



## **POLITICAL DISCOURSE AS A SUBJECT OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES**

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The paper considers political discourse in the context of globalization as a subject of interdisciplinary studies. The growing academic interest towards political discourse can be regarded as a social request to reveal and generalize not only the peculiarities of political thought and actions, but also those linguistic means politicians employ in their discourse to affect and control public opinion. We claim that linguocultural research of political discourse implying its anthropocentric-communicative interpretation with the help of the three-dimensional semiotic model enables us to carry out integral analysis of those aspects of political discourse that form its interdisciplinary essence as well as its genre-stylistic typicality.

**Keywords:** Political discourse, Interdisciplinary essence, Linguocultural analysis, Genre-stylistic typicality, Linguistic pragmatics.

### **Introduction**

At the present stage of the development of civilization the vital importance of the world political situation has made politics and political discourse a subject for intensive interdisciplinary researches as well as a subject for special teaching (Nimmo & Combs 1983; Wodak 1989; Bayley & Miller 1993; Wodak & Chilton 2005; De Landtsheer & Feldman 2000; Chilton & Schäffner 2002; Bayley 2004; Kirvalidze 2012). The growing academic interest towards political discourse can be regarded as a social request, aimed to study not only the peculiarities of political thought and actions, but also those linguistic and rhetoric means politicians employ to affect and control public opinion.

Critical review of special researches devoted to the study of political discourse has revealed that it can be analyzed from at least four viewpoints:

- a. from the political point of view on the basis of which conclusions of political nature are made;
- b. from the linguistic viewpoint proper, when the researcher analyses the textual aspect of political discourse considering it as a verbal macrosign in its socio-cultural and political context;

- c. from the psychological point of view the aim of which is to reveal and define those strategies that are employed by a politician covertly or overtly in his/her speech to gain political influence upon the addressee;
- d. from the individual-hermeneutic viewpoint during which the speaker's personal attitudes towards the target political situation are revealed.

Out of these four, we consider linguistic studies of paramount importance since political thought and actions are inseparable from political speech. Words, actions, and events work together; words interpret events or actions, as well as constitute political facts, while actions in various ways help words gain their political efficacy. The analysis of political discourse (or political rhetoric) should treat discourse as an instrument of doing politics, either in a strategic or constitutive sense. In fact, any political idea or action is born, prepared, realized and controlled with the help of language.

The close relationship between language and politics has always been central to both Western political thought and rhetorical tradition. In the *Politics*, Aristotle famously equated the very possibility of politics with the possession of language: "... man is by nature a political animal [*politicon zoon*]" because "man is the only animal" whom Nature, which "does nothing in vain", "has endowed with the gift of speech" (Aristotle 1943: 1-10). Indeed, language appears indispensable to the constitution and maintenance of human communities, the working of organizations and institutions, the activities of politicians, and the civic lives of ordinary people. As James Farr indicates,

"Politics, as we know it, would not only be indescribable without language, it would be impossible. Emerging nations could not declare independence, leaders instruct partisans, citizens protest war, or courts sentence criminals. Neither could we criticize, plead, promise, argue, exhort, demand, negotiate, bargain, compromise, counsel, brief, debrief, advise nor consent. To imagine politics without these actions would be to imagine no recognizable politics at all" (Farr 1989: 48).

Similar statement has been made by Paul Bayley (2004), who identifies the activities of a politician, such as seeking consensus, elaborating policy, negotiating and mediating in conflicts, representing interests and opposing the policy of others with fundamental linguistic activities. Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner also focus on the reciprocal nature of the relationships between language and politics. On one occasion these scholars note that political activity does not exist without the use of language, while on another occasion they suggest that "it is probably the case that the use of language in the constitution of social groups leads to what we call 'politics' in a broad sense" (Chilton and Schaffner 2002a: vi). Chilton and Schaffner conclude, that this virtual identification of political activity with linguistic activity implies a close alliance of the study of politics with the study of language.

