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ON THE NOTION OF COMMUNICATIONAL GRAMMAR IN POLITICAL LINGUISTICS

Abstract

Any *communicational grammar* may be viewed as a linguistic study concerned with rules responsible for efficient communication, and can be used as a tool for researching almost any issue that falls under the term *political linguistics*—a sub-field of linguistics which analyzes how ideologies are put into service to legitimate power and inequality. From the linguistic point of view we would perceive discourse to be a dynamic and changing phenomenon, profoundly rooted in its nonverbal context. The core of any discourse is established by particular texts formed by their speaker/writer. The meaning of the texts and their decoding by the hearer/reader seems to depend to a great extent not only on the cognitive processes that take place in the mind of the information receiver but also on the contextual embeddings which are: a) the situational embedding, that is where the text is produced (here: in what type of co-texts the text is situated); b) the social embedding, that is within what social group the text is produced (here: to what type of readers the text is directed to); and c) the cultural embedding, which is apparently the most difficult to grasp, for it directly translates into what we understand under the nebulous term *culture* (here: what is the cultural preparation of readers who are going to receive the text). The cultural embedding of texts should be held responsible for the projected associations it may induce in the receiver of textual messages and at the same time types of nonverbal cultural scripts and schemata that are supposed to accompany a verbal text. In light of the above, a model in which one has certain verbal texts that trigger certain socially and culturally specific behaviors can be called the communicational grammar of a particular discourse.

Keywords

Discourse, semantic leaps, communicational grammar, nationalism, political linguistics, anthropological linguistics.

1. Introduction

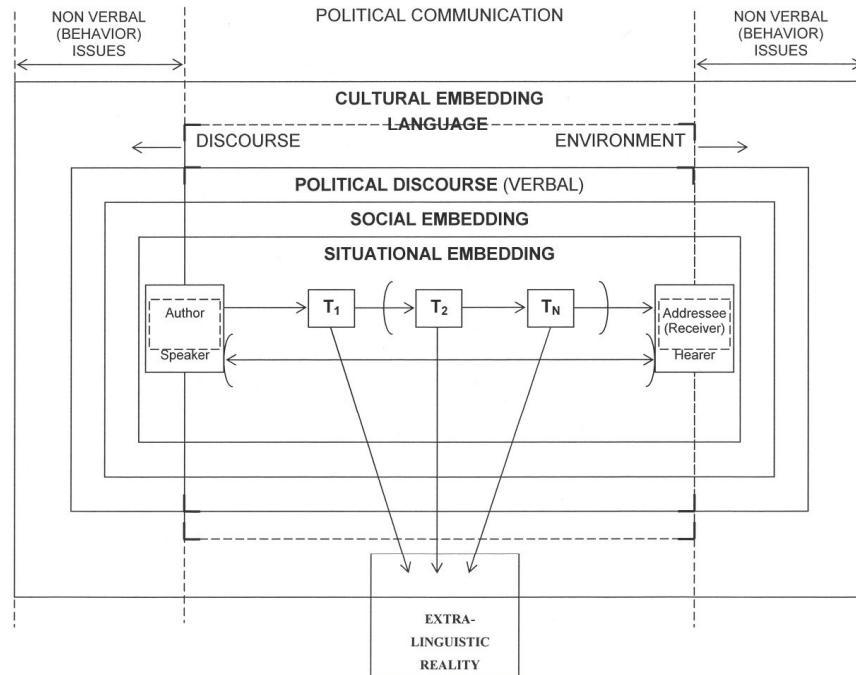
Any *communicational grammar* may be viewed as a linguistic study concerned with rules and patterns responsible for efficient communication and can be used as a tool for researching almost any issue that falls under the term *political linguistics*—a sub-field of linguistics which analyzes how ideologies are put into service to legitimate power (and often also inequality).

Due to the fact that communicational grammars are mainly used for researching a variety of discourse types, one needs to name what is viewed to be discourse. From the linguistic point of view I would perceive discourse to be a dynamic and changing phenomenon, profoundly rooted in its nonverbal context. The core of any discourse is established by particular texts formed by their producer. The meaning of the texts and their decoding by the receiver seems to depend to a great extent not only on the cognitive processes that take place in the mind of the information receiver but also on the contextual embeddings; and they are as follows:

- a) the *situational embedding*, that is where the text is produced (here: in what type of co-texts the text is situated);
- b) the *social embedding*, that is within what social group the text is produced (here: to what type of readers the text is directed to); and last but not least,
- c) the *cultural embedding*, which is apparently the most difficult to grasp, for it directly translates into what I understand under the nebulous term *culture* (here: what is the cultural preparation of readers who are going to receive the text, whether Polish, English, etc.).

