

IOHANNIS AND PONTA: THE WINNER AND THE LOSER. A NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION APPROACH TO THE 2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN ROMANIA

Elena BUJA

Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, *Transilvania University*, Brasov, Romania

Abstract: *The presidential elections constitute a 'battle field' in which candidates try to pull their opponents to pieces both verbally and nonverbally. In this paper the focus will be on the nonverbal means employed by Victor Ponta and his opponent, Klaus Iohannis in their presidential campaign, the aim being that of highlighting the nonverbal behaviours that led to the electoral loss of the former and success of the latter. The reason behind the choice of this topic is Goffman's (1959) idea that the nonverbal dimension of a candidate's style has a pre-eminent role, as the nonverbal elements of people's behaviour cannot be controlled very easily, and can also influence the evaluation of someone's credibility. The data-base employed for the analysis comprises the live televised debates between the two mentioned candidates, as well as photos published in the press. The investigated nonverbal components are colour symbolism, body movements (such as posture and gestures), facial expressions, haptics, and vocalics. The analysis conducted reveals the extent to which nonverbal elements may tilt the balance of success in presidential elections.*

Keywords: *presidential elections, presidential candidates, nonverbal behaviour, credibility*

1. INTRODUCTION

Election campaigns, including the election news coverage, are quite difficult to investigate, as they presuppose attention paid to a number of factors such as the characteristics of the political system (whether the political system is party-centred or candidate-centred, the number of political parties, the type of government), the characteristics of the media system (public service media vs private media companies, media that aim at a highly educated and politically interested population vs media oriented toward less educated and politically less interested people), the context, the relationship between the political actors, news media actors, and people as voters or consumers of media (Str mb ck & Lee Kaid, 2009). What is worth noting is that unlike in the past, when people tended to vote for the same party in successive elections, nowadays the election news coverage may have a say in how the electors will vote, as this could be the only way in which the electors may obtain information about the candidates for presidency.

The study of television visuals in electoral campaigns is important for two reasons. First, research in this field indicates that moving pictures produce stronger affective responses in

viewers than still pictures (Detenber *et al.*, 1998); such affective opinions are critical to actual voting behaviours, which is often contingent on how positively or negatively people evaluate a candidate (Kiouisis *et al.*, 1999). Secondly, television is the primary source of campaign information for most voters. Graber (1987) showed that quite often, people who decide on whom to vote may be more influenced by visual displays. Consequently, in this paper my interest is in the extent to which the decision to vote for one political figure or another might have been influenced by the way in which the televised debates in the latest presidential campaigns in Romania reflected the candidates' nonverbal behaviour.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section introduces the reader to a brief presentation of the organisation of presidential campaigns in Romania. As my interest is in the nonverbal behaviour of the presidential candidates, in section 3 I will define nonverbal communication and describe briefly its dimensions. The next part of the paper (section 4) is dedicated to the research methodology and to the research questions that guided me in the analysis contained in section 5. Some conclusions will be drawn in the last part of the paper (section 6).

2. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA

Election campaigns are tough competitions based on ideas; they consist of a series of actions aimed at making certain groups of voters support these ideas. They are thoroughly organized long before the Election Day.

In our country, the presidential campaign is organized on the basis of the Law 370, passed in 2004 and revised in 2014, according to which the period of election campaign starts 30 days prior to the Election Day and ends at 7.00 a.m. on the Saturday morning before the election day, which is always a Sunday. All the activities during the campaign are supervised by the Central Electoral Bureau.

Unlike in other countries, where people have a range of voting options, such as an electronic voting system, poll-voting or mail-in voting, in Romania people can only cast their vote in person at a polling station.

During the campaign, candidates are free to promote themselves via public meetings, fliers, banners, and letters, through websites, through a series of brief appearances in several towns, by using endorsements of celebrated people to boost support (see the photo below), and also via debates that are broadcast live on television.



Fig.1. Ponta associating with the figure of Simona Halep

Unlike in America, where it has become customary that late in the election cycle, i.e. at the end of September and throughout October, candidates should confront each other in debates for which they prepare very thoroughly, in Romania, debates are quite a recent phenomenon in the political arena. The first Romanian televised debate took place in the 1992, the candidates being Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu. Since then, debates have become part of the electoral

campaigns in our country. Nevertheless, in 2014, there was a problem in bringing the two candidates (Victor Ponta, member of the Social Democratic Party and Klaus Iohannis, member of the Christian Liberal Alliance (ACL) together in a televised debate. After long days of negotiations, disagreements, and a number of delays, the two candidates met in a first debate hosted by Realitatea TV on the 11th of November 2014 and moderated by Rare Bogdan. The second one followed on the 12th of November. The journalists of *adevarul.ro* stated that the first debate managed to show the different personalities of the candidates: while Victor Ponta was very aggressive and talkative, Klaus Iohannis kept calm (Agarici, 2014).

