
What is Political Discourse Analysis?

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1. Introduction

This paper will explore some responses to the seemingly naive question "What is Political Discourse Analysis?". Instead of being normative, in the sense of wanting to prescribe what political discourse analysis *should* be, it rather aims to be programmatic in another, more analytical way, and try to provide some answers to the question what *could* be an adequate way of 'doing' political discourse analysis.

Obviously, the very notion of Political Discourse Analysis (henceforth PDA), is ambiguous. Its most common interpretation is that PDA focuses on the analysis of 'political discourse', although we then still need to determine which discourse is political and which is not. On the other hand, there is also a more critical reading of the label, viz., as a political approach to discourse and discourse analysis, e.g., in the way understood in contemporary Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Without collapsing *political* discourse analysis into *critical* discourse analysis, we would like to retain both aspects of the ambiguous designation: PDA is both about political discourse, and it is also a critical enterprise. In the spirit of contemporary approaches in CDA this would mean that critical-political discourse analysis deals especially with the reproduction of political *power*, *power abuse* or *domination* through political discourse, including the various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance. In particular such an analysis deals with the discursive conditions and consequences of social and political *inequality* that results from such domination (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993b).

Having localized political discourse analysis in the broader critical approach to discourse, the main aim of this paper is to spell out what we mean by political discourse and how it can be studied most interestingly, that is, critically. One major point in our argument is that such an analysis should not merely be a contribution to discourse studies, but also to political science and the social sciences more generally. This means, among other things, that PDA should be able

to answer genuine and relevant political questions and deal with issues that are discussed in political science.

That the analysis of political discourse is relevant for the new cross-discipline of discourse studies hardly needs any further argument. Indeed, most scholars doing political discourse analysis are linguists and discourse analysts (see, e.g., Chilton 1985, 1988; Geis 1987; Wilson 1990; Wodak & Menz 1990). However, when we consider the *use* or application of discourse approaches in political science, we find that it is one of the few social sciences that so far have barely been infected by the modern viruses of the study of text and talk. As we shall see, what we find in political science are studies on political *communication* and *rhetoric* (Bitzer, 1981; Chaffee 1975; Graber 1981; Swanson & Nimmo 1990). Only some of these approaches have recently taken a more discourse analytical orientation (Gamson 1992; Thompson 1987d).

In this respect this paper at the same time formulates a plea that advocates a broader use of discourse analysis in political science. Of course such a plea can make an impression only if we have something to sell that political scientists want to buy. To present the argument that most phenomena in politics are forms of text and talk may be obvious, especially to a discourse analyst, but it is as such not a good reason for political scientists to change their current approach to a more discourse analytical one: Few scholars are prepared to 'reduce' their field, or their methods, to those of another field. Hence, we must show that problems in political science can in principle be studied more completely and sometimes more adequately when it is realized that the issues have an important discursive dimension.

2. Defining political discourse

We have seen that political discourse analysis first of all should be able to define its proper object of study: What exactly is 'political discourse'? The easiest, and not altogether misguided, answer is that political discourse is identified by its *actors* or *authors*, viz., *politicians*. Indeed, the vast bulk of studies of political discourse is about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, such as presidents and prime ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties, both at the local, national and international levels. Some of the studies of politicians take a discourse analytical approach (Carbó 1984; Dillon et al. 1990; Harris 1991; Holly 1990; Maynard



1994; Seidel 1988b). In the USA, especially studies of presidential rhetoric are numerous (see, e.g., Campbell & Jamieson 1990; Hart 1984; Snyder & Higgins 1990; Stuckey 1989; Thompson 1987e; Windt 1983, 1990).

Politicians in this sense are the group of people who are being paid for their (political) activities, and who are being elected or appointed (or self-designated) as the central players in the polity. This way of defining political discourse is hardly different from the identification of medical, legal or educational discourse with the respective participants in the domains of medicine, law or education.

This is the relatively easy part (if we can agree on what 'politics' means). However, although crucial in political science and PDA as actors and authors of political discourse and other political practices, politicians are not the only participants in the domain of politics. From the interactional point of view of discourse analysis, we therefore should also include the various *recipients* in political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the 'masses', and other groups or categories. That is, once we locate politics and its discourses in the public sphere, many more participants in political communication appear on the stage.

Obviously, the same is true for the definition of the field of media discourse, which also needs to focus on its audiences. And also in medical, legal or educational discourse, we not only think of participants such as doctors, lawyers or teachers, but also of patients, defendants and students. Hence, the delimitation of political discourse by its principal authors' is insufficient and needs to be extended to a more complex picture of all its relevant participants, whether or not these are actively involved in political discourse, or merely as recipients in one-way modes of communication.

There is another complication, which is associated with the very delimitation of the field of politics. Obviously, it is not only official or professional politics and politicians that are involved in the polity. Political activity and the political process also involve people as citizens and voters, people as members of pressure and issue groups, demonstrators and dissidents, and so on (Verba, et al., 1993). All these groups and individuals, as well as their organizations and institutions, may take part in the political process, and many of them are actively involved in political discourse. That is, a broad definition of politics implies a vast extension of the scope of the term 'political discourse' if we identify such practices by *all participants in the political process*.

Another, but overlapping way of delimiting the object of study is by focusing on the nature of the *activities or practices* being accomplished by political text and

talk rather than only on the nature of its participants. That is, even politicians are not always involved in political discourse, and the same is obviously true for most other participants, such as the public or citizens in general, or even members of social movements or action groups. This also means that categorization of people and groups should at least be strict, viz., in the sense that their members are participants of political discourse only when acting *as political actors*, and hence as participating in political actions, such as governing, ruling, legislating, protesting, dissenting, or voting. Specifically interesting for PDA is then that many of these political actions or practices are at the same time discursive practices. In other words, forms of text and talk in such cases have political *functions* and *implications*.

Although there are many more ways we may approach the problems of definition and delimitation, we may finally take the whole *context* as decisive for the categorization of discourse as 'political' or not. Participants and actions are the core of such contexts, but we may further analyze such contexts broadly in terms of political and communicative *events* and *encounters*, with their own settings (time, place, circumstances), occasions, intentions, functions, goals, and legal or political implications. That is, politicians talk politically also (or only) if they and their talk are contextualized in such communicative events such as cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, rallies, interviews with the media, bureaucratic practices, protest demonstrations, and so on. Again, text and context mutually define each other, in the sense that a session of parliament is precisely such only when elected politicians are debating (talking, arguing, etc.) in parliament buildings in an official capacity (*as* MPs), and during the official (officially opened) session of parliament.

This integration of political texts and contexts in political encounters may of course finally be characterized in more abstract terms as accomplishing specific political aims and goals, such as making or influencing political decisions, that is decisions that pertain to joint action, the distribution of social resources, the establishment or change of official norms, regulations and laws, and so on. That this domain is essentially fuzzy, hardly needs to be emphasized. What may be clear for official political decision making by politicians at all levels, or even for various forms of political protesters and dissidents, is less clear for the decisions and discourse of, say, corporate managers, professors or doctors in other but overlapping domains of social life. In the sense that the latter's decisions and practices affect the public at large or large segments of the public, also their actions and discourse become more or less 'political'.

However, in order to avoid the extension of politics and political discourse to a domain that is so large that it would coincide with the study of public discourse in general we shall not treat such forms of discourse-with-possible-political-effects as political discourse. That is, corporate, medical or educational discourse, even when public and even when affecting the life of (many) citizens, will here not be included as forms of political discourse. And although we may readily subscribe to the well-known feminist slogan that the personal is political, we shall similarly not take all interpersonal talk (not even of gender) as political discourse.

The same is true for the discourses that pertain to the societal realms of 'race' or class. Since people and their practices may be categorized in many ways, most groups and their members will occasionally (also) 'act politically', and we may propose that 'acting politically', and hence also political discourse, are essentially defined *contextually*, viz., in terms of special events or practices of which the aims, goals or functions are maybe not exclusively but at least primarily political. This excludes the talk of politicians outside of political contexts, and includes the discourse of all other groups, institutions or citizens as soon as they participate in political events. From our discourse analytical point of view, such a contextual definition at the same time suggests that the study of political discourse should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures.

