



# Political Discourse in Light of Semiotics of Passions: Classification and Dimensions

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## Abstract

Traditional analytical approaches, such as historical, structural, and stylistic methods, have often provided incomplete analyses of political discourse, missing out on the complex structures and operational methods. Modern semiotic approaches offer more practical tools by focusing on the linguistic construction of discourse, examining the discourse producer as an active subject. This study uses the semiotics of passions to analyze emotions—such as desire, love, hate, concern, persuasion, appeal, conflict, and sarcasm—carried by the discourse producer. These emotions are reflected in expressive choices and the contexts in which they arise, aiming to clarify the meaning or highlight the emptiness of meaning within the interactive context between producer and receiver. This paper focuses on classifying political discourse into specific layers based on the semiotic proposition of “passions,” which refer to the surface-level emotions perceived in discourse. It then identifies the general dimensions of these passions within the judicial content of political discourse, considering it as influential rhetoric with specific declared or implied objectives.

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**Keywords:** discourse, politics, semiotics, passions, dimensions, classification

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## 1. Introduction

Political discourse is a rich field of study that interconnects with various analytical approaches. Historically, structural and stylistic methods have offered understandings into limited aspects of political discourse. However, these methods often result in partial analyses, failing to capture the full scope of discourse structures and operational methods. Modern semiotic approaches,

particularly the semiotics of passions, provide more efficient tools for examining the linguistic construction of discourse. These approaches allow us to focus not only on the lexicon, structures, and semantics but also on the active role of the discourse producer.

Semiotics of passions is especially valuable in analyzing the emotions embedded in political discourse. These emotions—such as desire, love, hate, concern, persuasion, appeal, conflict, and sarcasm—are integral to the expressive choices made by the discourse producer. They reflect the contexts in which these expressions arise, thereby contributing to the overall meaning of the discourse. By analyzing these emotions, we can better understand the interactive dynamics between the producer and the receiver of the discourse.

This paper aims to classify political discourse into specific layers based on the semiotic proposition of “passions”. These passions represent the surface-level emotions perceived in discourse. Furthermore, the paper identifies the general dimensions of these passions within the judicial content of political discourse. By doing so, it considers political discourse as influential rhetoric with specific declared or implied objectives.

## 2. Classification of Passion in Political Discourse

The triadic classification of passions, as established by semiotics pioneers like Parret Herman (1996), categorizes passions related to the self that produces political discourse through language philosophy and pragmatics. This involves studying the manifestation component, reconsidering the deep structure, and linking it to the individual psyche. Emotional acts are revealed through psychological and linguistic pragmatic studies within the generative passionate pathway. Table 1 outlines these categories.

*Table 1. Categories of Passion*

Passions' Category	Passion	Producing Entity in Political Discourse	Example in Arab/Moroccan Political Discourse
<b>Relational Passions</b>	Curiosity, annoyance, ignorance, naivety, illusion, evasion, provocation, contradiction, anxiety, aversion, hesitation, mockery	Political opposition, technocratic ministers	- Statements by opposition party leaders - Parliamentary interventions irrelevant to public interests
<b>Excitement Passions</b>	Interest, trust, hate, caution, friendship, love, indifference, contempt, affection, appreciation, underestimation, disdain	Political analysts, political leaders, majority party leaders	Statements by prime ministers, counter-political statements, ministers' statements
<b>Enthusiasm Passions</b>	Enthusiasm, fascination, admiration, disturbance, acknowledgment, disappointment, respect, hope	Campaign promoters, political media campaign producers, discourse festival organizers	Statements by campaign leaders, campaign texts and phrases, slogans chanted in political discourse festivals

The classification outlined in table 1 outlines the generative pathway that marks a significant transition from the semiotics of action to the semiotics of passions. The semiotics of action traditionally perceives the world and environment through a dichotomy between the self and the world of objects. This perspective emphasizes the separation between the individual and their external surroundings, focusing on the actions and interactions that occur within this framework.

In contrast, the semiotics of passions offers a more integrated view, perceiving the world through the lens of the connection between the self and various psychological states. This approach emphasizes the internal experiences and emotions that shape how individuals perceive and interact with their environment. As Greimas and Fontanille (2010) state, “studying passion involves not only recognizing the signs indicating passions but also understanding their semantic effects as realized in discourse (literary, political, emotional, religious, sports). These effects are evident in the dimensions upon which the discourse itself is built.”

The dimensions of discourse influenced by passions are various. Some dimensions are related to the broader gains of general semiotics, such as the semiotics of action and objects. These dimensions focus on how actions and objects are represented and interpreted within discourse. Other dimensions are closely tied to discourse analysis theories rooted in linguistics, which utilize and invest procedural concepts to study passionate action in its specific context.

The semiotics of passions thus provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between language and emotion in political discourse. By analyzing the dimensions of passionate discourse, we can uncover the underlying psychological and emotional states that drive political communication. This analysis is essential for understanding how political actors use language to evoke specific emotions and reactions from their audience.

### **3. Passionate Dimensions of Political Discourse**

One of the most significant contributions of the semiotics of passions is the introduction of an additional analytical dimension in the study of texts and discourses: the emotional or passionate dimension. This innovative perspective supplements the traditional actantial dimension developed by A.J. Greimas in narrative and interpretative semiotics, which primarily focuses on the roles and functions of characters within a narrative structure. By incorporating the emotional dimension, the semiotics of passions enriches the analysis of texts, allowing for a more accurate understanding of how emotions and psychological states influence discourse.