As Lange (1999:28-29) points out,

Debates have advantages and disadvantages (...). On the negative side, it has been argued that mandatory debates would circumscribe the candidates' freedom to run campaigns as they wish (...). On the positive side, debates allow the candidates to face the public directly, they have been shown to heighten citizens' interest in elections and their levels of information, they are a means of enabling the public to make a direct comparison of the candidates, and as such are a useful supplement to the normal news coverage.

Throughout the campaign, the political figures are 'a prey' for their opponents, who watch for mistakes in order to speculate them to their advantage. Moreover, the media, and especially the television channels, represent the main source by which information about the candidates are conveyed to the electorate, in this way the candidates becoming a pray for the voters, too. The actual behaviour of the candidates, their capacity to control themselves in various circumstances, to produce biting retorts and to return the blows received are of utmost importance for the electorate. Very often, people vote for the man rather than for the political figure. For this reason, the campaigns should also focus on highlighting the individual qualities of the candidates and their way of behaving nonverbally, not only on their political skills.

3. NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

People can communicate in various ways: by means of speech, by whistling, by sign language (if they are aurally disabled), and nonverbally. Though they tend to think that the major means of communication is the word (or speech), it has been

shown that actually in any face-to-face interaction the nonverbal communication prevails. 'While the verbal channel of communication is used primarily to convey factual or semantic information about the world, the nonverbal channels have primarily social functions - 'to manage the immediate social relationships - like in animals' (Argyle, 1972, quoted in Beattie, 2004: 19). Nonverbal communication signals emotional states and attitudes that are crucial in the forming and development of interpersonal relationships. Beattie is of the opinion that 'we express relationships nonverbally because these types of communication are less subject to conscious control and, therefore, presumably more honest, and yet at the same time more nebulous' (2004: 22).

But what is nonverbal communication? Specialists in various fields ranging from anthropology to sociology and psychology have attempted to define the concept as clearly as possible. Thus, the famous anthropologist Eduard Sapir (1928:137) spoke of nonverbal communication as 'an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all.' According to Fiske *et al.* (2010: 465), 'nonverbal communication refers to the sending and receiving of thoughts and feelings via nonverbal behaviour', while Lustig and Koester (1996) (*apud* McLaren, 1998:132) define nonverbal communication as a

'multi-channelled process that is usually performed spontaneously and involves a subtle set of non-linguistic behaviours that are often enacted outside a person's conscious awareness'.

This last definition points to the fact that there are many different levels of nonverbal communication which determined linguists to separate them into codes. These are organised message systems that consist of a set of symbols and rules for their use. In what follows, the various nonverbal codes will be presented in more details.

a. **Kinesics** includes messages sent by your body through gestures, posture, body movement, body lean, and so forth. It also includes messages sent by your face, such as smiles, frowns, grimaces, and pouts. The kinesic code also includes eye behaviour, which is sometimes referred to as *oculesics*. Eye behaviour includes eye movement, eye contact, gaze aversion, and pupil dilation and constriction.

b. **Appearance and adornment**. This code includes influential nonverbal cues which are non-movement bound, i.e. physical appearance (*size,*

shape, and colour of your body, your perceived level of attractiveness, how you dress, wear your hair and use cosmetics, the use of accessories) and olfactory cues (*body smells and perfume/cologne*). These can communicate a lot and create impressions on others.

c. **Vocalics**. This code includes the sounds of the voice as well as silences. In other words, vocalics (also referred to as 'paralanguage') refers to HOW you say words rather than WHAT you actually say. This includes how you communicate through changes in speaking rate, volume, voice quality and pitch, accents, pauses, and hesitations. Also included are silence and the meanings attributed to it. Sometimes silence communicates a message more loudly than words ever could.

d. **Contact Codes**. This includes both spatial and tactile communication. *Spatial communication* (proxemics) focuses on how you use space and territory. Personal space refers to how far apart people are while engaged in various activities. A number of issues are of importance here:

- i. How do people **use** and **respond** to spatial relationship in formal and informal group settings?
 - seating arrangements;
 - spatial arrangements as related to leadership;
 - communication flow.
- ii. Attention paid to the way people behave in crowds and densely populated areas.
- iii. Conversational distance varies according to sex, status, cultural orientation, and roles.

e. **Haptics** (*or tactile communication*) refers to touch and physical contact, such as grabbing, hitting, stroking, hugging, holding, greeting and farewells, kicking, and kissing. It represents an important factor in the child's early development and in the adult's behaviour.

f. **Time and Place Codes**. This code refers to the larger context in which communication occurs. Communication through time (chronemics) includes how people use and perceive time. Time preferences, punctuality, and personal perceptions of time are some of many chronemic factors. *Environmental cues* refer to elements that impinge on the human relationship, but which are not directly a part of it. They include factors such as architectural design, interior decorating, colour, noise, furniture arrangement, and so on.