3. The domain of politics

We see that ultimately the definition of political discourse can hardly escape the definition of the very notion of 'politics' itself. This paper cannot do such a complex job, of course, also because there is not a single and unambiguous definition of what 'politics' is. Indeed, the whole discipline of political science is the answer to such a question. And depending on studies in political science, politics may thus not only include all official or unofficial political actors, events, encounters, settings, actions and discourses, but also, inore abstractly, political *processes* (like 'perestrojka'), political *systems* (like deinocracy and communism), political *ideologies* (like liberalism), and political (group) *relations* (such as power, inequality, hegemony, and oppression). In all there cases, the polity not

only involves political actors, events, relations, practices or properties, but also social, economic and cultural ones.

In order to spell out the consequences of such a characterization of the domain of politics for political discourse, let us briefly specify some of these properties. We shall later see that these will also appear as relevant properties of the political contexts which we have selected as the major sets of criteria to distinguish political from other forms (or orders, or domains of) discourse. We shall begin with the more general and abstract categories and end with the more specific properties of political contexts. Our characterization of each relevant category will be minimal, since each of the notions involved would require (and did result in) book-length treatment in political science. Our aim is only to select some relevant categories for the definition of political text and context.

- Societal domain or field

The domain of Politics is the highest, most inclusive category comprising the various aspects of politics specified below. Such a domain label, like that of e.g. Education, Health, Law, Business, the Arts, etc., plays an important role in the commonsense definition of political actions and discourse. It may also be negatively used in judging illegitimate practices in other domains, e.g., when research is prohibited or problematized because it is no longer in the domain of Science but in the domain of Politics. It is assumed that social actors generally know in which 'field' they are currently acting. Such categorizations may even be more general than the domains mentioned above, viz., those of the Private vs. the Public Sphere, or Business vs. Pleasure, or the Personal vs. the Social.

- Political systems

These systems are among the most obvious commonsense categories of the domain of politics: Communism, dictatorship, democracy, fascism, or the social democracy, among others, are generally seen as typically 'political', e.g., in the description of countries, nation-states, political parties, politicians or political acts. These systems are usually understood as referring to the organization and distribution of power and the principles of decision making.

- Political values

At the most general and abstract level, shared cultural values may be declared typical for political systems. Thus, Freedom is not only a political relationship (see below), but also a basic political value organizing more specific political ideologies and attitudes. The same is true for the values of Solidarity, Equality and Tolerance. Ideological groups and categories will especially also define themselves (and their goals) in terms of their most cherished (preferential) values. Thus, for dominated groups, political Freedom, Justice, Equality or Independence may

be more prominent values than for instance the social values of Harmony, Submission, or Sympathy.

- *Political ideologies*

What political systems are at the level of the social and economic organization of power, political ideologies define the socio-cognitive counterpart of such systems. They are the basic belief systems that underlie and organize the shared social representations of groups and their members. In that respect, communism or democracy may be seen both as a system and as a complex set of basic social representations, involving relevant values and sustaining specific attitudes about properties (like power, equality, etc.) that characterize the system.

- *Political institutions*

The domain of politics is typically analyzed as consisting of a number of political institutions, which, top down, organize the political field, actors and actions, such as the State, Governments, Parliament or Congress (the Legislature), city councils, state agencies, and so on.

- *Political organizations*

Less (legally, constitutionally) official are the large number of political organizations that structure political action, such as political parties, political clubs, NGOs, and so on.

- *Political groups*

Independently of their organization in political organizations, collections of political actors may form more or less formal, cohesive or permanent groups, such as opponents, dissidents, demonstrators, diques, coalitions, crowds, and in general socio-political movements.

- *Political actors*

Besides paid, elected representatives ('politicians') the class of political actors is commonsensically defined by all those who are 'engaged in politics', by accomplishing political action, including demonstrators, lobbyists and strikers.

- *Political relations*

The various structural units identified above are connected by multiple relations, some of which are typical for the field of politics: Power, power abuse, hegemony, oppression, tolerance, equality and inequality, among many others, especially define how the State relates to its citizens, or how certain political groups are positioned relative to others. Probably the most pervasive of these political relation terms is that of Freedom.

- *Political process*

Passing from the 'structural' analysis of political systems, organizations and relations to a more 'dynamic' conceptualization of the domain of politics, the political process is the overall term that categorizes complex, long-term, sequences of political actions. Governing, legislation, opposition, solidarity, agenda-setting, and policies are among the prototypical aspects of such political processes.

- *Political actions*

At the meso and micro level of the political domain, we finally deal with concrete acts and interactions that are typical for the political domain, such as sessions and meetings of political institutions, organizations and groups, passing laws, voting, demonstrations, campaigning, revolutions, and so on. It is at this level of everyday interaction that 'engaging in politics' is most directly visible and experienced. Such actions are also defined in terms of their intentions, purposes, goals and functions within the more complex political process. Thus a session of parliament is functional within the process of legislation, and a meeting of a group of dissidents part of the process of opposition or resistance.

- *Political discourse*

Obviously a specific example of political action and interaction, political discourse (and its many genres) may here be singled out as a prominent way of 'doing politics'. Indeed, most political actions (such as passing laws, decision making, meeting, campaigning, etc.) are largely discursive. Thus, besides parliamentary debates, bills, laws, government or ministerial regulations, and other institutional forms of text and talk, we find such political discourse genres as propaganda, political advertising, political speeches, media interviews, political talk shows on TV, party programs, ballots, and so on.

- *Political cognition*

In the same way as ideologies are the cognitive counterpart of systems, organizations or groups at the broader, societal and political macro-levels, political actors, actions and discourse are locally guided and interpreted and evaluated by various forms of political cognition, such as shared social knowledge and political attitudes, as well as more specific knowledge (models) of concrete political events. The most pervasive common-sense notion of this category is probably that of 'public opinion'.

This brief categorization of the structures and processes of the political domain, first of all provides us with a tentative positioning of political discourse among other properties of the political system and process. Defined as a special case of political action, and as functional or strategic part of the political process, we thus have a first, still highly informal, approximation of its conditions and consequences, and hence of the goals and functions that are typical for its accomplishment and contextualization. Thus, a parliamentary debate, a propaganda leaflet, a campaign speech or a revolutionary slogan are among the many genres of discourse for which we may now may spell out, at least tentatively, the overall societal domain, as well as the type or nature of the political system, institutions, groups, group relations, actors and overall interaction categories that

characterize such genres. For a parliamentary (or House) debate, such a characterization may be the following:

- Domain: Politics.
- System: Democracy.
- Institution: Parliament.
- Values and ideologies: Democracy, group and party ideologies.
- Organizations: Political parties, lobbyists.
- Political actors: Members of parliament, cabinet ministers.
- Political relations: Legislative power.
- Political process: Legislation.
- Political action: Political decision making.
- Political cognitions: Attitudes about the relevant issue (e.g. about abortion, affirmative action or nuclear energy).

For such a first political definition and contextualization, political leaflets and slogans would have other actors as participants, other groups being involved, and different types of political process (e.g., dissent) (see e.g., Reboul, 1975). This brief characterization at the same time seems to suggest that political practices may also need further defining characteristics of political *contexts*, such as time, location (space), buildings, objects, and so on. Indeed, parliamentary debates usually take place 'in' the parliament buildings and formal meeting rooms, furniture, objects (like the gavel of the Speaker of the House), etc. Time and speaker turn allocation will be strictly regulated by the Speaker. Similarly, demonstration settings will be typically the street, involve walking or marching, shouting, people carrying banners or shouting slogans, and so on (for some details, see e.g., Boynton 1991; Carbó 1984, 1992; Tetlock 1984; van Dijk 1993a, 1993c).

Again, we see that the richest characterization of genres of political discourse is not merely based on discursive properties per se, but also needs a systematic contextual definition in terms of relevant systems, organizations, actors, settings and cognitions, among others. Indeed, some discourses may be formally virtually identical, but whereas the one would be legal or educational, the other may be political, given the roles or status of the participants, the goals of the actors or the functions of the interaction. Indeed, interrogations may take place in congressional hearings, in courtrooms and classrooms or police stations, and in most of these cases official speakers will ask official (legally binding) questions, but the precise roles of the speakers and recipients and the aims of the interaction will be different.