The growing research interest towards political discourse has brought the birth of a new trend in linguistics – the trend of so called "political linguistics". Such a situation is quite natural as throughout different stages of its development linguistic theory has always demonstrated great interest in the functional studies of the language system in various spheres of real life. Indeed, it would be difficult to identify any sphere of social or institutional life in which language does not play an essential role. According to Threadgold, "acts of communication are forms of social discourse which maintain and regulate social activities, and define status and power relations. As such they are part of and a metaphor for the social actions and belief systems of a given culture" (Threadgold 1986: 44).

## **Literature Review**

The oldest form of preoccupation with political discourse can be found in rhetoric, dating from ancient Greece and Rome through the Middle Ages right up to the present. In the Middle Ages rhetoric belonged to the "trivium" ("three studies") together with grammar and logic. The major task of rhetoricians was to train public orators, that is, politicians. The main areas, the training was focused on, were usually the

following: *invention* which implied the discovery of ideas; *disposition* which implied the arrangement of ideas; *elocution* which implied the discovery of appropriate expressions for ideas; and *memorization* prior to delivery on the actual occasion of speaking (Kirvalidze 2008: 9). It is obvious that, despite its different terms and methods, classical rhetoric was vitally involved in seeking the ways how political texts were produced, presented and received.

Since then, political discourse has been increasingly attracting interest of different scholars including linguists and discourse analysts, and it benefits now from its own specialised publications, such as the "Journal of Language and Politics", and the book series, "Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture", both edited by Ruth Wodak and Paul Chilton. Published in this series, "Politics as Text and Talk: Analytic Approaches to Political Discourse", edited by Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner (2002), is offered as an introduction to the field. The book is intended to provide a methodological survey in order to "try to delineate the emergent methodology of the field" (Chilton & Schaffner 2002a: vii).

Chilton and Schaffner (2002) start on the premise that politics is largely language, and thus argue for the study of politics by linguists alongside political philosophers and political scientists. Indeed, with their fine-grained methods, discourse analysts bring a new dimension to the comprehension of old and new problems in politics. Politics is understood as a struggle for power but also as co-operation in order to resolve clashes. Both phenomena take place at the micro level (between individuals) and macro level (between institutions). Individuals interact through discourse, and institutions produce types of discourse with specific characteristics. As language is closely linked in practice with culture, and culture is itself linked with the practice of politics, the cultural context of the analysed political discourse always needs to be taken into account. The authors review some main principles in the analysis of discourse: speech acts (Searle), co-operative principle (Grice), politeness (Brown & Levinson), validity claims (Habermas), context and intertextuality, dialogism (Bakhtin), and functionalism (Halliday). Then, they briefly expose how political discourse can be looked at in its cognitive dimension and in its pragmatic dimension.

Teun van Dijk exposes his approach to the analysis of political discourse in his work "What is political discourse analysis?" (1998). He argues that for the study of political discourse to be relevant, discourse structures must be connected to the properties of political structures and the theory of political cognition. The purpose of this theory is to function as an interface between the personal and the social (socially shared political representations of groups). In other words, meaning and forms of political discourse are related to political context not directly but through the intermediary of the participants' construction of this interactional and communicative context, that is based on their knowledge, attitudes and ideologies.

There has been a considerable amount of interest in the study of how language functions within specific institutional contexts, and, because political discourse is a broad macro-category, studies on political language have included investigations into very different sub-genres such as electoral language, party political language, the language of diplomacy and international relations, the language of social conflict, the language of parliament, and so on. Linguistics has not been the only discipline to investigate the relationship between language and politics; similar interest has been shown within political science. Bayley and Miller (1993) provide a list of volumes in which political scientists or political sociologists have tackled language-related questions.

