

# 36 Political Discourse

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JOHN WILSON

## 0 Introduction

The term political discourse can refer in a number of ways to a range of different types of talk or text. We may be referring to a type of discourse which is a political production – a speech, debate, political interview, policy document, and so on (van Dijk 1997; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012), or we could be referring to any talk or textual output that is either about a political subject or which is politically motivated. For example, in a recent text entitled *Political Discourse and Conflict Resolution* (Hayward and O'Donnell 2011), most of the chapters use the term “political discourse” to refer to the object of analysis – a piece of extended talk or text produced by or for political actors. On the other hand, Liebes and Ribak (1991) argue that family talk about political events could also be political discourse, since the topic of talk is about “political events or issues” (see also Blommaert 2005; Feldman and De Landtsheer 1998), and Joseph (2006) argues that all language is inherently political, therefore almost all language use could be seen as “political discourse.”

For thousands of years political discourse has also been equated with the term “rhetoric,” since one of the original uses of the term was to describe particular forms of persuasion within political assemblies (Cicero 1971). Rhetorical studies of political discourse abound within the literature (Arnt Aune and Medhurst 2008; Finlayson 2007; Lunsford, Wilson, and Eberly 2008; Parry-Giles and Hogan 2010), and one finds a focus on the political and an emphasis on “language.” The essential nature of the exercise, however, is the study of rhetorical/argumentation procedures, their identification, and their persuasive effects. Hence, the “political” becomes one genre for the display of rhetorical forms of persuasion or performance, rather than an analysis of the ways in which linguistic selection and production not only derives from language theory, but also constitutes a definition of what is “political” (see Connolly 1993).

In a more restricted sense, “political discourse” refers to the study of political language where the focus is on aspects of language structure as it constitutes and displays specific political functions. Thus, large swathes of work that reference the term “political discourse,” such as found in areas like “rhetorical political analysis” (Finlayson 2007), or other general fields such policy study, political science, or social theory (see, e.g., Foucault 1972; Giddens 1991; Habermas 2000), while relevant, may not be political discourse within this specific interpretation. Various approaches may deal with political language, and even privilege language in some senses, but they often do so without any core theory of language or, more importantly, without any core language analysis.

This does not, however, make political discourse analysis “political linguistics.” There have been a number of analysts who have suggested going down this route. Burkhart (1996: cited in Wodak 2011) has suggested that the study of political language may be seen as “sub discipline between linguistics and political science” (cited in Wodak 2011: 6), and that its focus should be on everything from lexical issues to semiotics. However, while linguistic analysis is central to political discourse, it must be seen as a tool in explaining the operation of such discourse and not an end in itself; political discourse should be seen as intersecting a range of communicative modalities and theories. Further, in a practical sense, “political discourse” is the term of choice in the study of political language. Even those such as Okulska and Cap (2010), who claim there has been a significant growth in the field of “political linguistics,” do not actually use this term for their work, preferring to refer to this as the “analysis of political discourse” (2010: 3).

In distinguishing the focus of political discourse as language centered we are not calling for the drawing of disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, for political discourse other fields are clearly relevant as they are linked to the general linguistic concerns of political discourse, and frequently inform the questions the political discourse analyst wishes to answer. In the case of “critical” political discourse analysis this is made explicitly clear. Chilton (2004) states (see below) that the critical approach “has tended to draw ... on social theory of a particular type and on linguistics of a particular type.” Hence, this chapter presents political discourse as language centered, and it does so in the knowledge that such linguistic-oriented analyses will both inform, and be informed by, other relevant fields and theories as they intersect with and help explain the social and political concerns of actors, institutions, and polities.

## **1 Representation: Reference and Metaphor**

One of the central concerns of political discourse is the question of how the world is presented to the public through particular forms of linguistic representation. For example, how is language used in attributing meaning to individuals and groups with reference to the performance of their social practices? How are actions and events perceived and described? Which modes of reference are used to signify places, objects and institutions within particular positive or negative frames? (see Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; van Dijk 2009a, 2009b; Fairclough 1989, 1995; Wodak and van Dijk 2000). The claim is that “reality” is not simply given to us through language; rather it is mediated through different forms of language representation (see Sapir 2010; Whorf 1956).