4. Political discourse as political action

Alter this initial positioning of discourse in the realm of politics, we may now turn to a closer look at political discourse itself. It has been emphasized that both in politics and in political science, such discourse is primarily seen as a form of political action, and as part of the political process. Such a view is perfectly compatible with the dominant paradigm in most social approaches to discourse, viz., that discourse is a form of social action and interaction (Atkinson & Heritage 1984; Boden & Zimmennan 1991; van Dijk 1985). Although this has especially been shown to hold for spoken interaction or dialogue, it is obvious that also written texts, or rather writing texts, are a form of social and political action. Textual (written, printed, computer) communication may not be face-to-face, but therefore no less a form of action and interaction. Accomplishing political action, or simply 'doing politics' by text and talk is obviously more than producing or perceiving discourse in political contexts and by political actors. Thus, a conversational side-sequence or non-topical talk (on a personal or otherwise non-political topic; see Jefferson 1972) of parliamentarians in parliament need not be political discourse at all, although all other contextual conditions are satisfied, and similar examples may be mentioned for most political contexts. Indeed, such a sequence does not 'count' as an instance of political-parliamentary discourse at all. It will not be recorded in the Acts (Records, etc.) of Parliament, not only because it was a personal and not a public intervention, but also because it may be irrelevant to the business at hand, as defined by the agenda, and the overall purpose of the parliamentary session. Indeed, as is typically the case in classroom, courtrooms and other institutional settings, such 'irrelevant' side-sequences may be prohibited by the Speaker, chair or others controlling discourse in such a setting.

Hence, to continue this example, discourse in parliament is only political when it is overtly part of, and functional within the parliamentary debate, if it is 'for the record', and if parliamentarians intend and are heard to contribute to the parliamentary business at hand, such as debating a Bill. That is, besides speaking publicly and for the record, they are thus expected to speak *as* member of parliament, and *as* member or representative of their party. Technically, a number of further conditions are required, such as speaking out loud, sometimes only when they have been allocated a speaking turn (except in special cases, as in interruptions, where allowed see Carbó 1992), as addressing the assembly, and when speaking relevantly, i.e., on topic'.

We see that for this case of institutional talk, several rather precise conditions must be satisfied. The same is true for the institutional (legal, political or constitutional) consequences: Once spoken, such speech will be recorded, corrected, printed and possibly published or otherwise made public, and will 'count as' the intervention and position of a member of parliament or of a party on the issue or topic at hand. In some cases (e.g. in the U.S. Congress) 'revisions' may be made, and there is a formula that precisely suggests such possible revisions, which may be seen as a (delayed) political form of repair in conversation. Similar revisions-repairs may obtain when politicians require to 'authorize' the text of interviews given to the media.

The point of this (partial) analysis is especially that political talk and text, at least in similar cases, is such only when constitutive part of the political process of e.g. governing, legislating, election campaigns, party propaganda, and so on. As is the case for many other elite speakers and groups, also political actors will often speak, but 'off the record'. Apart from problems of attribution, identification, and privacy, the institutional consequence is especially that such talk does not 'count as' public political discourse. It won't be recorded and published and the speaker is not politically accountable. The question here is whether off-the-record talk of politicians is a form of political discourse, as defined here. Indeed, such 'privileged communications' with journalists form a special and quite common genre, and have important political (and media) functions: It may be a strategy enabling unofficial critique or opposition against (the leaders of) the own institution, organization or party, which when made public allows for media or popular contributions to political decision making and change. Given these political conditions and consequences of off-the-record-talk, we must indeed assume again that such conversations are obviously 'political' in a broader sense, viz., as defined by their immediate functions and consequences: Political discourse, when published, need not be attributed to specific politicians. Even when usually part (as quotes) of media discourse, such textual consequences of off-the-record talk at the same time have a political function.

What is relatively straightforward for official and institutional political texts and contexts may be increasingly fuzzy for all less official situations of political text and talk, even by politicians. Indeed, the informal side-sequence conversation in parliament may well be about a political topic or even about the issue on the agenda, and have a functional role in the preparation of speakers, or in the information exchange or mutual persuasion of members of parliament. The same is true for talk of MPs outside the official setting, viz., in the hallways, in offices

or elsewhere, with other MPs, with lobbyists, representatives of social or political organizations or simply with citizens. Again, the categorization and analysis of such talk as political discourse will be based on a number of structural criteria for such texts and contexts: Roles and goals of speakers, inain topics, special conditions and circumstances and especially the functionality of such discourse, for instance in view of influencing the political position of MPs or members of Congress, and hence as part of the political process of decision and policy making.

Although such abstract criteria may be rather clear, actual instances of such talk may not always be easily categorizable and recognizable as political. For instance, is all that a politician or a candidate for a political position says during a campaign 'political', even informal talk with citizens, representatives, campaign co-workers? Many of such conversations may have fuzzy, multiple or complex goals, in which public and private, informal and formal goals, and hence properties of different discourse genres may be mixed. In view of our analysis, however, we continue to specify that as soon as a discourse or part of a discourse is directly or indirectly functional in the political process (e.g., of campaigning, canvassing or otherwise of influencing or being influenced in view of elections), such discourse should be categorized and analyzed as being (also, mainly) political. Such problems of categorization and genre-delimitation also suggest that communicative contexts should feature not simply categories for goals, but also a hierarchy of goals.

This is not merely a definitional problem for a sophisticated and explicit (political) discourse analysis, but also essential for the understanding of the political process itself: Not only the official 'administration' (governing, legislation, the bureaucracy, etc.) is largely a discursive-political process, but also the wider field of politics, including propaganda, campaigning, canvassing, media interviews and influencing or being influenced by citizens or 'public opinion'.

Outside of official or semi-official politics, e.g. at the bottom of the large array of citizens's groups, pressure groups, social moveiments, the media, social organizations, and so on, the incidence of 'political discourse' is even less straightforward. If (members of) any group publicly or covertly act such as to influence the political process (e.g. elections), then again the contextual (conditionality and functionality) criterio will categorize such discourse as political. However, whether more or less public, or more or less 'about politics', there are many types of discourse which do have such a function or effect (like news and editorials or background articles and TV programs in the media). For instance, an editorial commenting on a government decision, a parliamentary

debate or the actions or antics of politicians, obviously has a possible political condition and consequence. However, we would not categorize editorial, news, or most TV programs as 'political' discourse as defined here, but essentially as media discourse, even when also directed at politicians. If not, large part of the news (when *about* politics) would also need to be categorized as political discourse if we would ignore the contextual hierarchy of goals according to which media discourse does not primarily have a political goal beyond the information of the public at large.

In the everyday lives of (the members of) pressure groups, parties, NGOs, social movements, or other organizations, we may have multiple discourses that have mixed socio-political roles. As soon as the communicative contexts are clearly defined (e.g. in terms of the usual conditions of a meeting, a debate on election strategies, or the preparation of propaganda), also the functionality and hence the type of political sub-genre may be established. But whether for everyday personal talk (e.g. about personal involvement in political action) or official declarations of media or corporate or other institutional actors, the main functions may not be political even when there are indirect, implicit or otherwise not very prominent political conditions or consequences.

Since practically all text and talk indirectly has socio-political conditions and consequences, we therefore again require a more or less arbitrary set of criteria according to which discourse may be categorized as (mainly) political, viz., when it has a direct functional role as a form of political action in the political process.

5. Discourse structures

Having thus emphasized the crucial contextual dimension in the definition of political discourse and its many sub-genres, we may now focus on the structures and strategies of political text and talk itself. We face similar questions and problems here when we try to establish whether there are any properties that distinguish political discourse from discourse in other societal domains (like education, business, religion), or that enables us to differentiate the sub-genres of political text and talk. Indeed, in which respect does a parliamentary speech distinguish itself from a campaign speech of a politician, except from the setting and the participants? Above we already encountered some textual conditions of political discourse, viz., speaking audibly, directing oneself to an audience, and

respecting a topical (semantic) organization that is compatible with the issue on the (political) agenda at hand.

One question in such an inquiry is whether there are any structures of text or talk that are exclusively or prototypically 'political' in the sense that they appear primarily in political discourse, and precisely signal or constitute the political nature of such discourse. Although this is ultimately an empirical question, there are theoretical reasons why this will be quite unlikely. Most, if not all, discourse structures may have many functions, in many different contexts and in many different genres. Except from the obvious case of lexical jargon (typically political words), therefore, we can hardly expect that structures that have so many functions could be reserved only for political genres and contexts.