In my opinion, however, the cultural embedding of texts ought to be held responsible for the projected associations it may induce in the receiver of textual messages and at the same time types and patterns of nonverbal cultural scripts and schemata that are supposed to accompany a verbal text. In light of the above, a model in which one has certain verbal texts that trigger certain socially and culturally specific behaviors can be called the communicational grammar of a particular discourse. Having stated this, one would logically have to regard singular realizations of the discourse investigated, that is texts, to be of a great importance for any further discussion of the issue. In the course of this short work I wish to show that it is possible to delimit and research patterns of communication which can vary due to changing situations, societies and cultures, though the research model remains the same.

Table 1. A model of communicational grammar in political communication (see Chruszczewski 2002: 17)



2. The notion of *political discourse* and its communicational grammar framework¹

The communicational grammar of political discourse appears to be a complex notion which can be comprehended in many ways. It is based, however, on the concept of *grammar*. With respect to grammars one can immediately note that they can be dynamic, they can change, and that there are many of them. There can be the *Grammar of Modern English* (Mittins 1973) as well as *Old English Grammar* (Campbell [1959] 1983). There are grammars with regard to what subject they take into consideration, for instance: *Word Grammar* (Hudson 1984), *Grammar of Case* (Anderson 1971), *Grammar of Anaphora* (Aoun 1985), *Grammar of Metaphor* (Brooke-Rose 1958), or *The Grammar of Adverbials* (Bartsch 1976). There are

¹ Parts of this subchapter are also presented in Chruszczewski 2002.

grammars for the group of people who study them, for example: *English Grammar for Foreign Students* (Potter 1932), *University Grammar of English* (Quirk and Greenbaum 1980), *Collins Cobuild Student's Grammar* (Willis 1992).

It is to be observed that grammars evolve and change, for example: *Towards a Contextual Grammar of English* (Winter 1982), *Stratificational Grammar* (Sampson 1970). There can be grammars with regard to their function: *Lexical-Functional Grammar* (Horn 1983), *Systemic-Functional Grammar in Natural Language Generation* (Teich 1999). One can study fundamental portions of grammars, for instance: *Essentials of English Grammar* (Jespersen [1933] 1974), *Fundamentals of English Grammar* (Azar 1985), their sense: *Sense of Grammar* (Shapiro 1983), or their philosophy: *Philosophy of Grammar* (Jespersen [1924] 1968).

One can note that grammars equal sets of rules, with no regard whether they concern conversations or silence: *Spanish Conversation Grammar* (Sauerl 1891), *Grammar of Silence* (Cottrell 1986). Smaller textual units are organized according to these rules. The basic units can be morphemes, words, sentences, longer texts, entire discourses, etc. They can be even ornaments, e.g. *Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament: A General Introduction* (Cramp 1991). Grammars can be described as active or theoretical, they can also be applied in practice: *Active Grammar* (Bald 1984), *Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (Thomas 1969). Grammars are visible signs of the contemporary developments of a linguistic reality e.g. *New Zealand English Grammar* (Hundt 1998). One can research their contexts: *Grammar in Context* (Gethin 1983), and work out their models: *Models of Grammar* (Nickel and Nehls 1980). An excellent example of the concept of grammar which I have in mind was presented by Crawford and Ostrom (1995). Their methodology of research; however, is different from ours, for their article is more oriented towards political science than linguistics. Nevertheless, I would agree with them that:

The institutional grammar introduced here (...) is based on a view that institutions are enduring regularities of human action in situations structured by rules, norms, and shared strategies, as well as by the physical world. The rules, norms, and shared strategies are constituted and reconstituted by human interaction in frequently occurring or repetitive situations. (Crawford and Ostrom 1995: 582)

Grammars constitute sets of patterns. These patterns can be of various types. Therefore, the communicational grammar presented is a study of certain verbal and also non-verbal patterns in their respective communicative embeddings (see Table 1.). For our brief example I have chosen the text of Andrzej Lepper, former Vice-Speaker of the House and (since recently in 2007) former Deputy Prime Minister, which was delivered on the 29th of November 2001 in the Polish *Sejm*. Lepper's text is juxtaposed with another text falling into the category of political discourse,

namely a speech delivered about sixty-two years before by Adolf Hitler in the Nazi parliamentary setting of the III Reich. As it may appear to be too far fetching an analogy between the two parliamentary discourse texts, I present the above just to show how a “political leap” may be called into existence and a new, blended image may be created.