Now that we have seen the codes by means of which people communicate nonverbally, it is important to point to the prevalence of this kind of communication in relation to the verbal message.

In one of his early studies, the American anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell (1970) was of the opinion that about 65 per cent of a message is conveyed nonverbally. Other specialists in the field, Mehrabian and Wiener (1967:109-114) suggested that 90 percent of communication occurs nonverbally or paralinguistically, while Beattie (2004:25) considers that only 7 per cent of communication is verbal, the rest being nonverbal.

Nonverbal communication is considered to be important as it provides 'a frame of reference for interpreting what is said verbally' (Burgoon *et al.*, 1989: 9). Our nonverbal behaviour very frequently complements, emphasizes repeats, contradicts, or substitutes the verbal messages we deliver. When there is incongruence between the verbal message and the nonverbal behaviour, the latter should be trusted as this cannot be controlled so easily. Moreover, there are situations in which nonverbal behaviours may express feelings and attitudes that cannot be described by words.

All of the nonverbal categories of communication are important, and in politics some are used intentionally to set the stage for what will be said (Lee Kaid & Johnston, 2001:28).

Certainly, presidential campaigns are a veritable treasure trove of nonverbal behaviours; in particular appearance, eye contact, posture and gestures can have a say in how the electorate is going to vote. The way in which candidates behave nonverbally might influence how their style is interpreted and how their style is manifested. Moreover, their nonverbal behaviour can increase or diminish their credibility and, in the long run, influence the outcome of the elections, as we shall see in section 5 of the paper.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to identify possible explanations for why the incumbent prime minister, Victor Ponta lost the presidential elections despite the fact that he was considered the front-runner, a consistent data base of nonverbal behaviours was needed. Thus, on the one hand I have searched for visual information in the still photographs taken during the campaigns, and on the other hand, I have examined the visual content of moving images in the two televised debates in which the Romanian candidates, Victor Ponta and Klaus Iohannis, confronted each other. As mentioned previously, my interest was in the use of a certain colour, in body movements (such as postures and gestures),

facial expressions, and vocalics. In order to capture all these nonverbal dimensions in the televised debates, I have employed the print-screen technique by means of which I was able to capture the images that seemed relevant for the analysis. At the same time, I took advantage of the split-screen format employed in television, which enables the viewers 'to compare the appearance and behaviour of two or more subjects (Millerson, 1990, *apud* Lee Kaid and Johnston, 2001:32). For the elements pertaining to vocalics, I relied on the sensitivity of my own ears.

Starting from the assumption that the candidates' nonverbal behaviour may have an impact on the voting behaviour, the research questions that guided the present study are the following: RQ1: What does the media's visual presentation of a candidate reveal about Victor Ponta's and Klaus Iohannis' images in the last presidential campaign? RQ2: Which of the nonverbal dimensions had a stronger impact on the viewers?

5. THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR CAN TILT THE BALANCE OF THE ELECTION RESULT

During the presidential campaign trail, the candidates' nonverbal behaviour is of extreme importance as many viewers focus their attention on this aspect, rather than on the verbal message, which very often, is beyond their level of understanding. Thus, as the electoral campaign touched upon issues such as tax, health, economic growth, and military enforcement, a large part of the population who was not familiar with the problems and with the solutions suggested by the candidates, focussed more on what they saw, rather than on what they heard.

Before embarking on the analysis of the nonverbal elements in the televised debates, a word about them would be in order here. In Romania, though initially four such meetings had been planned, due to the disagreements between the campaign teams of the Social Democratic Party and of the Christian Liberal Alliance (formed of the Democratic Liberal Party and of the National Liberal Party) only two televised debates brought together the two candidates, Victor Ponta, the incumbent prime-minister and member of SDP and Klaus Iohannis, former mayor of Sibiu and member of CLA. The first debate was hosted by Realitatea TV and moderated by Rare Bogdan on the 11th of November, while the second was

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broadcast by B1TV on the 12th of November, being moderated by M d lina Pu cal u. The first debate seemed completely chaotic: the moderator was poorly prepared for it; he spoke too much, and did not inform the candidates how the event was going to unfold until the 13th minute. At the same time, he did not manage to stick to the format of the event (i.e. 2 minutes for each candidate), at times Ponta leaving the impression that he was the moderator of the show. The second debate was better organised in that from the very beginning Ms Pu cal u told the candidates and the audience the rules of the game, at the same time being very strict when the invitees tried to break them. The purpose of these debates was to make the ones vying for Cotroceni, show their best.