In other words, once we have analyzed the particular properties of political contexts, political discourse analysis in many respects will be like any other kind of discourse analysis. The specifics of political discourse analysis therefore should be searched for in the relations between discourse structures and political context structures. Thus, whereas metaphors in classroom discourse may have an educational function, metaphors in politics will function in a political context, for instance in the attack on political opponents, the presentation of policies or the legitimation of political power. An account of the structures and strategies of, e.g., phonology, graphics, syntax, meaning, speech acts, style or rhetoric, conversational interactions, among other properties of text and talk is therefore necessarily part of political discourse analysis only if such properties can be politically contextualized.

Despite such rather straightforward conditions on political discourse analysis, we may however ask ourselves whether specific discourse structures are more or less typical and especially more or less effective for the political functions they may have, or even, more specifically, in the specific political contexts in which they might be used. Thus, we know that the 'official language' of government decisions, or the legal jargon of bills, laws and regulations, is both discursively, politically and legally mandatory. Similarly, also parliamentary debates are expected to be held in relatively formal style of address and dialogue. That is, at least for the official, public forms of political text and talk, we seem to have a number of stylistic constraints, which may not be exclusive, but which political discourse shares with other forms of official and public talk and text. Some of the more formulaic expressions, forms of address and textual and dialogical conventions are even specific for bills, laws, regulations, parliamentary debates, or political speeches.

Besides this normativity of official discourse, discourse structures may also satisfy criteria of effectiveness and persuasion. Thus, lexical items not only may be selected because of official criteria of decorum, but also because they effectively emphasize or de-emphasize political attitudes and opinions, garner support, manipulate public opinion, manufacture political consent, or legitimate political power. The same may be true for the selection of topics, for the use of rhetoric figures, the pragmatic management of speech acts, interactional self-presentation, and so on. In other words, maybe the structures of political discourse are seldom exclusive, but typical and effective discourse in political contexts may well have *preferred structures and strategies* that are functional in the adequate accomplishment of political actions in political contexts. Let us examine the various levels and dimensions of discourse structure and see what typical structures and strategies seem to have this status of preferred discursive methods of doing politics'.

5.1. Topics

In principle political discourse may be about virtually any topic. However, given the constraints of the political context discussed above, we may assume that political discourse also exhibits preferred topics. First of all, political discourse will be primarily *about* politics, again as defined above. That is, we may typically expect overall meanings related to political systems, ideologies, institutions, the political process, political actors, and political events. In other words, much political discourse is reflexive. This is not quite trivial, because this reflexivity is not typical for educational, scholarly, or legal discourse. Thus, campaigning politicians will speak about themselves as candidates, about the elections, about voting for them, and the policies they promise to support when elected. They speak about opponents and political enemies and about the bad politics and policies of previous presidents, governments or parliaments. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for speakers of the opposition, for dissidents and for those who challenge political power. More officially, governments or parliaments also refer to their own policies and political actions in decision making discourse. In sum, typically, political discourse is at least partly topically about politics itself.

This is however not the whole story, because whether or not it also refers to various elements of the political domain, political discourse usually combines its topics with those from other societal domains. Thus a debate about immigration policies is not only about government policies, but also about immigration or

minorities, and the same is true for political meetings, discussions, debates, speeches or propaganda about education, health care, drugs, crime, the economy, (un)employment, or foreign affairs. This seems to open up a pandora-box of possible topics and to suggest that formulating topical constraints in political discourse seems pointless. However, even with this broad scope of topics, there *are* such constraints. (Incidentally, one of the major fields lacking in discourse analysis is a sub-discipline of Topics' (Topica) or 'topology' which studies, among other things, what various types of discourses in what situations may be 'about'.)

First of all, if we take topics as semantic macropropositions (van Dijk, 1980), we may observe that the relevant (semantic) participants in such propositions are usually limited, viz., to political institutions and organizations on the one hand (see above), and public, powerful or other elite organizations and actors, on the other hand, such as business corporations, unions, NGOs, professional organizations, as well as their leaders. Indeed, given the contextual constraints on political discourse defined as functional political action in the political process, we should expect nothing else: Topical participants are all those actors who are able to contribute to the political process, viz., elite groups and organizations on the one hand, and the 'public' (citizens, the people, etc.) on the other hand. More generally, then, topical participants are *public* actors. This also means that typically individual persons who are neither politicians nor powerful or influential other elites do not typically appear in political discourse as topical agents.

Sometimes non-elite individuals may appear as victims, and occasionally as celebrities, but such appearances are quite exceptional, or they may have a special rhetorical effect, e.g., in persuasive discourses 'with a personal touch', typically about one (brave or miserable) family, mother or child. Examples of the latter type of political discourse are 'expulsion' stories in political discourse about individual immigrants in Western Europe, in which case a politician or party takes up the case of one person or family in order to show its humanitarian good-will, in a strategy of positive self-presentation that masks otherwise harsh immigration policies and police practices (van Dijk 1993c).

The predicates of semantic macropropositions also show some preferences. Given the prominent role of political actors, we may here expect political events and especially actions: What politicians have done or will do, what they will decide or which opinions they have about political issues. Again, such actions, decisions or opinions have a general, official, institutional or public nature, and generally pertain to the realm of public management, policy making, decision



making, regulating, controlling or their political counterparts: protesting, demonstrating, opposing, challenging, and so on. And for the same reason, such predicates are seldom about personal, private, non-elite, trivial or everyday acts, like getting up in the morning, going to the bathroom, having breakfast, going to work, coming home from work, drinking a beer, cooking dinner or watching TV — unless where such activities have broader, public or moral consequences or implications (typically anything to do with health, food, smoking, sex, drugs, crime, as well as work and unemployment). In that case, however, they will be discussed in general or generic terms, and not as describing unique actions of individuals. When part of political discourse, for instance in political sex-scandals, such predicates at the same time express the ways politicians have violated the norms of acceptable political action.

Similarly, predicates of the macrostructures of political discourse tend to be future-oriented. Given the role of discourse in the political process, we may typically expect references to or threats about future developments, announcements or promises about future actions and so on. Quite typical for much political discourse is the fact that references to the present tend to be negative, and those to the future positive: Indeed, their *raison d'être* is to design policies that make life better', or at least prevent (further) deterioration or catastrophe. In that respect the political discourse of the opposition or of dissidents is not different: It also refers negatively to the present, and positively to the future, but only the responsible actors for these states of affairs are reversed. References to the past are ambiguous. Typically conservatives may refer to the good old times', but so may progressive environmentalists referring to 'unspoiled' nature, or even socialists when referring to the solidarity, class struggle and the blessings of the welfare state now being destroyed.

The macropropositions (topics) of political discourse may typically be modalized (semantically, i.e., with modality 'operators' that modify propositions; Lycan 1994): Events and actions may be necessarily, probably or possibly the case in the past, present or future; actions may be permitted or obligatory, wished or regretted, and so on (Coates 1990; Maynard 1993). Following the basic principles of many aspects of the political process, we may thus expect political actors to topicalize especially what is now the case and what should be done about it. Obviously, such modality choices not only have a political function as part of various political relevant speech acts (such as promises, threats or recommendations), but also have a more general persuasive function (Chaiken & Eagly 1976).

Topics may also feature evaluations. Descriptions and references to politicians, public figures, and organizations and their actions are of course a function of politically and ideologically based opinions and attitudes. Such evaluations are characteristically polarized: Whereas **WE** are democratic, **THEY** are not, and whereas Our soldiers, or those who share our cause, are freedom fighters, those of the Others are obviously terrorists (Chomsky 1985, 1987; van Dijk 1995a). The same is true for our policies and political decisions, which will invariably benefit the country and all citizens, whereas those of the Others will not. This semantic and ideological polarization is well-known, and we shall return to some of its other aspects below. For the characterization of topics in political discourse, however, this means that also the semantics will be similarly biased, e.g., through positive evaluations of us and negative evaluations of **THEM**, i.e. our political and ideological competitors, opponents, or even enemies. This semantic polarization also has its complements, viz., in the topical de-emphasis (or de-topicalization) of *Our bad* actions or properties, and *Their good* ones, and vice versa.

