seventeen seconds. For the purpose of this analysis, the transcript was reviewed in full; however, I selected different segments that were considered relevant for the analysis because they contain the main themes and rhetorical strategies relevant to the study.

¹ Government of Mexico (2024, October 1st). Claudia Sheinbaum's inaugural speech. Retrieved from <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/articulos/version-estenografica-toma-de-protesta-de-claudia-sheinbaum-como-presidenta-constitucional-de-los-estados-unidos-mexicanos>.

4.3 Data analysis

The data analysis was carried out through a series of steps. First, watching the video recording of Claudia Sheinbaum's speech delivered in Mexico City, and then examining the transcript in detail. The transcript of the speech was downloaded and coded following Van Dijk's dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis, which operates across three levels: social cognition, society, and discourse. The analysis was based on the ingroup-outgroup representations made in Sheinbaum's speech and on the positive self-representation and negative other-representation. This approach allowed a detailed examination of lexical choices, pronouns, evaluative language, ideological polarization, repetition, and inclusion or evaluation strategies to examine how social actors and identities are discursively constructed to reveal the ideological orientations and positioning.

In-group	Discourse strategy
1. Muchas gracias a todas y todos	1. Inclusive language, uses one feminine and one masculine noun to refer to the audience.
2. Pueblo de México	2. Lexicalization / National identity construction
3. La historia y el pueblo lo ha juzgado	3. Representation of the people
4. Más amor de su pueblo	4. Positive evaluation / Positive representation
5. La Cuarta Transformación	5. Ideological lexicalization
6. Los pueblos indígenas y afromexicanos de México	6. Lexicalization / Inclusion
7. Hoy le devolvemos	7. Self-representation
8. Es tiempo de mujeres	8. Lexicalization / Gender representation
9. Llegamos las mujeres	9. Collective feminine identity construction
10. No llego sola, llegamos todas	10. Pronoun use / Collective identity
11. México es de mujeres y hombre libres	11. Inclusive language
12. A nuestros paisanos y paisanas	12. Inclusive language
13. Héroes y heroínas	13. Positive lexicalization
14. Su pueblo generoso, solidario, alegre, libertario, resistente, rebelde, sabio y hoy, empoderado	14. Positive evaluation
15. Humanismo Mexicano	15. Ideological lexicalization
16. Que los gobiernos de la transformación hacemos realidad	16. Positive self-representation
17. Las y los gobernantes	17. Inclusive language
18. La democracia es el gobierno del pueblo, por el pueblo y para el pueblo	18. Repetition / Positive ideological representation
19. Las mujeres	19. Collective identity construction
20. Las y los trabajadores	20. Inclusive language
21. Nosotros somos demócratas	21. Pronoun use / Positive self-representation
22. Candidatas y candidatos	22. Inclusive language
23. La gente, será el pueblo	23. Group categorization / Identity construction
24. Las y los trabajadores	24. Inclusive language
25. Las y los adultos mayores	25. Inclusive language
26. Todos los niños y niñas	26. Inclusive language
27. A todas y todos las mexicanas y los mexicanos	27. Inclusive language / National identity construction
28. Es tiempo de transformación	28. Ideological lexicalization
29. Es tiempo de mujeres	29. Lexicalization / Gender representation
30. Las mujeres participan en las grandes hazañas	30. Positive representation of women
31. Las mujeres podemos ser presidentas	31. Collective identity construction / Positive self-representation
32. Sólo lo que se norma existe	32. Lexicalization
33. Juntos y juntas	33. Inclusive language

4.4 Analysis process

To conduct the analysis, I first got familiar with the speech transcript by reading it multiple times to identify ideological expressions and references to social actors through the use of pronouns. The data were coded according to in-group and out-group representations. These representations were analyzed through discursive strategies such as pronoun use (“yo”; “nosotros”), lexicalization (“pueblo de México”; “tiempo de mujeres”), polarization (in-group “us” / out-group – “them”), repetition (“por el pueblo y para el pueblo”), and inclusion (“los y las”) or evaluation (“su pueblo generoso, solidario, alegre, libertario, resistente, rebelde, sabio y hoy, empoderado”) strategies. The findings were interpreted at the cognitive and macro-social levels to examine how the speech constructs ideological orientations related to political legitimacy, collective identity, and power relations in the Mexican socio-political context.

