

Functions of the Word “Democracy” in the Speeches of Right-Wing Populist Parties: Critical Discourse Analysis of the Rassemblement National and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs

François Debras¹

Introduction

The literature has defined “right-wing populism” (RWP) as political organizations that oppose to democracy. Depending on the author, this opposition is institutional (Mayer 2016) or value-driven (Mudde 2016; Hainsworth 2016). However, RWP presents itself as the defender of democracy (Klammer 2013; Taguieff 2012; Hafez 2010). The literature argues that this is a symbolic discourse rooted in a strategy of “normalization” of the party (Halikiopoulou 2018; Pupovac 2015).

I aim to further revise this assumption by asking the question: in the discourse of the *Rassemblement National* (RN) in France and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria, is “democracy” a “cosmetic term” or is the word “democracy” also ideologically loaded? I first propose to concentrate on the discursive relationship between RWP and the concept of democracy as studied in the literature. Second, I will present the methodology that were selected. Third, I will study the term “democracy” in RN and FPÖ speeches by carrying out a lexicometric analysis and a critical discourse analysis (CDA). I will then deal with different functions of the term “democracy” (cosmetic or symbolic, rhetorical or strategic and ideological) while highlighting tensions in the rhetoric.

RWP and Democracy

Discourse and methodology

Lexicometric approach

CDA

Conclusion

¹ François Debras is a lecturer at the University of Liège (Belgium). He defended his doctoral thesis entitled: “The Sirens’ Song: When Far-Right Deals with ‘Democracy’. Critical Discourse Analysis of the *Rassemblement National* in France, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* in Austria and the *Alternatif für Deutschland* in Germany”.