We thus obtain the well-known *overan*, strategic principle of all ideological and political discourse, viz. an Ideological or Political Square, which generally constrains political text and talk and its evaluation: Emphasis/De-Emphasis of Our/Their Good/Bad Actions (van Dijk 1995a). As is the case for the other properties of political discourse, also this semantic polarization of the evaluative dimension of semantic macropropositions is functional and effective in the political process, e.g., in the competition for votes, support, and the struggle for political survival and legitimation.

Although this characterization is not complete, it suggests that a systematic study of preferred topics in political discourse may reveal quite characteristic constraints on participants and predicates of semantic macropropositions. These obviously reflect the role of political discourse in the political process, and hence may also be expected to be reflexive: Political topics will be mainly about political actors (politicians, elites, public figures and social institutions and organizations) and their typical actions, in past, present and especially the future. Moreover, given the nature of political polarization in the political process, we may further expect the typical positive evaluation of us and **OUR** actions in positive terms and of **THEM** and **THEIR** actions in negative terms.

5.2. *Superstructures or textual 'schemata'*

Discourse genres may be organized by abstract, schematic forms, consisting of conventional categories that define their nature and the overall structure of the semantic 'content' (topics) of each genre. Typical examples are the conventional categories that organize argumentations (Premises, Conclusions), stories (e.g., Complications and Resolutions), and news reports (Summaries, Recent Events, Backgrounds, etc.). What is the possible function of such text schemata for text and talk in political contexts?

The first general property of such schematic structures (as is also the case for sentential syntax, see below) is that they may make (global) meanings more or less prominent for obvious partisan reasons. Whether or not some information is highlighted in a headline, a summary or a conclusion depends on the way meanings are distributed in discourse. Conversely, relatively insignificant details may get extra emphasis by putting them in prominent (first, important) schematic categories, and vice versa, in order to conceal important information, we may downgrade it by putting it in less prominent textual categories. Classical studies in persuasion on the role of primacy and recency effects of discourse are theoretically somewhat less explicit implementations of this principle (Hovland et al. 1957). Sometimes, relevant categories are altogether deleted if the information in that category is dispreferred for political reasons, for instance in Background information in political news interviews, propaganda, and advertising (see e.g., the analyses of U.S. foreign policy propaganda by Herman & Chomsky 1988; see also Thompson 1987c).

Secondly, each political discourse genre may exhibit its own canonical schematic structure, as is the case for parliamentary debates, political speeches, party programs, propaganda leaflets or slogan in demonstrations. Some of these categories are obligatory (as in legally binding Openings and Closings of official sessions of parliament), whereas others are merely conventional or strategic, as in political speeches or propaganda.

Perhaps most pervasive in political text and talk are the structures and strategies of argumentation, in which both explicit and implicit premises, the various steps of the argumentation, as well as the Conclusions may all organize a political dispute, in which opposed standpoints of the political Others are systematically attacked and those of the political ingroup defended. Indeed, persuasion by argumentation has sometimes been described as the hallmark of democracy (see also Condit 1987; Dryzek 1990; Windisch 1995). By normative

standards, such argumentation will of course tend to use argumentative fallacies of many different kinds, as long as they are politically expedient. Good policies of opponents may thus be discredited by *ad hominem* attacks on opponents, and vice versa, bad policies may be concealed by focussing attention on the good qualities or intentions of those who defend them (see e.g., Agar 1987; Billig 1988, 1991; Fischer & Forester 1993; Kaid, Downs & Ragan 1990; Maas 1984; Smit 1989; Strauber 1986).

Nationalist or populist appeals in such political argumentation are classical examples of persuading the opposition by making reference to the benefits for the nation or the People. Given the relevant political context and process, it is thus essential to argue for one's fundamental democratic (tolerant, etc.) principles and attacking those of others as disregarding the Will (or the Voice) of the People (the Vox Populi argument of democratic discourse). My analysis of parliamentary debates about minority and immigration policies has shown the relevance of populist arguments that presuppose popular resentment against foreigners', and hence also the ways democratic principles may be argumentatively subverted (van Dijk 1993c). Similarly, the policies or standpoints of our group are represented as altruist, and those of the political opponent as egoist. That is, each argumentative move will follow the overall principle of the Ideological Square of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Although we here deal with meanings of arguments (see below), such moves have become politically standardized to such an extent that they seem obligatory formal moves in the argumentative strategies of political debate. For instance, parliamentary and policy debates on immigration will routinely begin with nationalist positive self-presentation and argumentative common places about the 'long tradition of tolerance' of our country (Billig 1995a; van Dijk 1993c).

5.3. *Local semantics*

Whereas overall topics may be quite distinctive for political discourse, more detailed, local structures may be expected to be increasingly less discriminating. Obviously, also for the local level we may first predict that meanings reflect political contexts. That is, they will preferably denote politicians, as well as political institutions, organizations, actors and actions, decisions, politicians, and so on. As is the case for macropropositions, thus, semantic participants (agents, patients, settings) and predicates in local propositions tend to be reflexive in political text and talk. In a broader framework the same is true for all social and

public issues that are the object of political attention, interests and struggle, such as those of national and international policies, war and peace, national security, and public debates and controversies on affirmative action, crime, drugs, the welfare state, health care, and so on (Gamson 1992). Much of traditional content analysis will capture such prototypical meanings of political discourse. This does not mean that such analyses are useless. On the contrary, they do establish a main dimension of any kind of text, viz., explicit meanings and what people talk and write about (Rosengren 1981; for an interesting application, see, e.g., Tetlock & Boettger 1989).

However, more interesting, while more subtle and indirect, are all those properties of local semantics that need further analysis, such as conditions of local coherence, presuppositions and entailment, indirectness and implicitness, strategies of description and representation, and so on (van Dijk 1995a). Lacking systematic empirical data on these properties of political discourse, we are unable to predict which of these tend to be prototypical in political discourse.

However, given the strategy of the ideological (and political) square introduced above, we may formulate some tentative hypotheses. Given the nature of the political system and process, thus, we may first of all expect the usual partisan polarization, also at this level of analysis. *Our* group (party, ideology, etc.) will tend to be described in more positive terms than *their* group (party, ideology, etc.), a polarization that in general will result in *contrastive meanings*. One other main semantic strategy to do this is to make propositions with positive predicates about our own group rather *explicit* than *implicit*, rather direct than indirect, and stated rather than presupposed. Similarly, given the possibility to vary the level of generality and specificity and the degree of completeness (at each of these levels) in description of people, events and actions, we may similarly expect that *Our* good deeds will be described with plenty of detail. The opposite will be true for the description of our bad deeds, which will tend to get short shrift, remain implicit or referred to only indirectly or vaguely (Gruber 1993). The reverse will be true for the description of the Others. In this respect, political discourse is similar to ethnocentric majority discourse about minorities.

Similar principles operate for interpropositional relations, for instance in relationships of local discursive *coherence*. Such coherence is of two types, viz., conditional and functional, which are based on relations between facts in subjective speaker models of events, and on semantic relations between propositions themselves, respectively. Conditional relations are often of the causal or temporal kind, and crucial in various types of explanation.

Since explanations may be based on our ideological conception of the world in general, and in our case, of the world of politics, in particular, it is easy to see how conditions of local coherence may be a function of politically biased explanations of social and political facts. If political views and policies see high minority unemployment as being caused mainly by the failure of minorities to perform or compete, and not primarily by discrimination by employers, we may expect a very different organization of local relations between propositions (van Dijk 1993c; for explanations as part of the legitimation of ethnic prejudices, see also Schuman, Steeh & Bobo 1985).

Similarly, functional relations of Generalization and Specification, of Contrast and Example, also allow the expression of biased mental models of political events and states of affairs. Thus, if the political ingroup (wE) have done something bad, we may expect this to be treated as an exception and as an incident, so that such descriptions (already minimalized in the type and number of propositions) will hardly be followed by Generalizations. The reverse will be true for the description of negative actions of the political outgroup (mal). As we also know from over-generalizations in prejudice, *their* bad acts tend to be seen as typical and hence will be described in detail and then also be generalized. Or conversely, a general statement will be made about them, which will then be 'backed up' with detailed Specifications (details) or Examples (stories). As we have seen, another functional relationship between propositions, viz. Contrast, which also has a rhetorical nature, will be useful to precisely function in the emphasis of the polarization between Us and Them (Entman 1991).