Viewing political discourse in this way, analysts often explain politics as a relationship between language and power, specifically that political control is a form of language control (see Wodak 2011). Chilton and Schäffner (2002: 5), for example, define politics “as a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it.”

One of the first scholars to note the use of language in controlling the distribution of power in society was George Orwell. In *Politics and the English Language* Orwell argues that there is a link between language and the way we view the world, and that politicians manipulate this for their own ends, as he puts it: “using political speech and writing ... in defense of the indefensible” (1969: 225). Here he is referring to forms of “inverted logic” such as those found in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell 1949), where slogans such as “WAR IS PEACE,” “FREEDOM IS SLAVERY,” and “IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH” create “doublethink,” and invert the positive into the negative and the negative into the positive.

It is argued that control and domination of representations allows politicians to generate worldviews consistent with their goals, and to downgrade, negate, or eliminate alternative representations. To take another Orwellian example, if a village full of innocent people is bombed, or thousands of people are relocated as a consequence of aggression and war, we can choose to manipulate the representation of such negative acts as types of positive or neutral events. We could call the first “pacification” for example, and the second could be referred to as a “rectification of frontiers.” Presented in this way issues such as pain, suffering, and homelessness are hidden within neutral, placid, or positive representations.

This is the core point that Orwell wishes to make, and it emerges again and again in the study of political discourse (see Bonnett 1993; Hart and Lukes 2007; Henry and Tator 2002; Philips 1998; Wodak and van Dijk 2000). It also raises the issue of whether there is an “objective” truth which politics or other forms of language subvert through representation, or whether all interpretation is relative to a context. These two views of representation may be seen as the “universal” and the “relativist” (Browning 2006; Montgomery 1992; Rorty 2008). The universalist view states that we understand our world in terms of conceptual primes, and language simply reflects these possibilities. Language is the vehicle for expressing our system of thought, with this system being independent of the language itself. The relativist argues language and thought are inextricably intertwined, in that available linguistic resources affect our understanding of the world. Our world is not given to us directly but is continually mediated by language.

Consider for example America’s war with Iraq. This was not just “war,” with all its negative connotations, this was a project called “Operation *Iraqi Freedom*.” Keeping the United States and its people safe from further attack was not simply security but “*Homeland Security*.” The legislation established for the protection of the “homeland” became known as the “*PATRIOT ACT*.” The full title is “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism.” While the term “*PATRIOT*” looks like an acronym, critics suggest that it is in fact a “backronym,” intentionally designed to produce, or spell out, a selected word with an attendant concept. Specifically, it was designed so that criticism or lack of adherence to the Act would be seen as *unpatriotic*. A *PATRIOT Act* may therefore convert the war on terror into a more positive exercise with a worthy moral purpose. Hence, the consequent limits

on individual or group freedoms dictated by security measures, and the consequent extension of presidential powers (Herbert 2012), become something that is normalized as part of “patriotic” duty. Interestingly, George W. Bush accepts this assessment. He argues that the term PATRIOT was an outcome of Congressional action, and he agrees that one consequence of this action was to make “unpatriotic” any critique of the Act (see Bush 2010).

Or consider Weden’s (2005) study of alternative ideologies within the Arab–Israeli conflict. Weden looks at how language is used to justify resistance through various forms of violent action. The process by which individuals carry bombs and detonate these, killing both themselves and others around them, may be called “human bombing” or referred to as “suicide bombing” by the Western press (Weden 2005: 93). However, Weden argues the “military metaphor of human bombings” can be reconstituted by combining other metaphors from Islam so that “human bombings” are defined as “martyrdom attacks” (Ghazali 2003, cited in Weden 2005), where bombers “sacrifice their lives” as martyrs (Salih 2003). Hence, under one ideology such bombers are viewed positively as they make the ultimate sacrifice for their beliefs.