Let us now have a closer look at the nonverbal behaviour of the two Romanian candidates for presidency in the electoral campaign. I shall start the analysis by looking at their touching behaviour or *haptics*.

5.1 Haptics. People will accept and also offer a certain amount of touching depending on the culture they belong to. Hecht *et al.* (1989) labelled the cultures in Latin America, the Mediterranean area, the Middle East and Eastern Europe ‘contact cultures’ as people living in these areas are prone to touching each other. On the other hand, cultures like those in northern Europe, North America, and Asia are considered “distance cultures” due to the fact that here people do not like to touch or be touched, in other words, they like to keep a certain distance between each other.

According to McLaren (1998), in contact cultures (as is the case of Romania), more touching is expected during the greetings, which presuppose handshaking. Strangely, the two Romanian presidential candidates did not touch at all: in none of the photos I had access to where they caught shaking hands or patting each other on the back.

In the Romanian culture, handshaking is common not only among men, but also among women and among men and women. If Klaus Iohannis did not shake hands with his opponent, he did shake hands and even kissed the hand of the moderator of the second debate, Ms. Pu cal u, who welcomed both candidates outside the TV plateau. The hand kiss is a gesture of courtesy and extreme politeness which is falling out of fashion in Romania, but which is still used in diplomacy. By making use of this way of greeting, Iohannis showed that he is well-mannered and most probably warmed the hearts of the female voters. The hand-kissing gesture, as shown in the photo

below, is accompanied by a direct eye-gaze which indicates sincerity and attention.



Fig. 2. Klaus Iohannis kissing the hand of M d lina Pu cal u, the moderator of the second televised debate.

5.2 Colour symbolism. A look at the publicity elements employed during the presidential campaigns shows that the two candidates for presidency identified with the colours of their parties. Thus, the banners, fliers, posters and presents offered by the staff of the CLA were blue or had a blue background, while those employed by the opposition were red. In Romania, red is the identified colour of the left, while blue that of the right.



Fig. 3. Socialists like it red, Liberals blue.



Fig.4. Red all over for Ponta's supporters and his ladies.



Fig. 5. Colours of ties in agreement with the colour of the candidates' parties

As picture 5 above shows, the two candidates tried as much as possible to identify with the colours of their parties in their dress code, too. Thus, Iohannis wore a blue tie, whereas Ponta a red one. But this happened only occasionally, as in the two televised debates they both knotted up ties of similar dark colours. One element that may have diminished Victor's Ponta chances of becoming president of Romania was exactly the colour of this party. As a man, apart from wearing a red tie, any other piece of clothing of this colour on him would have compromised him. So the three females in his life (his mother, wife, and daughter) carried the colour symbol of the Social Democratic party for him, as were the hundreds of people that gathered on the National Arena (see figure 4 above), when he launched his campaign like a rock star and where he informed people of the radical measures he was going to take for the well-being of Romania. In the mind of the people aged 50+, red was the colour of the communist regime that we so much loathed and wanted to get rid of. In November last, when we saw again the stadiums jammed with people carrying red flags and banners and adopting the same servile attitude like in Ceau escu's time, our fear was that those terrible days of the eighties were going to return. So, despite the fact that Victor Ponta was considered to be the forerunner for presidency, he may have lost because people 'saw red', and in their minds a strong association was created between him and Ceau escu, or even worse, between him and the current president of North Korea, Kim Jong Un.

5.3 Facial expressions. According to Banning & Coleman (2009), one of the earliest programs of research into political leaders' facial expressions undertaken by a group of social psychologists (Lanzetta *et al.*, 1985, *apud* Banning & Coleman, 2009:7) found 'that emotional expressions by political leaders had a direct emotional effect on television viewers and clearly established that facial gestures had an impact on viewers' feelings about the person being observed'.

Paul Ekman (2003), the pioneering psychologist in the field of emotions, is of the opinion that learning how to identify emotions in their early stages or when they are masked can improve our communication with people in various situations, as well as help us to manage our own emotional responses.

On the political arena, the two Romanian candidates did not excel in expressing their feelings towards their viewers. Their facial expressions were most of the time quite rigid. My impression is that they both tried to pass as serious men, with the noblest of intentions for the Romanian people. Iohannis' facial expression may lead one to think that he is very organized and calculated like the German people. Ponta's facial expression, on the other hand, might be an indicator of wisdom.