We see that the overan discursive strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation may affect the local semantics of text and talk in various ways. One well-known move is that of the disclaimer, which is a semantic move that aims at avoiding a bad impression when saying negative things about Others. In the discourse of racism, such disclaimers are well-known, as is the case for the Apparent Negation ('I have nothing against Blacks, but...') or the Apparent Concession ('There are also smart Blacks, but...'). Obviously, similar moves may be expected in political discourse about political opponents and political outgroups (e.g., communists, fundamentalists, terrorists, etc. in dominant U.S. political discourse) (van Dijk 1991, 1993c).

We may conclude from these theoretical reflections on the local semantics of political discourse that politicians will tend to emphasize all meanings that are positive about themselves and their own group (nation, party, ideology, etc.) and negative about the Others, while they will hide, mitigate, play-down, leave

implicit, etc. information that will give them a bad impression and their opponents a good impression. Discourse semantics has a wide variety of means to accomplish such complementary strategies at the local level.

5.4. *Lexicon*

What is true for global and local meanings is obviously true for the meanings of words, and hence at the level of lexical choice and variation. Indeed, most studies of 'political language' focus on the special words being used in politics (Edelman 1977, 1985; Herman 1992).

The same partisan principles of the Ideological Square apply here as well: Opponents or enemies will be described in more negative terms, as the classical pair of *terrorists* vs. *freedom fighters* shows, for instance in former U.S. President Reagan's rhetoric about Nicaragua (Halmari 1993; Johannesen 1985; Stuckey 1989, 1990). Thus, whereas we may have moral principles, others are

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such politically different meanings of words, see Herman 1992).

Conversely, our bad habits, properties, products or actions will usually tend to be described (if at all) by euphemisms, as when our bombs are called 'Peacemaker' and our killings of civilians among the Others as 'collateral damage'. We may thus compose a lexicon of Newspeak, Nukespeak, Doublespeak or Polit-speak, simply by recording the words that describe us (and our allies) and THEM (and their supporters). Since these principles of political discourse are well-known, we need no further examine them (Herman 1992; Chilton 1985, 1988; Schäffner 1985; Schäffner & Wenden 1995).

5.5. *Syntax*

Somewhat less obvious and more subtle than lexical style is the political manipulation of syntactic style, such as the use of pronouns, variations of word order, the use of specific syntactic categories, active and passive constructions, nominalizations, clause embedding, sentence complexity and other ways to express underlying meanings in sentence structures.

Best known, at the boundaries of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, is the partisan use of deictic *pronouns*, as is already clear from the paradigmatic pair denoting political polarization: us vs. THEM (Maitland & Wilson 1987; Wilson 1990; Zupnik 1994). Thus, the use of the political plural *we* (or possessive *our*)

has many implications for the political position, alliances, solidarity, and other socio-political position of the speaker, depending on the relevant ingroup being constructed in the present context: *We* in the West, *we* the people, *we* American citizens, *we* Democrats, *we* in the government, or indeed *we* the President. In this respect, political pronouns are typical deictics for political contexts and their categories. Throughout the same political speech, such pronominal self-references may of course vary, depending on which reference group is most relevant for each argument. Principles of exclusion and inclusion are at play here, and reflect the partisan strategies of power in the political process.

Other syntactic variation, such as *word order*, usually has two types of political functions, viz., that of emphasis or mitigation through more or less prominent placement of words and phrases, and the ways underlying semantic roles are focused on. Syntactic *topicalization* by fronting a word may draw special attention to such a word and — following the ideological square — such may be the case again in order to emphasize our good things and their bad ones. Active sentences will associate responsible agency with (topical) syntactic subjects, whereas passive sentences will focus on objects (e.g. victims) of such actions and defocus responsible agency by putting agents last in prepositional phrases, or leaving it implicit, as in the well-known headlines *Police killed demonstrators vs. Demonstrators killed by Police vs. Demonstrators killed*. Thus, as is true for semantic structures, syntactic structures are able to put more or less emphasis, focus or prominence on specific words, phrases or clauses, and thus indirectly contribute to corresponding semantic stress on specific meanings, as a function of the political interests and allegiances of the speaker or writer (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress & Hodge 1993).

5.6. *Rhetoric*

We already suggested that much work on political discourse was traditionally being done under the broad label of 'rhetoric'. This is of course not surprising when we realize that classical rhetoric, apart from its uses in the courtroom, was primarily developed as an 'art' to persuade people in a political assembly. Thus, special arguments, special forms and figures of style were traditionally associated with political text and talk. Indeed, common sense notions of political discourse as typically verbose, hyperbolic, dishonest and immoral are sometimes simply summarized with the negative label of 'rhetoric'.

If we limit the analysis of rhetoric here to the use of specific rhetorical operations traditionally studied in the classical *elocutio* as figures of style, we generally find the same patterns as those signalled above. One theoretical difference however is that unlike semantic, syntactic and stylistic structures, these rhetorical operations are generally optional. This means that their presence usually has persuasive functions, and therefore political significance in a political context of communication. It is not surprising therefore that the analysis of political communication was often reduced to the study of 'political rhetoric' (among a large number of studies, see e.g., Billig 1991; 1995a; Bitzer 1981; Campbell & Jamieson 1990; Clinton 1988; Dolan & Dumm 1993; Hirschman 1991; Kiewe 1994; McGee 1985; Tetlock 1993; Windt & Ingold 1987).

Thus, we may expect *repetition* operations at the level of sounds (alliterations and rhymes), sentence forms (parallelisms) and meaning (semantic repetition), as one of the major strategies to draw attention to preferred meanings and to enhance construction of such meanings in mental models and their memorization in ongoing persuasion attempts or later recall (Allen 1991; Cacioppo & Petty 1979; Frédéric 1985; Johnstone 1994).

In the same way, we may in many ways simply construe discourse by making (irrelevant) *additions* on many kinds, as is the case in what is traditionally described as 'verbose style', and as we have seen in the semantics of level of description and degree of completeness. Political speakers will thus elaborate in details their own or their own group's beneficial actions and the horror stories about their enemies. Euphemisms, litotes and hyperboles are the classical figures describing such relative 'too much' or 'too little' information being given, and also reflect the strategic deviances of Grice's principle of quantity in discourse. Irrelevant additions may also be found in racist discourse, both in politics and the media, e.g., when actors of crime are irrelevantly described as belonging to a minority group (van Dijk 1991, 1993c).

Conversely, the same is true for all operations of *deletion*, where information would be expected in a given context but is deleted for similar partisan reasons, as we also have seen in the use of indirectness and implicitness for whole propositions above.

Finally, and perhaps most subtle and pervasive are the semantic operations that seem to obey a principle of *substitution*: *Viz.*, to use and express a concept different from the one would expect in the present context, as is the case for irony, metonymy and *metaphor*. The use of tropes in political language has been studied for a long time, and needs no further attention here (see, e.g., Akioye 1994;

Blommaert 1994; Chilton 1985, 1987, 1995; Chilton & Ilyin 1993; Howe 1988; Mumby & Spitzack 1983; Read et al. 1990; Zashin & Chapman 1974). The principles of their use follow the overall goals of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation we have found in the ideological square. That is, we, our people and our actions and properties will tend to be described in metaphorical meanings that derive from conceptual fields with positive associations, whereas the opposite is true for the description of our political opponents or enemies. So, whereas our politicians or soldiers are characterizations as good' (strong, valiant, brave, persistent) animals such as lions, tigers or bears, those of the Others will be preferably represented as cunning (foxes) or dirty (hyenas, rats, dogs, cockroaches). Similarly, their minds tend to be represented with concepts derived from the field of mental illness, as is the case for the British conservative designation of Labor in terms of the 'Loony Left' (van Dijk 1991).

5.7. Expression structures

Beyond those of syntactic sentence structures, the expression structures of sounds and graphics usually also play an indirect function in emphasizing or de-emphasizing partisan meanings. Volume (shouting and whispering), pitch and intonation of speakers may influence modes of attention and understanding of what they say following the principles of the ideological square. The same is true for graphical display through headlines, letter type, use of colors or photographs. Preferred meanings are thus emphasized by shouting, high pitch, raising intonation, or by headlines, big type, striking color or catchy photos, and the opposite is true for dispreferred meanings.

