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Analysing Political Discourse

Theory and Practice

Reviewed by Alireza Salehi Nejad (Department of British Studies, University of Tehran)

In this novel work, Paul Chilton expends a considerable amount of effort examining relations between the use of language and political discourse (p. xi). Many realist linguists in the past century claimed that language should be evaluated as the innate part of a human mind. The scholarly interest in the public use of language is followed by critical theory and the Frankfurt School of social theory and philosophy, which considered language rather as a social phenomenon than a mental phenomenon and intended to validate the crucial relationship between language, politics and culture.

Analysing Political Discourse with a comprehensive introduction takes a fresh linguistic-oriented approach towards political interaction, discourse, and language, which can attract the interest of scholars from different disciplines in cognitive and social sciences such as linguistics, political science, psychology, and religious studies. Paul Chilton not only analyses the integration of language and politics, but also offers concrete analyses of actual specimens of political text with regards to semantics, pragmatics, evolution and discourse processing.

The book is divided into four sections and eleven chapters; comprising a theoretical foundation in the first four chapters, followed by illustration and analysis of political text in a domestic (UK) context in part two and a global context in part three. The final chapter, after a concise contextualization, synthesizes the analytical notions examined throughout the book and offers some concluding thoughts for

formulating a theory of language and politics by integrating human interaction and mental representations of the world.

The first part of the book entitled 'Political animals as articulate mammals', on the basis of Aristotle's premise that humans use language to pursue their own benefits and are political creatures with a unique aptitude for speech (4), covers four chapters on human cognitive linguistic ability, including thoughts on its evolution and relation to social order, and what might be broadly labeled as politics.

Chapters 1 and 2, entitled 'Politics and Language' and 'Language and Politics', discuss the nature and evolution of language, linguistic ability, and its ties with politics as a means of cooperation and social interaction. Chilton believes that both language and political comportment are constructed from cognitive endowments rather than social practices, while both being closely interrelated. (29) By the same token, Chilton intends to challenge the Chomskyan position on the social intelligence language module of generative creativity, with the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis on Linguistic Relativity in Chapter 3 and 4 entitled 'Interaction' and 'Representation', by evaluating the linguistic, discursive, and communicative dimensions of politics in the first two chapter. He sketches the philosophy of language and cognitive linguistics to explore the ways in which we think and behave politically, concluding with overviewing and comparing Paul Grice's cooperative principle with Jurgen Habermas's validity claims and communicative rationality.

The three chapters covering 'political interviews', 'parliamentary language' and 'foreigners' in the second part of the book, entitled "The domestic arena", offer models for the analysis of political discourse in the given national and cultural settings. This part of the book provides examples from the United Kingdom to illustrate including Labour MP Margaret Beckett's interview with BBC 4 before the 2001 General Election, explicitly agreed institutional rules of parliamentary language, and Enoch Powell's (the Former Financial Secretary to the Treasury) 1968 Rivers of Blood speech.

Similarly, Part III entitled 'The Global Arena', examines political discourse beyond national borders, mostly focusing on war, terrorism, and military intervention. Bill Clinton's speech on the Kosovo War in 1999, George W. Bush's speeches following the 9/11 attacks, the English translation of Osama bin Laden's speech aired by Al Jazeera, and

George W. Bush's speech entitled 'Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance' given at the National Cathedral in 2001 are used to illustrate. In both Part II and III, the political discourse analysis is significantly colored by cognitive linguistics and the philosophy of language, and Chilton implies the prominence of language in the representation.

Part IV entitled "Toward a Theory of Language and Politics" is a single chapter that offers concluding views regarding the necessity for a theory of language and politics on the basis of human interaction and mental representations of the world. Whereas the author seeks the means of communication in contemporary language, societies, political trends, and culture by focusing on critical theory and cognitive linguistics, he claims that political discourse uses binary conceptualizations and exploits spatial cognition and metaphorical reasoning.

To conclude, the book's merit of two dedicated parts for practicing theory by sketching out concrete examples of political discourse analyses is considerable. However, the multi-dimensional framework for analysing great volumes of political text or diverse genres of political discourse could be flawed since Chilton never clarified his methodology for compiling a corpus of political text. Even though the integration of methodologies may benefit political discourse analysis beyond a particular sample of text or genre, neither the conceptual nor the empirical components of the book are adequately cogent. Moreover, the review of literature is not elaborate, and the text is not appropriate for those who have absolutely no knowledge of speech act theory, rhetoric and generative linguistics, social theory, and cognitive science. Chilton mentions that he does not know whether discourse analysis may have any serious impact on the 'genocides, oppressions and exploitations we are still witnessing' (x), and he leaves the discussions open to debate. Generally speaking, the author provides an inventive contribution towards understanding political discourse, especially by touching upon detailed micro-analyses of samples, hence I recommend "*Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*" to students who are interested in theoretical approaches of studying language and politics.