Fig.6. Rigid facial expressions.

There were, nevertheless, a number of instances in which the facial expressions of the two politicians revealed more than wisdom or consideration for the Romanian people. Thus, in the first debate, when Klaus Iohannis expressed his dissatisfaction to Rare Bogdan (the moderator) concerning the format of the debate, Victor Ponta's face betrayed surprise. The key elements of such a facial expression are the raised eyebrows, the wide-open eyes, as well as the lower jaw which drops open. One can see that in the photo below

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(minute 11:47, RD1¹), the lower part of Ponta's face adopts a different position than the one characteristic of surprise, namely the lips are pressed together. According to Ekman (2003), this could be an indicator of very slight anger or anger that is just beginning. We may speculate that surprise, which is the shortest of all emotions, is immediately followed by slight anger in Ponta, maybe due to the fact that his speech was interrupted by Iohannis' statement, which for him might not have had any relevance.



Fig.7. Ponta's facial expression of surprise (RD1, minute 11:47)

A little later in the same debate, the prime minister in office, V. Ponta, adopted a different facial expression, one of sarcasm or irony. This expression was triggered by Iohannis' remark that after the first round of voting on the 2nd of November, when most of the Romanians in the diaspora did not have the opportunity to cast their vote, it should have been Victor Ponta who had to step down from office and not Titus Corl ăean, the then Minister of the Justice and Foreign Affairs. The sarcasm on Ponta's face is betrayed first and foremost by the lips which are pressed together, the left corner being slightly pulled up (giving the impression of an asymmetrical smile). Contributing to this expression are also the eyelids, which tightened, give the viewers the impression that the prime minister was literally or figuratively trying to focus on something, namely on the suggestion that his opponent had just made. This, to me, looks like a sign of nonverbal aggression.

After the elections, in an interview given to Costi Rogozanu and Dan Duca from Realitatea TV on the 7th of December, Ponta admitted that in the electoral campaign he had been arrogant.



Fig. 8. Ponta's sarcastic expression (RD1, minute 16:56)

But Ponta is not the only one capable of showing irony or sarcasm. Half-way through the second debate, when approaching issues related to the legal system/ judiciary, Iohannis presented his opponent with a photo taken in January 2011 comprising SD Party figures such as Ponta, Adrian Nastase, Titus Corl ăean, Ecaterina Andronescu and others, all having been accused of political persecution. In exchange, Ponta presented Iohannis with another photo, taken on the same day (and probably on the same occasion) in which he (Ponta) is accompanied by Crin Antonescu and some members of the National Liberal Party and of the Democratic Liberal Party, one member of which had committed an abuse and changed parties, joining the party Iohannis now belonged to. The scene shows that none of the presidential candidates was willing to acknowledge himself inferior to the other. The verbal exchange that accompanied the screen-capture below went as follows:

Iohannis: 'V las cu placere fotografia' (I'll gladly leave you the photo).

Ponta: ' i eu v dau fotografia... s nu lua i numai fotografia care v place, lua i tot' (I also give you the photo ... you should not take only the photo you like, take everything!).



Fig.9. Mutual irony.

¹ RD1 stands for the first debate between the Romanian candidates.

Irony is reflected in the lower part of the candidates' faces, namely by the raising of the upper lip (like for a smile) and the baring of the teeth, which is an aggressive facial signal (like a canine snarl).

Victor Ponta proved to communicate very much by means of his face, unlike Klaus Iohannis, whose face was quite neutral throughout the first debate. In minute 40:00, when the party he belongs to (i.e. the Social Democratic Party) was accused of having been against the electronic voting system, the viewers were left in no doubt concerning his emotion. He was deeply hurt by this accusation and did not have the time to compose his facial expression, to hide his inner state.



Fig. 10. Ponta's facial expression of anger.

The key elements of an angry face are the tightened eyelids, the brows which are lowered and slightly drawn together (a sign of controlled anger), the lips pressed together and the jaw which is thrust forward.

5.4. The gaze. In this section I will focus on another dimension of nonverbal behaviour, namely on oculosics, as our gaze often gives away our thoughts and emotions. 'Oculosics is the name given to communicating with the eyes. The most common form is eye contact, which can show attention and, sometimes intimacy. If there is not enough, others may assume lack of interest or even lack of trust. If there is too much, people may assume rudeness' (McLaren, 1998: 141).