3. Political “semantic leaps”

Semantic leaps are usually defined as verbal entities concerned with shared meanings, namely they are regarded to be:

(...) a family of natural language phenomena (...) [which include] all sorts of nonstandard meanings absent from dictionaries and, typically, not computable by traditional parsers. Leaps include things such as metaphoric and metonymic expressions, hyperbole, understatement, and sarcastic quips. They also include things such as innuendo, subtle accusations, and the private meanings that can arise when people live or work closely together. Many leaps are necessary because of the way we deploy background knowledge in meaning construction. (Coulson 2001: 2)

However, it appears that semantic leaps can also function very well non-verbally, only being amplified by verbal means. As well as one can share verbal private meanings, one can obviously share nonverbal hyperboles, for “it is to be expected that new information will constantly overlap with the already collected information thus shedding new light on old facts and phenomena. New facts, which one constantly discovers, be they linguistic or extralinguistic, can always influence one’s behavior by the very fact of filling in ‘semantic gaps’ caused by certain misinterpretations of information which human minds have to face all the time” (Chruszczewski 2004a: 325). The blended image of the Speaker of the House, which was concocted by Polish journalists of a common weekly magazine—*Wprost* (see Figure 3. as presented by *Wprost*, May 26, 2002)—is such a political semantic leap which serves as a very harsh accusation aimed at the non-parliamentary conduct and extra-parliamentary register of Lepper’s militant statements. This assertion seemed (in 2002!) to be shared by the majority of Poles and their elected parliamentarians since Lepper’s term as the Speaker of the House was the shortest ever in the Polish Parliament. The image of Lepper (see Figure 2. as presented by *Newsweek*, March 20, 2002) was juxtaposed with the image of Hitler (see Figure 1. as presented by *Der Feldzug der achtzehn Tage, Illustrierte Sonderausgabe der “Niedersächsischen Tageszeitung” Hannover über die historischen Septemberwochen 1939*) and then was blended to give the concocted “new” image of Figure 3. Its nonverbal appeal is enhanced by the verbal caption under the

picture which reads “Heil Lepper!” and concerns the puzzlingly high political popularity of the populist under question.

Figure 1. Adolf Hitler in his Reichstag speech in 1939 in Germany

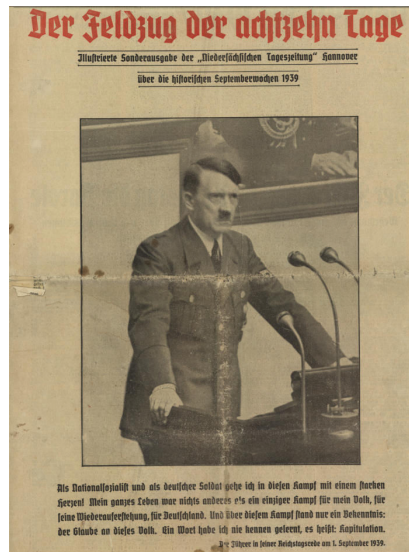


Figure 2. Andrzej Lepper as the Speaker of the House in 2001 in Poland



Figure 3. A blended imaginary picture concocted from the above Fig. 1 and Fig. 2



The above non-verbal political semantic leap (or even “cognitive frame shifting”) may also be supplemented by two short excerpts from political speeches delivered by the two politicians under question. They are as follows:

1. An example of Hitler’s texts delivered in the III Reich parliament on September 1, 1939 (the very day on which Nazi forces attacked Poland, thus commencing WW II):

Als Nationalsozialist und als deutscher Soldat gehe ich in diesen Kampf mit einem starken Herzen! Mein ganzes Leben war nichts anderes als ein einziger Kampf für mein Volk, für seine Wiederauferstehung, für Deutschland. Und über diesem Kampf stand nur ein Bekenntnis: der Glaube an dieses Volk. Ein Wort habe ich nie kennen gelernt, es heißt: Kapitulation. (Der Führer in seiner Reichstagsrede am 1. September 1939²)

[As a *national socialist* and as a *German* soldier I go into this fight with a *strong* heart. All my life has been nothing else but a *fight for my people* and for the *revival of Germany*. And over this fight there was only one icon. *The belief in this nation*. One word I never learnt, it is giving up. (Führer’s speech delivered in the Reichstag on September 1, 1939.)] [Trans. and emphasis P.C.]

2. Selected examples of Lepper’s texts delivered in the Polish Parliament (November 29, 2001)³:

(...) Talking of democracy which led to the fact that now there are 23% of people who have taken over the world’s goods, that 1015% [sic!, P.C.] of all the people live well and 80% starve. It is no explanation that we think of it and its results, on the results of *globalization* (...).

(...) Poland is a NATO member and it shall remain that way, but NATO can’t just *produce weapons and fight* and kill innocent people, even in defense of the highest principles.

Behave! Show a little culture! The left side is always so cultural, but today, as I see, some of you are not behaving up to that standard. And what for? What for?