5.8. Speech acts and interaction

At the boundaries of text and context we already emphasized the interactional nature of political discourse. Thus, a pragmatic analysis may examine which speech acts are preferred in what sub-genres of political text and talk (Blommaert & Verschueren 1991; Eelen 1993; Holly 1990; Trognon & Larrue 1994; Verschueren 1994; Volmert 1989; Wilson 1991). Thus, whereas government declarations may largely be assertions, and official laws and regulations have the same illocutionary force as directives (orders, commands, advice), parliamentary debates will be more varied and typically feature assertions, questions, accusations or apologies (Abadi 1990). Political dissent characteristically comes in the form

of accusations directed against the dominant elites, which may or may not defend (excuse, etc.) themselves against such attacks. One of the more prominent overall political acts in all such cases will be that of legitimation. This is however not a speech act in the strict sense, but a complex social act or process that may be accomplished by other speech acts, such as assertions, denials, counter-accusations, and so on.

Political dialogue, finally, features all the usual moves and strategies of verbal interaction, from turn allocation and appropriation in official sessions (including interruptions in parliament), institutional opening and closing of debates, to more or less irrelevant side sequences in official settings already briefly described above. Some of the conversational categories and moves involved here may be conventional or formulaic, such as the ways the Speaker of the House and the other 'honorable' representatives are being addressed in Congress in the USA and the Commons in the UK, and how turns and speaking time are being allocated and redistributed by members of parliament and congress. Similarly, political rhetoric may be accompanied, interactively, by applause and its strategic elicitation (Atkinson 1984; Heritage & Greatbatch 1986). Fairclough (1994) observes that more generally current public, including political, discourse is undergoing a process of 'conversationalization'.

6. Discourse analysis and political analysis

After this brief theoretical analysis of some of the systematic ways political discourse may take shape, let us briefly return to our political analysis. As suggested above, doing a discourse analysis of political discourse is not yet the same as doing political analysis. PDA will only be accepted by political scientists if it has something to offer, preferably something that political scientists would not otherwise (get to) know — at least not as well — through other methods, such as polls, participant observation or content analysis. And it is a long way from seeing discourse analysis not merely as a 'method', like content analysis, but as a new (also theoretical) cross-discipline in its own right, a discipline in which also political science is involved.

The recognition of the relevance of discourse analysis presupposes realization of the perhaps trivial fact that the many ways of doing politics' often involves engaging in discursive practices. Upon some reflection, even political scientists who are not working on political communication or political rhetoric,

will accept that many if not most political acts and events consist of text and talk. Examples have been given above, and range from cabinet meetings and parliamentary debates, to bureaucratic 'red tape' (documents of many types) and forms of verbal resistance, as in revolutionary tracts and slogans during demonstrations.

Now, the question is, what has a discourse analysis of such communicative-political events to offer that enhances our understanding of such events, in such a way that we have a more detailed and hence 'richer' insight into the political process? After all, we might give, say, a detailed analysis of turn-taking in parliament, but such rules and strategies may well be politically marginal or even meaningless, and the same may be true for a stylistic study of political fliers or slogans. That is, the study of these and other structures must show, additionally, that these structures *as such* play a role in the political event and in the political process of which it is part. In other words, to assess the political relevance of discourse analysis we need to examine in some more detail the *contextual functions* of various structures and strategies of text and talk. Some of these functions have briefly been indicated above, but need to be made more explicit and systematic.

6.1. *Immigration and Racism*

An example may clarify this point. Assume that a right-wing member of parliament (and the same may be true for other MPs or for elites outside of parliament, e.g., in the media, for that matter) holds a speech about minorities or immigration (for a concrete example of such an analysis, see van Dijk 1993a). The overt content of that speech may not reveal any blatant anti-immigrant bias, but yet we (and MPs) feel there is something fishy with the *way* things are being said. That is, intuitively, we do know that the covert properties of the speech do have the function to express a xenophobic or racist point of view. At this point, we suggest, discourse analysis may reveal what these forms of covert racism are, and how exactly they function in that particular context (and how they may influence public opinion). This is a well-known *political* problem in Western-Europe, where right-wing or racist parties become increasingly bold, but often (try to) remain 'within the law'. Apart from identifying covert racist structures and strategies in such a speech, another political (and legal) problem is how to combat such text and talk most effectively. Again, a multidisciplinary discourse analysis may have some suggestions in such a case (for further discussion of the role of

discourse analysis in the political study of immigration and racism see also Jäger 1988, 1992; Knowles 1992; Silverman 1991; Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988; van Dijk 1991, 1993c; Blommaert & Verschueren 1991, 1992; Whillock & Slayden 1995; Windisch 1978, 1982, 1985, 1990; Wodak 1991).

Similarly, in a historical case in the Netherlands, the Ministry responsible for the immigration of refugees, may decide to introduce a neologism such as *economic refugee*, as it did in 1985 during what was presented as the Tamil invasion', in order to distinguish between 'real' and mere economic' refugees (van Dijk 1988). The function of that lexical and conceptual innovation was clear, and similarly relevant elsewhere in Europe, viz., to keep these 'fake' refugees out. Instead however to speak of fake' or 'phony', although that was what was actually meant and understood by the public at large to be meant, a seemingly technical lexical item was used as a means to sub-categorize and then marginalize and expel one group of refugees. Again, the *political* functions of such a largely discursive trick are obvious, as was the widespread use, both in politics and the media, of threatening metaphors, such as *invasion*, and especially flow' metaphors, such as *floods*, *waves* or *tides* of refugees: viz., to categorize the alien invaders' as enemies, and in case of a threatening tide, to build dams or dikes to keep them out (a powerful metaphor especially in the Netherlands).

The point of these examples is not merely to show that politicians or journalists use various direct and less direct ways to say negative things about minorities, immigrants or refugees, and hence may contribute to the reproduction of racism in society. Obviously, this is the case, and research has shown that such negative Other-presentation, also among the elites, is pervasive in Western-Europe and more recently also in the USA, as has especially become clear with the adoption of Proposal 187 in California, barring illegal aliens' from public services such as hospitals and schools. Also, it is obvious that such sometimes subtly racist elite discourse may affect public opinion, largely through the mass media, if the interests of large segments of the (white) population at large are consistent with the implications of such messages, viz., to keep immigrants out. That is, discursive contributions to the reproduction of racism in society (and the same is true for sexism) are an obvious, though routinely denied, political function of political discourse. As such, then, they are not merely a discursive way of 'doing politics', as when politicians decide to be 'tough' on immigration and sharpen immigration laws. They at the same time, contribute to the public agenda, and hence to public opinion, which is thereby managed in such a way as to provide

the necessary legitimation to political decisions that might be legally and morally dubious while violating international law and human rights principles.

That is, the complexity of the political 'facts' involved here goes beyond a mere discourse analysis. Beyond adequate description, they also need political explanation. Indeed, *why* would the Secretary of Justice not speak of 'fake refugees' (as he or she might do in a closed meeting at his or her department) instead of using the technical and more neutral sounding description of 'economic refugees'? And *why* would the right-wing, racist representative not express his or her racist feelings in a more overt way? Or *why* do the media routinely use threatening invasion' or 'flow' metaphors in the accounts of the arrival of refugees?

To answer that question we need to further analyze the political context of such discursive practices, and among other things examine the prevailing official norms, ideologies and attitudes about (speaking about) minorities. We need to know that overt and public expressions of negative opinions may be 'heard as' racist, and hence need to be avoided, as also well-known disclaimers such as "We have nothing against blacks (refugees, etc.), but...", show. At the same time, such a contextual analysis of the political situation also needs to specify that politicians assume that large segments of the population will agree with the implicit message, and oppose further immigration, if only for plain 'economic' reasons of (perceived) unfair' competition on the job or housing markets. Fourth, the political economy of decisions about (refugee) immigration must be spelled out — that is, who will profit or lose out on such immigration (indeed, the presence of many illegal, and hence ill-paid, refugees may be good for business) (for detail, see e.g., Solomos & Wrench 1993).