In both televised debates, Iohannis did a better job in connecting with the TV audience. In most of the cases in which he addressed the viewers, he talked straight into the camera. According to Richard Webster (2014:170), 'direct eye contact is a sign of honesty, sincerity, trust and open communication'.

When asked by the moderator what the Romania of Klaus Iohannis would look like, Iohannis turned his gaze from Ms Pu cal u and looked straight into the 'eyes of the Romanians',

giving them the feeling that he was one of them. Moreover, in the second debate, when Iohannis had the right to challenge Ponta's answer concerning the well-being of the Romanians, he told the SDP nominee that the Romanians were fed up with figures and statistics and that they wanted solutions to their problems. While saying this, his gaze was focused on his oponent. But when he said 'let us ask the Romanian people whether they have been better off since Victor Ponta became their prime minister', he turned round and looked right into the camera, lifting his index finger and thrusting it forwards, as if pointing to his audience.



Fig.11. Iohannis addressing the TV audience (RD1, minute 59:48, on the left and RD2, minute 16:09, on the right).

Normally, the finger-pointing gesture is considered to be quite rude, but in this particular circumstance I would say that it was employed to great effect, in that together with the gaze it emphasized the strong bond between the speaker and the audience. By pointing at the viewers, Iohannis treated them as if they were his friends.



Fig. 12. Iohannis' gaze combined with the finger-pointing gesture (RD2, minute 19:47)

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Victor Ponta, on the other hand, hardly ever looked straight into the camera, hence into the electorate's eyes. This made the viewers perceive him as distant and detached. When he was not busy rummaging through his notes, the bible, or the constitution, he looked at Iohannis, being on the watch out for mistakes on the part of the latter. This is obvious in the previous photo (fig.11). By contrast, when Ponta was talking, Iohannis kept looking away, as if he disconsidered or ignored his opponent, something that made the latter angry to the point that he asked Iohannis to look at him, assuming that by doing so, he would better grasp Ponta's information.



Fig. 13. Ponta begging Iohannis to look at him (RD2, minute 24:29).

When Iohannis asked Ponta questions or made statements that the latter perceived to be 'uncomfortable' for him, his gaze was cut off from Iohannis. One such instance occurred when the topic of the problems the Romanians outside the country faced during the first round was brought up. Knowing well that culpability was partly his, Ponta cut the visual contact with Iohannis by nodding and blinking fast, as if in an attempt to shy away from his interlocutor. Blinking rapidly is a more refined way of visually getting rid of a person or a touchy subject than completely covering your eyes with the palms, the way children do.



Fig. 14. Ponta's refined manner of avoiding eye contact in embarrassing circumstances (RD1, minute 14:32).

As rapid blinking usually means nerves and a person's desire of blocking out what is happening or what he is hearing, Ponta's gesture had a great impact on how people perceived him.

An even more obvious state of embarrassment or shame on behalf of Victor Ponta appears towards the end of the first debate, when his counter-candidate asks him why he lied by saying that he (Iohannis) would reduce the retirement pensions. Knowing that Iohannis was right and as he most probably did not expect such a question, Ponta looked down for a longer time than usual, trying to avoid his interlocutor's venomous stare by keeping his eyes closed and his head lowered.



Fig. 15. Ponta disconnecting with his interlocutor (RD1, 1:04:33).

5.5 Tone of the voice. In both debates between Ponta and Iohannis, the latter's tone of voice was softer, lower, and calmer than Ponta's, though, at times, his voice betrayed nervousness. Ponta's tone, on the other hand, was sharper, harsher and more serious. On the basis of the tone of voice employed, Iohannis managed to convey to the electorate the fact that he is not a hot-tempered or arrogant person. By contrast, his counter-candidate employed a sharper tone to emphasize that Romania was passing through a quite critical period; at the same time, he tried to show the confidence that leaders must have during such problematic times. From this point of view, I think that Iohannis had an advantage over Victor Ponta in that the tone of his voice helped in lessening the worries and the fears of those watching the debates. His booming deep and louder voice seemed to have won people over as it promoted credibility, confidence, and, to a certain extent, dominance, too.

Another aspect related to the voice is the rhythm of speech. Klaus Iohannis spoke very slowly, something that certain specialists (such as sociologist Alfred Bulai and psychologist Mihaela Vintila, see Ring, 2014) consider speech

impairment and that many journalists made fun of. But my impression was that the pauses in his speech were not at all an indicator of anxiety or of lack of self-confidence (and far from being a speech impairment), but rather of careful consideration. Most probably those who made fun of Iohannis' slow way of speaking were not familiar with the Confucian saying (quoted in McLaren, 1998:149): 'The superior man is diligent in duty but slow to speak'. Neither were they familiar with the opinion of scholars with a longer experience in the field of nonverbal communication, such as Peter Collett (2003:139) who stated that 'deep voices are associated with dominance, masculinity and concern; (...) they also sound warm'. Ponta's metallic sounding voice could have contributed to the impression of a cold person. This together with other nonverbal behaviours made voters perceive him as wanting the office too much.