(...) Fortunately in this parliament there are *national forces*, and they are Polish: the *League of Polish Families* and *Self-Defense* [*Samoobrona*—the political party started by Andrzej Lepper—P.C.], and that is fortunate.

(...) You’re talking of political culture, but you are painted [sic!, P.C.] in suits, ties, smelling of Dior and Chanel, you’ve been caressing yourselves for the past 12 years, and so caressed yourselves into the *depression* of the economy (...).⁴

² Quoted from: *Der Feldzug der achtzehn Tage, Illustrierte Sonderausgabe der “Niedersächsischen Tageszeitung” Hannover über die historischen Septemberwochen 1939.*

³ For the complete speech see <http://ks.sejm.gov.pl:8009/kad4/006/40062001.htm>.

⁴ [Trans. and emphasis—P.C.]

As can be observed in the above passages, features of the two apparently non-congruent specimens of parliamentary discourse are similar in their application of the military and national or perhaps *chauvinistic* expressions. There are, however, some extra-linguistic issues preventing Lepper from seizing the absolute political power in Poland as happened in the unfortunate case of the III Reich over seventy years before. To explain this, I have provided a model of the communicational grammar of *political discourse* (see Table 1). The core of the model is built up on the communicated verbal texts which are addressed from their speaker toward their receiver(s)/hearer(s) (for a detailed discussion see Chruszczewski 2002, 2003). All texts are supposed to mirror a certain extra-linguistic reality. In our case it is the contemporary political situation in Poland, to which Lepper refers his texts. The textual realizations of political discourse mentioned are rooted in a particular dynamic and thus changing situational embedding. The texts are aimed at a specific group of people. In the case exemplified their immediate receivers are all the parliamentarians present in the Polish parliament on the delivery of the address, and their hearers are all other people who happen to hear the texts, as for instance broadcast on TV or radio. They all establish the social embedding of the texts. The third and the largest embedding is apparently the one which is the most difficult to define clearly, the cultural embedding. This embedding seems to be encompassing the other two embeddings as well as language(s) and discourse(s), since there can be more than one language or discourse applied within one culture (see also Chruszczewski 1999). All these entities with all their nonverbal (behavior) issues must be included in the notion of *communication*. In the case discussed the communication concerns Polish political discourse, and, in turn, all its nonverbal (behavior) communicative aspects as well Polish political behavior.

4. Instead of conclusions

As a general observation it may be stated here that political communication has been viewed as a higher level stratum comprising texts, their situational, social and cultural embeddings, discourse(s), language(s) as well as extra-linguistic ways of transmitting information. In light of the issues presented *political linguistics* (for a full multi-layered discussion of the issue see Blommaert and Bulcaen [eds.] 1997) can be regarded as a branch of general linguistics concerned with delimiting and researching the patterned behavior of political attitudes. It needs to be added here that there are different communicational grammars for different institutions, owing to the fact that there are varying traditions and communicational interdependencies in different cultures, and social groups, not to mention individual languages, lects, argots, volapück, or peculiar idiosyncrasies. Papers usually start with a relevant

quotation, but I think that they can also be concluded with a relevant line, and here is one of Duranti's:

We are born with the ability to learn languages. However, the contexts in which we learn them, the manner in which we use them, and the extent to which they help or hinder us in achieving our goals is culturally mediated. If we want to understand the role of languages in people's lives, we must go beyond the study of their grammar and venture into the world of social action, where words are embedded in and constitutive of specific cultural activities such as telling a story, asking for a favor, greeting, showing respect, praying, giving directions, reading, insulting, praising, arguing in court, making a toast, or explaining a political agenda. (Duranti 2001: 1)

Needless to say, all the social actions enumerated above have their unique communicational grammars, textual realizations and are accompanied by a vast array of nonlinguistic activities constituting culture-specific semiotic (see e.g. Shapiro 1983) codes of conduct. It is also these social actions within which ideologies are expressed and (re)produced (van Dijk 1998: 191), for ideologies are nothing more than shared representations of the extra-linguistic reality with specific cultural functions for the groups which share them (see also van Dijk 1998: 126-127, 191). Ideologies are not just systems of static beliefs, for contrary to belief systems there is also a dynamic socio-cognitive dimension to them. Almost all socio-cognitive representations which I have in mind in this place can be strengthened and distributed by both verbal and nonverbal means that are not chaotic, for they usually are highly institutionalized, in which case there is always a possibility to work out patterns of how they operate and are applied in their contextual dynamics. In light of the above there is a *caveat*; however, for if there are observable communicational patterns, it can mean that "our minds select facts by themselves due to the cultural mechanisms (scripts?) which have already been preselected for them" (Chruszczewski 2004b: 689). In order to evade the apparent pitfall one needs to think independently for oneself, regardless of the prevailing contemporary beliefs and ideologies.

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