Although this is a merely a first and still superficial analysis of the political context of immigration debates and legislation, we see that the detailed structures of the relevant discourses dovetails with such a context. Indeed, an analysis of the many subtle and implicit forms of implicit racism in discourse, reveals many things about the political context (such as the nature of current and prevailing norms, attitudes and knowledge among politicians or the public at large), about the real reasons and functions 'behind' the often wonderful sounding phrases of nationalist 'tolerance' rhetoric. Precisely for these social and political constraints of context, discourse and its speakers may want to hide or mitigate such reasons, intentions, functions or other political cognitions. But a subtle and critical analysis

- should be able to make them explicit, and thus conversely contribute to our insight into the political context in the first place, under the assumption that many



properties of discourse are a function of the properties of its context. Indeed, sometimes discourse is the only evidence we have of such hidden' cognitions, processes and structures.

In sum, detailed and sophisticated political discourse analysis first of all provides direct insight into discursive political practices such as cabinet meetings, parliamentary debates, bills and laws, bureaucratic documents, party propaganda, media interviews, or protests by opposition parties and organizations. These political acts, events and processes need description and analysis in their own right. We need to know how they are organized, structured, and expressed, and what kinds of possible influence or effects they may have on the political cognitions of the public at large.

Secondly, however, and perhaps even more interestingly, the contextual functionality of text and talk also allows reliable inferences about political context features (like power relations, racism, group interests) which may be taken for granted, hidden, denied or otherwise not explicitly known or formulated. Sometimes highly aggressive reactions to such critical analyses (e.g. of the media) show that 'we must do something right' when exposing underlying and often barely conscious xenophobic or eurocentric political attitudes, policies and principles. Now, this is a major contribution of discourse analysis if other approaches (like census data, polls, interviews or participant observation) are unable to provide such subtle forms of evidence.

Obviously, we do not claim that *all* of politics is discourse, nor that all political analysis should be reduced to discourse analysis. Especially at higher levels of description, e.g., where political systems, organizations, institutions, complex events and processes are involved, such a political analysis is crucial, and itself a condition for adequate discourse analysis. But if we go 'down' to the nitty gritty of how politics is actually being 'done' in everyday life, we usually end up studying what some political actors were saying or writing. A detailed discourse analysis of such everyday political practices in that case not only contributes to our understanding of these (discursive) practices per se, but also of their relations with the social and political context and its detailed properties, including the constraints on discourse as well as their possible effects on the minds of the public at large. It is precisely this integrated analysis which also offers a more adequate insight into the complexity of political processes, institutions and systems, that is, the kind of objects of analysis political scientists are interested in.

Indeed, to stay with the same example, political scientists may want to know

- the precise relations between macro-phenomena such as immigration, increasingly

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popular resentment against foreigners', government policies about immigration and integration, party political positions and propaganda, the influence of the extreme right on mainstream party positions, and the coverage and debate in the mass media on ethnic affairs. This currently eminently relevant (see also Bosnia and Rwanda) political issue is vastly complex. But we should realize that much of what is going on here are not merely the socio-economic 'facts' of the immigration of (sometimes relatively minor) groups of Others. Also, at the 'symbolic' side, what is going on here is how politicians, journalists and the public at large, think, speak and write about these issues, and how such discourse and cognition influence political action and hence political structure. This is where discourse analysis may be able to provide insights and explanations that otherwise would remain lacking.

6.2. Other political issues

Immigration, multiculturalism and racism are merely one set of issues in contemporary politics that have raised interest among political scientists. The very derogatory phrase and the prominent debate about *multiculturalism* and '*political correctness*', especially in the USA, show the political and public relevance of this issue, as well as its many discursive forms and implications (Aufderheide 1992; Berman 1992; Fish 1994; Williams 1995).

But there are many other topics, problems and issues in political science for which a discourse analysis would be useful approach. Thus, again in the USA, but also in Europe, the debate on immigration, multiculturalism and political correctness is closely related to the demise of state communism in Eastern Europe, the arrival and prevalence of the conservative New Right, with its political extremism and various forms of religious fundamentalism and nationalism, the increasing challenge of liberalism, the attacks on the welfare state and the triumph of the 'market' (Bennett 1990; Dorrien 1993; Himmelstein 1990; Rozell & Pontuso 1990; Sunic 1990).

These hot topics of current politics and political science have barely begun to be studied from a discourse analytical point of view, although it is obvious that the ideological landslides involved here also have a prominent discursive dimension, at least since the rhetorical role played by the Great Communicator, ex-president Ronald Reagan, in the persuasive spreading of Reagonomics. Similar remarks hold for Thatcherism in the UK, and for other conservative take-overs and growing nationalism in Western Europe during the last decade (for some discourse

analytical and related studies of these issues, see, e.g., Allcock 1989; Billig 1995a; Blommaert & Verschueren 1992; Bruce 1982; Clark 1979; Detrez & Blommaert 1994; Hall 1988; Hirschman 1991; Maddox & Hagan 1987; Meeuwis 1993; Seidel 1987, 1988b; van Dijk 1995b; Williams 1994).

These issues in turn are related to the politics and policies of international affairs, anti-Arab prejudices, and the relations between North and South more generally (Billig 1995b; Derian & Shapiro 1989; Gamson 1992; Thompson 1987a). Increasing conservatism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant policies and racism in the North-West is thus linked to ethnic and religious conflict in many other parts of the world, and the reactions of politicians and the media to such conflicts are again related to the symbolic politics of discourse and social cognition we have briefly analyzed above (see also Fox & Miller 1995; Lau & Sears 1986; Sears 1993; Sidanius & Liu 1992).

International negotiations on peace in Bosnia or the Middle-East are not merely about socio-economic interests, land, and rights, but also about mutual perceptions, representations, prejudices, and intercultural relations and communication, and hence on symbols and forms of talk and text (Korzenny & Ting-Toomey 1990). And a war like the Gulf War is not merely about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait or the technological response of Bush' alliance drawing a line in the desert sand. It was also a media event and a discursive construct: Its legitimation was largely discursively managed (for media analysis and public opinion management about the Gulf War, see e.g., Bennett & Paletz 1994; Greenberg & Gantz 1993; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Jeffords & Rabinovitz 1994; Kellner 1992; Pan & Kosicki 1994; for first discourse analyses of the Gulf War and its aftermath: Cheney 1993; Hackett & Zhao 1994; Martín Rojo 1995; Shakir & Farghal 1992; Wallace, Suedfeld & Thachuk 1993).

Virtually all topics and issues relevant in current political science thus seem to have a prominent discursive dimension. Indeed, what is true for racism and multiculturalism, is true for sexism and gender equality, and the position of women, and not merely a social, but also a political issue. Socio-economic and political rights of women, and women's concerns (equal pay, free choice of abortions, among many others) again are not limited to political decisions on privileged access to social resources, but also related to the ways women are represented by men in cognition and discourse, whether in political discourse, the media, medical discourse or textbooks, as well as the access women have to public discourse (for some discourse analytical studies of gender and politics, see e.g., Brown 1988; Castañeda 1992; Fraser 1989; Hennessy 1993; Houston & Kramarae

1991; Kaplan 1989; Lazar 1993; Seidel 1988c; Skjeie 1991; Villiers 1987; Winter 1993; Yeganeh 1993; Zerilli 1991).

Similar remarks hold for class, and hence for poverty, unemployment and the current destruction of the welfare state in favor of the Market, as well as the increasing globalization of the economy (Fairclough 1995; Lemke 1995). Discourse analysis allows a more detailed insight into the largely discursive processes of agenda setting, and the relations between politics, media and public opinion. Social policies are not merely abstract properties of political action or cognition, but largely expressed in text and talk, and politically acted upon as such, for instance in the formulation of bills, laws or regulations, which again are all political and legal genres of discourse (Schram 1993; Zarefsky 1986).

Social, economic and political power may be based on special access to or control over scarce social resources, but these are not merely material, but also symbolic, such as knowledge, education and especially access to and control over public discourse, especially in the mass media (van Dijk 1996). Indeed, much of political power may safely be operationalized in terms of the means and patterns of access and control of politicians, parties or political movements over public discourse. Who controls public discourse, at least partly controls the public mind, so that discourse analysis of such control is at the same time inherently a form of political analysis.

In other words, it is not so much directly the social and political economy, but rather the symbolic economy' of language and discourse that controls the minds of political actors and hence their actions. At a general level, such a statement may be interesting but does not allow much description and explanation. Once however we have recourse to a detailed and sophisticated discourse analysis, we will be able to spell out the relations between subtle properties of text and talk and the various dimensions of the political context, the political process and the political system at large.

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