5.6. Body language. This last sub-section of the analysis of the candidate's nonverbal behaviour looks at the messages sent by the body through gestures, posture, body movement, and body lean. I shall look at the body behaviour of the debaters both when they talk, as well as when the other is speaking.



Fig. 16. The candidates' hand chopping gesture (RD2, minute 17:15 and RD2. Minute 30:04)

As far as hand gestures are concerned, both candidates seemed to employ them sparingly. This is not at all surprising, as the frequent use of gestures may give the impression that the person is

impulsive and not entirely in control of his/her actions, what might not be the best image if discretion and a cool-headed attitude is required. Both candidates used, at times, the 'hand chopping gesture' or 'baton gesture' in which the hand moves up and down, as if chopping wood. This hand gesture accompanies speech, so that the hand may move to the rhythm of the speech. It is gesture often employed by politicians when addressing a crowd, as it adds emphasis to key words or ideas in their speech.

Victor Ponta makes use of this hand gesture when he enumerates the members of the former Government² (Boc, Blaga, Predoiu, Anastase, Videanu, and others) whom he accuses of having brought the country into a disastrous state. By using this gesture (performed with the open palm placed vertically), he not only places the blame on each of the mentioned persons, but also seems to 'punish' them by figuratively chopping their heads off. By contrast, Iohannis' gesture does not seem as aggressive as Ponta's in that it is performed differently: the thumb touches the index and the middle fingers. This could also be interpreted as a milder form of the finger-pointing gesture. Another difference relates to the fact that it is employed when Iohannis talks about the legal system in Romania, highlighting each idea he utters.

A second hand gesture employed by both candidates is placing the open palm on their chests.



Fig.17. Ponta's moment of sincerity (RD2, minute 20:17)

In placing both open palms on the chest, Victor Ponta said the following: 'I want that the Romania whose president I am should not vote AGAINST someone, but FOR someone'. The gesture employed was meant to indicate two things: a) that he already considered himself the president of Romania; b) that he was sincere in what he said, that he spoke from his heart. And the truth is that

² The former government comprised members of the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL - Boc) and the National Liberal Party (PNL – Blaga, Anastase, and Videanu).

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his whole body behaviour expressed sincerity. On the other hand, Klaus Iohannis' gesture was not so obvious, due to the yellow information strip at the bottom of the screen. His left open palm seemed not to rest on the chest but to move towards his heart when he uttered: 'I think that we should not interfere with the justice' and 'I would like to protect the legal system'. By employing the gesture twice within a couple of seconds, one may be inclined to really believe what he uttered.



Fig.18. Iohannis' moment of sincerity (RD2, minute 38:56)

Another aspect of body language that speaks volumes is *body posture*. My impression was that Klaus Iohannis adopted a more relaxed and, at the same time, dominant posture in that he used more space than his rival. In the photo below (fig. 18) his legs are open, taking up more space than his opponent and giving the impression that his needs are more important. This is in line with Collett's (2003:45) statement that 'people who sit with their knees apart send clear, although usually unintended, signal that they are feeling dominant'. Additionally, his left hand is placed on the table, which gives him an asymmetrical sitting posture, conveying a strong impression of relaxation. Collett (2003: 46) is of the opinion that 'relaxation is a key part of any dominance display because it suggests that the individual isn't concerned about being attacked and could easily respond if necessary. Relaxation is signalled by postural and movement cues – postural cues consist of low muscle tone, an absence of tension, and asymmetric arrangements of the arms and legs, while movement cues consist of less movement and slower movements of the body'. By contrast, Ponta's posture is indicative of a submissive person: his closed knees are an indicator of defensiveness, just like the palms placed one over the other on the table. He uses his hands and legs as a 'barrier' against the attacks launched by Iohannis. To quote Collett (2003:46) again,

submissive individuals display the opposite behaviour – they tend to adopt more symmetrical poses, to rearrange their arms and legs more often, to show more tension in their posture, and to move their body quickly and more often (2003:46).

And this is exactly what Ponta had done in both debates: when he did not adopt the 'obedient pupil' posture, he looked for his notes in his briefcase, arranged them on the table, shuffled them, and took more notes.



Fig.19. Body posture of the candidates (RD2: minute 14:14).