### **Defining the Concept of Political Discourse**

What is political discourse? The definition of this term is closely connected with two understandings of politics – wide and narrow, i.e. more concrete. A wide definition of politics includes the activities of those organizations that belong to civil society and which are not necessarily regulated by the state but at the same time compete for resources – trades unions, business associations, environmental groups, etc.. It can also include the activity of the media because they produce discourse on, for example, politics, social conflict, and international relations. Non-institutional actors in social conflict may, similarly, be seen as engaged in politics. Moreover, many apparently non-political institutions, such as schools, universities

and hospitals are the products of public policy, which is in turn determined by ideological choices. Such institutions are regulated by large administrations which produce their own form of public discourse. In his book “Discourse and Social Change” (1995), Fairclough analyses a number of linguistic and social phenomena, such as the changes in the discourse of educational institutions, which, he claims are transforming the role of a student into that of a customer or a client. Such phenomena may be ascribed to social change, but at the same time they can also be interpreted as being political, not only because education is one of the ways through which resources are distributed, but also because such change is the result of a complex set of political and ideological discourse practices. Finally, political socialization takes place not just in the public sphere, but also in the private sphere; the home, the workplace and public meeting places are all sites at which political discourse may take place. In its most simple definition, politics is limited to the activity of the institutions, such as government, parliament and parties, fulfilling their role of distributing resources. To complement this, it could be defined as a struggle for power among the members of these institutions through elections, parties, parliamentary procedures and propaganda. Accordingly, there are two approaches to the definition of political discourse: wide and narrow. Such dual interpretation of political discourse is implied in the statement made by Paul Bayley:

“There is no such thing as political language, but a wide and diverse set of discourses, or genres, or registers that can be classified as forms of political language. It would be feasible to identify a set of ‘canonical’ forms of political discourse: policy papers, ministerial speeches, government press releases or press conferences, parliamentary discourse, party manifestos (or platforms), electoral speeches, etc. They are all characterized by the fact that they are spoken or written by (or for) primary political actors – members of the government or the opposition, members of parliament, leaders of political parties, candidates for office” (Bayley 2005).

In other words, in its wide sense, political discourse can be defined as a language of mass media or other institutions that is generally used in social and political spheres of communication. Such definition of political discourse is found, for instance, in “The Political Rhetoric of a United Europe” by Christ’l de Landtsheer (1998; 1998a: 35). We give preference to a narrow, Van Dijkean (1998; 2002) interpretation of political discourse according to which it is defined as a politically restricted genre that has its own thesaurus and specific functions. Political discourse is a discourse of a politician and if we view it within the professional framework, it can be considered as an institutional form of discourse. This means that only those discourses can be qualified as political which take place in such institutional situations where the speaker expresses his/her opinion as a politician (e.g. government sessions, parliamentary discussions, election campaigns, political debates, etc.).

## **Research Methodology**

There has been a considerable amount of interests in the study of how language functions within specific institutional contexts. Political discourse being a broad macro-category, studies on political language have included investigations into very different sub-genres such as electoral language, party political language, the language of diplomacy and international relations, the language of social conflict, the language of parliament, and so on (Wodak 1989; Fairclough 1995, 2000; Bayley and Miller 1993; Wodak and Van Dijk 2000; Chilton and Schäffner 2002; Feldman and De Landtsheer 1998; De Landtsheer and Feldman 2000, etc.).

Linguistic study of political discourse has been particularly associated with Critical Discourse Analysis the genesis of which can be traced back to the end of the 1970s. The aim of the early works in critical linguistics was to identify the social meanings that were expressed through lexis and syntax and to consider the role that language plays in creating and reinforcing ideologies (see Fairclough 1995, van Dijk 1997, Wodak and Chilton 2005 and others). For Critical Discourse Analysis language is a form of social practice. It seeks to identify linguistic change in terms of social change and postulates the fundamentally

linguistic or discursive nature of power relations. As Bayley claims “the link between text and society is mediated by ‘orders of discourse’ – the network of conventions that underlie and legitimise discourse practices” (Bayley 2005). The analytical instruments that Critical Discourse Analysis uses include syntax, local and global semantics, pragmatics, argumentation structures, cognition and contextual modelling.