The integration of the emotional dimension into semiotic analysis is particularly noteworthy because it expands the scope of semiotic inquiry to include the subjective experiences and internal states of individuals. This approach recognizes that emotions play a crucial role in shaping how people perceive, interpret, and engage with texts and discourses. By examining the emotional underpinnings of discourse, researchers can uncover the deeper layers of meaning that resonate with audiences on an affective level.

In addition to enhancing narrative semiotics, the semiotics of passions also employs pragmatic linguistic concepts to complete the analysis of the deep structure of passionate action. Pragmatic linguistics focuses on the ways in which context and speaker intentions influence the interpretation of language. By incorporating pragmatic concepts, the semiotics of passions provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how emotions are communicated and perceived in various contexts.

This comprehensive semiotic approach allows for the identification and analysis of passions in political discourse through several key dimensions such as Lexical, Semantic, Value, Interpretative, and Pragmatic dimensions.

### **3.1. Lexical Dimension**

From a semiotic perspective, the lexicon represents an analytical dimension by including words that carry constant and variable meanings within a cultural context. The lexicon classifies semantic units within categories of meanings and subjects. Dictionaries or lexicons help us understand the meanings of words and determine the lexical significance of each word used by the discourse producer. Semiotics of passions considers the lexical dimension not merely a linguistic luxury in analysis, as linguistic differences represent a level of passion manifestation and its degree according to the principles of “tension and intensity”. For example, the passion of provocation can be observed in the discourse of political opposition or responses. The words chosen by political figures can evoke specific emotions and reactions among their audience, highlighting the importance of lexical analysis in understanding political discourse.

### **3.2. Semantic Dimension**

This dimension focuses on deepening the investigation into the meanings of words within their rhetorical or textual context. It does not merely stop at isolating lexical meanings but requires studying them in the internal context of the discourse within the semantic field of each word. For instance, the passion of trust is observed in the semantic field of this lexical item in political program texts aiming to evoke trust in the receiver. This dimension allows us to understand

how political figures use language to build trust, persuade, or manipulate their audience. By analyzing the semantic dimension, we can uncover the underlying intentions and emotions conveyed through political discourse.

### 3.3. Value Dimension

The value dimension in the semiotic conception of passions refers to what is known as the pathway of passionate schemata and their transitions from one state to another with the change of value space. For example, the value of justice forms a fundamental element in political discourse, especially for ministers of justice. However, the passion representing the value for the producing self changes with changing positions “considering it as a transition from one state to another” (Greimas and Fontanille 2010, p. 235). This can be observed in the emotions in the opposition discourse compared to the majority’s discourse. For instance, the discourse of the current Moroccan Minister of Justice “Mr. *Ouahbi*”<sup>1</sup> can be included in the opposition and also the majority position. This will illustrate the transformation in passionate action. Therefore, the passionate pathway according to this dimension may result in a transition from positive to negative passions. This is again similar to transitioning from relational passions to excitement passions.

### 3.4. Interpretative Dimension

The semiotics of passions relies on the concept of interpretation as established by interpretative semiotics through the convergence of linguistic clues in discourse (syntactic construction) with contextual clues. This dimension reveals the passions according to the meanings granted by the receiver to that discourse in an interactive relationship resulting in passions such as hate, rejection, mockery, etc. This is evident in political discourse that appeals to religious emotions and uncovers its reality (e.g., political religious discourse) or responses resulting from irrational statements (e.g., statements by the Minister of Justice). The interpretative dimension helps us understand how political messages are received and interpreted by different audiences, highlighting the role of context and cultural background in shaping these interpretations.

### 3.5. Pragmatic Dimension

The political discourse producer relies on a certain act, whether implicit or explicit. The act here is a semiotic sign reflected in the purpose of the discourse pragmatically represented in

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<sup>1</sup> Abdellatif Ouahbi is a Moroccan politician and lawyer, currently serving as the Minister of Justice and the Secretary-General of the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM).

(intention, desire, and persuasion) and evokes ideological motivations that vary according to the background of the discourse producer. For example:

- **Religious background:** Political religious discourse evokes religious passion, belief, conviction, etc.
- **Liberal background:** Secular political discourse evokes liberal passion, freedom, equality in its modern sense, etc.

Each background of the produced discourse exploits the pragmatic space consistent with its passion. For instance, the religious background evokes the religious space derived from historical texts and circulated values. On the other hand, the liberal background evokes the modern cultural transformations of society; thus, it relies on the passion of merging with the other and supporting individual freedoms, etc.

In the semiotic passionate sense, what matters in the pragmatic dimension are the emotional roles that appear on the surface, such as: the belonging, the ungrateful, the isolated, the extremist, the angry, the resentful, the liberated, the conservative, the disgruntled, the detached, the tolerant, the loving, the just, etc. By analyzing these roles, we can gain understandings of the emotional dynamics of political discourse and the motivations behind specific political actions and statements.

## 4. Conclusion

In summary, the concepts developed by the semiotics of passions in attempting to analyze discourses, along with concepts borrowed from other semiotic directions and pragmatic linguistic achievements, have led to significant results, especially in studying discourse in relation to its producer in terms of underlying and controlling passions. It also opened the field to identify other passions that can be recorded in literary discourse, as this article has revealed. Passionate schemata operate in political discourse and can be analyzed in-depth in another context. Further research could explore additional dimensions of passion in political discourse and their implications for understanding political behavior and communication strategies.

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