Out-group	Discourse strategy
1. La comunidad internacional	1. Group categorization
2. Contra el juicio de desafuero	2. Negative other-representation
3. Ustedes me van a juzgar	3. Pronoun use
4. A ustedes y a mí nos juzgue la historia	3. Pronoun use / Evaluation
5. Del fracasado modelo neoliberal y el régimen de corrupción	5. Negative lexicalization
6. Se cayeron muchos mitos y engaños del pasado	6. Negative other-representation / Negative evaluation
7. No, eso es autoritarismo	7. Negative evaluation

5. Results and discussion

5.1 *Us and them*

Micro-level

The findings showed that Claudia’s speech creates a distinction between “us” and “them” by using inclusive language and constant references to “the people”. The use of these discursive strategies implied that her speech goes beyond inclusion, she intends to recognize that the people from Mexico is integrated by a diverse and multicultural society. Following Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model, expressions such as “pueblo de México”, “todas y todos”, and “juntos y juntas” not only create closeness with the audience, but also these linguistic resources can also be interpreted as a form to visualize certain groups that have been historically less represented within Mexican political discourses. For that reason, she includes in her inaugural speech groups such as workers, women, indigenous communities, and older adults to represent the movement as inclusive and connected to the people. Even though, the use of inclusive language does not in itself constitute proof of a particular ideology, it is often associated with progressive movements that promote gender equality and the representation of marginalized groups. In the case of women, phrases such as “no llego sola, llegamos todas” is relevant as they present political success as a shared achievement for women rather than an individual accomplishment. In contrast, the out-group is connected to ideas of corruption, neoliberalism, and authoritarianism, creating a clear division between the current movement and the political past.

However, a relevant point is that this external group is rarely defined explicitly. Instead of identifying specific actors, the discourse employs broad and abstract categories such as “corrupción”, “neoliberalismo”, or “los gobiernos del pasado”. This lack of precision functions as a discursive strategy that allows for the generalized attribution of blame without clearly defining who makes up the opposing group. As a result, the category of “them” remains open-ended and can be interpreted by different audiences as referring to various political or social actors. This

strategy is particularly interesting because it transforms a linguistic choice into a symbolic political act, linking language to broader debates about gender, representation, and power.

Macro-level

The findings showed that at the cognitive level, the in-group expressions encourage people to see themselves as part of a collective group connected to the speaker and the political movement. References to women, workers, Indigenous or Afro-Mexican communities, children, and older adults also support the idea that the movement represents the everyday people and groups that often were excluded from past political representation. At the social level, the discourse presents the movement as democratic and focused on social change, while previous governments are linked to corruption and authoritarianism. This discursive construction fosters the formation of a positive collective identity based on belonging to the “people”, while shifting responsibility for national problems onto an ambiguously defined external group.

5.2 Positive self-representation and negative out-representation (lexical choices and evaluation)

Micro-level

The results indicated that her discourse applied strategies of positive self-representation and negative out-representation. According to Van Dijk (2011; 2015) there is an idea that dominant groups represent themselves with positive characteristics while minimizing or criticizing those of opposing groups. In Sheinbaum’s speech, this representation is described as the use of positive adjectives such as “Generoso”, “solidario”, “alegre”, “libertario”, “resistente”, “rebelde”, “sabio y hoy, empoderado”. Creating an image of unity, strength, and legitimacy. Furthermore, expressions such as “Humanismo Mexicano”, “nosotros somos demócratas”, and “la democracia es el gobierno del pueblo” present the movement as democratic and focused on social justice.

Women are also represented in her speech with the use of phrases, for instance, “es tiempo de mujeres”, “llegamos las mujeres”, and “las mujeres podemos ser presidentas”. However, the phrase “no llego sola, llegamos todas” is especially significant as it provides the positive representation of women in politics as a collective achievement.

In contrast, the lexical choices that represent the negative out-groups are expressions such as “fracasado modelo neoliberal”, “régimen de corrupción”, and “engaños del pasado”. These word choices describe the previous political system as corrupt and unsuccessful, forming a clear distinction between the current Fourth Transformation movement and the political past. It is relevant to note that these negative references are generally directed at abstract entities or broad categories rather than clearly identifiable individuals or groups. In this way, the discourse expands the scope of criticism and reinforces the perception of a collective threat without the need to precisely define who belongs to the opposing group.

Macro-level

The results demonstrate that at the cognitive level, the inaugural speech associates the audience with the political movement in terms of inclusion, social justice, collective progress, and democracy. In addition, it promotes unity and empowerment for women's political participation and representation. The past political movements and their governments are framed negatively, establishing perceptions of corruption, inequality, and political failure. At the social level, the discourse emphasizes the current political movement as democratic, inclusive, and connected to social change, while presenting past governments and ideologies in a negative way. By creating this contrast, her speech strengthens the division between the actual movements and the political

past, representing the Fourth Transformation as an alternative to corruption and authoritarianism.