However, Critical Discourse Analysis has drawn on the works of scholars whose principal interest has not been language. For example, the works of van Dijk (2002; 2004) emphasise the role of personal and social knowledge and belief and thus add a cognitive element to discourse analysis, according to which readings and interpretations of texts vary according to the cognitive schemata of individual hearers or readers, which may be determined by factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, age, etc. Chilton (2005) argues that the mainstream of Critical Discourse Analysis, in order to maintain credibility and utility, needs to pay much more attention to cognitive science and evolutionary psychology.

The second theoretical and descriptive framework that has a clear commitment to the analysis of political discourse is Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1978, Halliday and Martin 1981, De Landtsheer and Feldman 2000, etc). It should be said that the analysis of political texts, in a strict sense, is not the principal activity of Systemic Functional Analysis, which has addressed a wide variety of different text types. Moreover, a great deal of publications within its framework have dealt with the theoretical modelling of language rather than with discourse analysis. However, the analytical tools that it has developed are capable of handling the complexity of political language analysis.

Systemic Functional Linguistics considers language as social practice. It seeks to present a unitary vision of the systems, structures and functions of language, tolerating the fuzziness of categories that this inevitably implies. It fundamentally has two aspects – systemic and functional. Systemic Functional Linguistics postulates that the relationship between a language and the social functions that it serves is reflected in the internal organisation of the language. A grammar is thus not arbitrary but motivated and its features can be explained by the uses to which a language is put. Meanings, moreover, are created in and through language and not merely encoded by it.

According to the systemic functional methodology, function, however, does not amount to an inventory of the things we do with language but with more general and abstract categories. First, language functions to interpret and to represent the world – real or imaginary - around us in terms of actions, actors, objects, relationships of time and space, and so on. Second, language has to express logical relationships such as ‘and’ and ‘or’. Third, language expresses the participant roles and statuses of speakers and the way speakers act or try to act on others. Finally language has to do these three things at the same time, relating what is being said now to what has been said before as well as relating it to the context of situation in which it is being produced.

We regard political discourse as a subject of linguocultural studies as this paradigm of research, namely the broad understanding of culture, enables us to unite and carry out integral analysis of those aspects of political discourse that form its interdisciplinary essence as well as its genre-stylistic typicality. Linguocultural analysis of political discourse implies effective use of the experience and the knowledge that have been gained and stored throughout years in such humanities as politology, philosophy, rhetoric, linguistics, sociology, psychology and hermeneutics. We think that the main instrument of such analysis of political discourse is its anthropocentric-communicative interpretation with the help of the three-dimensional semiotic model implying the integral study of its semantic, syntactic and pragmatic aspects.

The interdisciplinary linguocultural methodology of research enables us to consider political discourse as an intersubjective and interactional verbal communication performed via text the main communicative purpose of which is the struggle for political power by manipulating or controlling public opinion. In the theory of Discourse Analysis the term *interaction* implies co-participation and cooperation of the communicants in the verbal discourse while *intersubjectivity* is understood as their togetherness, experienced psychologically and phenomenologically (Makarov 2003: 39). Accordingly, scholars concentrate on the study of pragmatic aspect of political discourse as pragmatics deals with concrete situations in which concrete communicants participate with their concrete intentions and psycho-emotional dispositions.

In view of the above-said, we assume that linguocultural interdisciplinary methodology of analysis combines the research instruments of both critical discourse analysis and systemic functional linguistics within its framework thus enabling us to determine the system of those linguocultural and pragmatic peculiarities that creates genre-stylistic typicality of political discourse.

### Results: Linguocultural and Pragmatic Features of Political Discourse

On the basis of the data provided by the linguocultural interpretation of political discourse, we have worked out a system of features that forms its interdisciplinary semiotic essence. These features comprise: institutionality and illocutionary function of political discourse, its linguistic diglossia, informational-communicative specificity, polemic and theatrical nature, abundance of slogans, ambiguity and esoterism, metaphorization and manipulating with symbols, the addressee factor and the interactional peculiarities of political discourse, specific contact with the audience and its dependence on mass media. Below we offer a brief analysis of these peculiarities.