Though the general impression concerning Klaus Iohannis' posture was that he appeared quite relaxed, at a closer look this was not really so. His feeling under pressure (which was very normal in these circumstances) was reflected by the fact that he placed his open palm on the table, with the arm extended. This gesture contributes to his spatial extension, enhancing the feeling of dominance, as mentioned previously, but, at the same time, it could also be interpreted as his attempt to control his nervousness, by holding onto something stable. To alleviate stress and nervousness, in the first debate, Iohannis started playing with his cell phone, while in the second one, as both debaters were provided with bottles and glasses of water, Iohannis turned his round and round.



Fig.20. Iohannis' nervousness is leaking out. Left - RD 1, minute 37:57, Right - RD2, minute 9:02)

6. CONCLUSIONS

The general impression concerning the nonverbal behaviour of the two Romanian presidential candidates is that Victor Ponta was more animated than Klaus Iohannis, which is one of the reasons he seemed more energetic. Iohannis, by contrast, adopted a more controlled, and, at times, rigid nonverbal behaviour which one might have expected to work against his success. He gesticulated very little, leaving the impression that he was cold and distant. In reality it was exactly this behaviour that helped him gain the confidence of the voters: he made people believe that he would not leave them in dire straits, that he would not start shaking with fear when confronted with an important decision, and that he cannot be manipulated. By contrast, Victor Ponta's nonverbal behaviour conveyed too many messages, many of which did not inspire credibility.

In terms of eye contact, my feeling is that Ponta's fatal mistake was that during both televised debates he looked more at the moderators, instead of at the camera to those at home. He also spent a lot of time during the debates looking down at his notes or to take notes, and quite often, as he listened to the moderators or his rival, his head was down. This was an indicator of submission – in other words he bowed to his rival. This made Iohannis look a little more dominant.

On the other hand, when Klaus Iohannis addressed the debate viewers, he looked directly at the camera for most of the time which gave them the feeling he was speaking directly to them. When a political figure makes eye contact with the people, it is the ultimate gesture of rapport and trust. So, I assume the TV audience was more connected to Iohannis than to Ponta because of the former's eye contact.

In terms of vocalics, my belief is that Iohannis had the upper hand, as his low, resonant voice had the effect of conveying credibility. Despite Ponta's more melodic speech, that exploited intonation to a maximum, even revealing arrogant nuances in his tone, the balance was tilted in the favour of his rival. As far as the facial expressions are concerned, both candidates did a pretty good job of keeping neutral facial expressions. However, if we watch Ponta's face, his lips produced smiles quite frequently, but they were not of the friendly and happy kind. Moreover, some of his smiles were asymmetrical, an indicator of self-assuredness and arrogance. Then, his eye-brows proved quite

mobile – up, down, drawn together, emphasizing here and doubting there. On this dimension of nonverbal communication, we could say that both debaters were bad in that their facial expressions were not at all indicators of a positive outlook, which would have been very encouraging for the viewers in a country on the verge of a depression.

To answer the first research question (What does the media's visual presentation of a candidate reveal about Victor Ponta's and Klaus Iohannis' images in the last presidential campaign?), I think that the visual media tried to exploit to the maximum the weaknesses rather than the qualities of the two candidates. The ordinary people kept wandering about the financial sources behind the election campaign, especially of Victor Ponta's. In a country struggling with poverty and characterised by deeply rooted corruption and a high rate of unemployment, a megalomaniacal launch of the presidential campaign like Ponta's (see figure 21 below) stirred the outrage of the people. This might be one of the reasons why so very many Romanian citizens around the country demonstrated peacefully in the streets against the nominee of the SD Party.



Fig. 21. Red confetti flying in the air at Ponta's launching of the presidential campaign

As far as the other dimensions of nonverbal behaviour are concerned, the two televised debates showed that, on the whole, both candidates proved quite inexperienced in the employment of this kind of behaviour and that in order to become genuine politicians they need to train a lot in this respect. Since in Romania nonverbal behaviour is quite a recent subject of interest for both academics and politicians, it would be advisable that the future presidential candidates should have a specialist to offer them training and advice regarding this aspect.

With respect to the second research question, my feeling is that the format of the debates had a

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say in what concerns the prevalent nonverbal dimensions. Since the debaters were seated close to the table, they could not exploit the whole repertoire of body language. Thus, the two codes that turned Iohannis into the winner and Ponta into a loser, even if by narrow margin, were vocalics and facial expressions.

All in all, I hope that this analysis has proven that politics isn't just about principles. Crucially, it's about employing a nonverbal behaviour that is convincing and presidential. And in the 2014 presidential elections in Romania, Iohannis did a better job than Ponta in this respect.

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