5.3 Ideological polarization

Micro-level

In this study, ideology is understood as a system of shared beliefs that shapes the way groups interpreted social reality and differentiate between those who belong to the group and those who are excluded from it (Yang, 2023). From this perspective, ideology is expressed through discourse by the selection of topics, social actors, and evaluations that privilege the in-group while presenting the out-group in a less favorable way.

The findings indicated that there is a strong process of ideological polarization in Sheinbaum's speech. From Van Dijk's perspective and the concept of the ideological square, the discourse emphasizes the positive features of the in-group while highlighting the negative aspects of the out-group. This polarization can be observed in the repeated opposition between transformation and corruption, democracy and authoritarianism, the people and neoliberalism, inclusion and exclusion.

Furthermore, the results suggest that the discourse articulated an ideology centered on the representation of the people as the source of democratic and moral legitimacy. This ideology is reflected in expressions such as "la democracia es el gobierno del pueblo", "nosotros somos demócratas", and the frequent references to "pueblo de México", which constructs a positive collective identity associated with justice, participation, and national transformation. In contrast, terms such as "fracasado modelo neoliberal", "régimen de corrupción", y "engaños del pasado" construct a negative image of an external group associated with political practices considered contrary to the interest of the people and those of The Fourth Transformation movement. In addition, the repeated use of words such as "pueblo", "transformación", and "mujeres" reinforces the central ideological themes of the speech and gives coherence to the political narrative.

As a result, these lexical choices help to legitimize the movement by presenting it as part of a broader struggle for justice and national transformation. This polarization is reinforced through the use of vague references to the external group. Although the discourse attributes negative characteristics to "them" it rarely identifies these actors in a specific way. This ambiguity may serve as a strategic function. While Sheinbaum still constructs a polarized distinction between political actors, she often avoids naming specific individuals or groups directly. This may be particularly relevant in the case of a female politician, as research on gender and political communication suggests that women are often expected to display less aggressive and more cooperative communicative styles than their male counterparts (Homes & Wilson, 2022). Through these discursive strategies, her speech creates a polarized narrative that clearly separates "us" from "them".

Macro-level

The results showed that at the cognitive level, the constant opposition between concepts such as transformation and corruption or democracy and authoritarianism simplify political reality into two evident, opposed sides. This division can strengthen emotional identification with the Fourth Transformation movement and reinforce the perception that social change is only possible through the actual political project. At the same time, at the social level, the discourse reproduces ideological polarization by dividing society into opposing political and moral groups. This discourse strategy positions her speech as a broader narrative and associates the movement with a national transformation and collective progress; in contrast, the opposite ideologies are connected to social inequality and political failure.

Furthermore, the discourse constructs ideological polarization not only through the opposition between transformation and corruption, or democracy and authoritarianism, but also through the vague representation of the external group. Terms such as “corrupción”, “neoliberalismo”, and “los gobiernos del pasado” describe a broadly defined adversary, allowing responsibility to be attributed in a generalized manner without identifying specific actors. This strategy strengthens the division between “us” and “them” and reinforces the legitimacy of the movement as an alternative to the political past.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed Claudia Sheinbaum's inaugural speech using Van Dijk's micro- and macro-level model of CDA. The purpose was to examine how discourse strategies construct collective identities, political ideologies, and social representations through the analysis of in-group and out-group construction, positive self-representation and negative out-group representation and ideological polarization. The findings showed that Sheinbaum employed diverse discourse strategies to construct an inclusive collective identity and strengthen her political legitimacy as Mexico's first female president. The use of inclusive language, lexicalization of certain social categories, and frequent mention of people, women, and socially marginalized groups makes the speech project an image of unity, representation, social diversity and proximity to the audience: “el pueblo de México”.

Similarly, the explicit inclusion of women in the speech helps to highlight social actors who had a limited presence in previous inaugural speeches, reinforcing a narrative of change and recognition. Beyond the Mexican context, this study highlights the significant role of political discourse in shaping public perceptions of leadership, power, and social inclusion. The case of Claudia Sheinbaum shows how language can be used not only to communicate political goals but also to redefine social identities and expand the visibility of groups that have historically occupied marginal positions in political discourse. Thus, the results of the study demonstrate that CDA remains a relevant approach to the problem under consideration. Furthermore, the use of ambiguous polarization may reflect the gendered expectations that continue to shape political communication. Women politicians often operate in an environment where direct and aggressive confrontation with political opponents is less socially accepted than it is for men. As a result, ideological opposition needs to be expressed through more indirect or softened forms of criticism, allowing female leaders to maintain political polarization without violating expectations of femininity and politeness.

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