**1. Institutionality and illocutionary function of political discourse.** A person joins this or that institutional situation not only in a particular social role but with a definite purpose as well. For instance, the fundamental goal of *scientific discourse* is polemics which aims at seeking the truth in the process of scientific cognition of the objective world; the purpose of *religious discourse* lies in uniting people in this or that religion; *juridical discourse* focuses on regulating legal relations among the subjects of certain socium; the goal of *pedagogical discourse* can be defined as socialization of a person, etc. Unlike them, the intentional basis, that is, illocutionary force of *political discourse*, is the struggle for political power in its different manifestations, be it coming to power or its consolidation, winning supporters or defeating opponents in various fields of activities (such as election campaigns, etc.), regulating the distribution of resources or something else.

**2. Linguistic diglossia of political discourse.** It implies simultaneous functioning of the propagandistic-political and the general subsystems of the language. According to Austrian scholar Ruth Wodak, political language seems to exist between two poles. On the one hand, it represents a special, functionally determined language whereas, on the other hand, it can be treated as a political jargon of an ideologically united group of people (Wodak 1989: 138). Therefore, political language has to perform juxtapositional functions: it should be easily understood by masses of people, but when necessary, political discourse has to be user-oriented, that is, directed and comprehensible only for definite social groups of people.

**3. Informative-communicative peculiarities of political discourse.** Linguists use the term ‘informativity’ to designate the extent to which a presentation is new or unexpected for the receivers. Every text is at least somewhat informative. Texts with particularly low informativity are likely to cause boredom. We assume that informative-communicative peculiarities of political discourse are predetermined by its illocutionary function and subinstitutional type. Accordingly, we differentiate between three communicative types of a politician’s discourse:

- informative in the linguistic sense of this term, focusing on the freshness of the information contained in his/her speech;
- conventional-phatic which is of stereotypical and ritual character and doesn’t aim to provide the addressee with new information (for instance, the president’s speech at the inauguration ceremony is stereotypical and conventional.);
- emotional-expressive whose illocutionary function is to affect public opinion (for instance, emotional-expressiveness of political discourse is regarded to be one of the election strategies of politicians.).

**4. Polemic and theatrical nature of political discourse.** It implies “war with words” (cf. Greek *polemikos* = *warlike, hostile*) and “political show” that are aimed at manipulating public opinion with two major purposes: either to win people’s support or provoke their negative attitude and emotions against political opponents. This accounts for the situation when a politician’s speech is appreciated by his/her supporters while it gets a negative evaluation from their opponents. Political debates often turn into war with words. Polemic and theatrical features of political discourse are particularly characteristic of election campaigns when the victory of a politician or this or that party is predetermined not so much by their political platform as by the fact how successfully the show staged by their image-makers affects the public opinion.

**5. Abundance of slogans in political discourse.** Slogans can be regarded as a peculiar type of social-political advertisements. Unlike a commercial advertising text whose illocutionary function is to stimulate people’s buying activity by convincing them they have a problem and offering them a certain product as a solution to their problem, a political slogan focuses on regulating ideological relationships in the society by informing people about ideological-conceptual platforms of political parties and subjects. The effectiveness of a political slogan depends on the fact how well the ideology declared in the slogan in a maximally condensed form appeals to public consciousness.

**6. Ambiguity and esoterism of political discourse.** We consider these characteristics of political discourse as a politician’s communicative-pragmatic strategies aimed at:

- disguising and neutralizing undesirable information and facts;
- concealing the truth and deliberately provoking distraction in masses;
- avoiding responsibility by anonymity and depersonalization;
- saving one’s own political rating and image;
- avoiding public conflicts in the course of discourse.

**7. Metaphorization and manipulating with symbols.** These features of political discourse create its emotional expressiveness which aims to increase the impact of political discourse on public opinion. Politicians use figurative language to control public consciousness particularly during the political and economic crises when they are trying to persuade the society to do and believe such things they would neither believe nor do otherwise (Chilton & Ilyin 1993, De Landtsheer & Feldman 1998; 2000). According to George Lakoff, this has been the communicative strategy of President George Bush who, by employing “Strict Father”, “Nurturant Parent” and some other metaphorical-cognitive models which underlie American political rhetoric, managed to sermon people’s moral values, depict Saddam Hussein’s character as immoral, activate people’s moral priorities and appeal both to conservatives and liberals in the USA to help the oppressed people to get rid of the tyrant thus justifying war first in the Gulf and later in Iraqi (Lakoff 1991; 1995).

The thesis about the metaphorical nature of political thought in crises was substantiated by the experiment which was conducted under the supervision of Prof. Chirst’l de Landtsheer at the Amsterdam University in 1998. A special group of linguists performed a content-analysis of the recordings of speeches delivered by more than 700 members of Euro-Parliament during the period of 1981-1993. The experiment revealed that there was a direct correlation between the social-economic and political situation in the state and the degree of metaphorization of politicians’ speeches: the more aggravated the social-economic situation in the country was, the more metaphors of pessimistic and aggressive nature politicians used in their speeches. This enabled the scholars to conclude that the degree of metaphorization of political discourse might be considered as a linguistic marker or indicator of a political and social-economic crisis in the country (De Landtsheer 1998a).

**8. The addressee factor and its interactional peculiarities.** Political discourse is usually directed at double audience: concrete audience, physically attending the political event and participating in the discourse, and so called “implied audience”, involving masses of people, sometimes the whole population

of the state. Accordingly, we can speak about two types of addressee: concrete and implied. As for the interactional peculiarities of the addressee, they are manifested via different responsive activities of the audience which can be mainly of three types: passive, actively expressing solidarity and oppositional-antagonistic.

**9. Specificity of contact in political discourse and its dependence on mass media.** It implies two types of contact with the addressee: direct and mediated through mass media. None of the other institutional types of discourse depends so much on mass media as the political one. The dominant among the main functions of mass media is informing the citizens on the activities of the institutions, recontextualizing and translating institutional language into a language of their own. Therefore we regard mass media as the main instrument of political influence upon public opinion acting as mediators between political subjects and people.

Scholars, who work on this problem, claim that the great impact of mass media on people explains the intense pressure, journalists experience from the government as well as from oppositional leaders (Nimmo & Combs 1983; Wodak 1989; Шейгал 2004). Newspapers, radio and television acquire power and authority not only because they inform the public but also because they form public opinion and set the public agenda. Political actors, who perhaps once scorned journalists, seek their attention and submit to interviews in order to gain access to this new public arena, which is not regulated exclusively by the formal institutions. Because of the media, citizens may gain new perspectives on the affairs of the institutions, and construct their own discourse around them, at the workplace, at home or at public meeting places, and this kind of talk is part of political socialization. Bayley (2004) extends the role of mass media claiming that "... first the radio, then television and finally the internet - they themselves become an arena for political activity, at least as important as the institutions. Governments continue to explain, justify and legitimate their actions to parliament but they may prefer to do so first to the media. Political parties and other groups stage press conferences and publish press releases and their leaders subject themselves to interviews. News programmes are available 24 hours a day and political information is available at the click of a mouse".

Thus politics, which since its inception has been a primarily linguistic activity, is characterised by multiple layers of discourse: dialogue in and between the institutions, dialogue between the media and the institutions, dialogue between the media and the parties, and dialogue between the media and the citizens.

## Conclusion

Summing up our paper, we can conclude that all the considered theoretical issues in it, as well as the above-offered system of the linguocultural and pragmatic peculiarities of political discourse, indicate that this institutional type of discourse represents a multidimensional semiotic phenomenon, each dimension requiring a number of special interdisciplinary studies. We also think that the same peculiarities of political discourse are of paramount importance from the point of applied linguistics as, in our opinion, they form the theoretical basis that should underlie its teaching at higher schools. We therefore hope the paper will be helpful both to teachers and students who are interested in politics.

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