Representations can also be reinforced by the repeated use of descriptions, where such repetition helps embed specific interpretations. In the prelude to the Iraq war reference to “Saddam Hussein” would frequently occur in conjunction with the phrase “weapons of mass destruction (WMD),” and also either “al Qaeda” or “terrorism” or both (Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2004). This process confirmed in the public mind that Saddam Hussein not only had WMD but that he had links with terrorists, and al Qaeda in particular, and hence may have been in some way linked to 9/11. As the co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission put it:

The Bush administration had repeatedly tied the Iraq war to September 11 – insinuating in some people’s minds a link between Iraq and the attacks themselves ... [A]t different junctures a majority of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was involved in 9/11. (cited in Russomanno 2011: 141)

Evidence of these links was debatable at the time, and was later confirmed as basically untrue. Nevertheless, repeated references linking Saddam Hussein with WMD and al Qaeda became so strong in the American public’s mind that even when evidence emerged that the links were unconfirmed a large proportion of the public still continued (and continue) to believe that there were such links; including, despite evidence to the contrary, that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Reviewing selected public polls Entman (2012: 168) comments that:

In a Gallup Poll taken during January (2006), 53 percent of respondents said they thought the “Bush administration deliberately misled” Americans about Iraq’s WMD. Yet 57 percent in a March 2006 Gallup Poll said they were either certain that Iraq had WMD or thought it likely. And 50 percent in a July Harris Poll said they believed WMD had been found.

It seems that once particular representations are established they are hard to shift. Interestingly, they may also have other effects. Many Americans (and indeed many other nationalities around the world) are suspicious of Islam and things associated with the

Middle East. It was with some unease, then, that some sections of the United States public discovered that their new president of 2008, Barack Obama, the first ever black president, also had the middle name "Hussein." For some this suggested links or associations with the Muslim world. Obama has been a lifelong Christian and is not a Muslim. Yet Obama himself, speaking in 2010 to Israeli media, said "it may just be the fact that my middle name is Hussein, and that creates suspicion" (cited in *The National Journal*, September 27, 2012). Waismel-Manor and Stroud (2012) reported an experiment where Arab-Israelis and Jewish-Israelis both watched videos of President Obama talking to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. In one video the caption read "Barack Obama" and on the other "Barack *Hussein* Obama." When the middle name was introduced Arab-Israelis thought Obama would be fairer to Arabs, while Jewish-Israeli's thought he would be "less pro Israel."

How one refers to oneself or others is not, or not always, a neutral act, and can be affected by culture, context, and interactional practice (Schiffrin 2006). This can also be seen in politicians' manipulation of pronouns; making a distinction between "them" and "us" for example, or carefully distributing personal roles and responsibility through what is called the "inclusive" and "exclusive" use of "we" (see Borthen 2010; Bramley 2000; Mühlhäusler and Harré 1990; Petersoo 2007).

Recent research on how language guides our political representation includes work by George Lakoff (2004) on what he calls "framing," the way in which language sets up particular "frames" which guide beliefs and our interpretation of the world (see also Goffman 1974). The concept of "framing" builds on Lakoff's work on "metaphor" (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors have a conceptual function and that they provide mappings between forms of subjective experience and other more abstract complex domains. They note "the existence of experientially grounded mappings," for example, "More is Up," as in "Prices rose" and "Stocks plummeted." "In 'More is Up' a subjective judgment of quantity is conceptualized of the sensorimotor experience of verticality" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 47). Such metaphors can serve as "frames" for guiding how we view and think about complex issues, tasks, or relationships.

In political discourse there is a significant literature on how conceptual metaphors are used for political purposes, ranging from explaining economic theory via "Economy is a person" (Sacco 2007), to explaining interparty and intercultural conflict in South Africa through "Racism is a disease" and "reconciliation is healing" (Malan 2008: see also El Refaie 2001; Musolff 2004).

Lakoff (2004) has now extended this argument further, suggesting cognitive metaphors not only describe how politicians attempt to delimit our thinking about politics, but also how "framing" itself can provide a way out of this controlling language. In Lakoff (2004) he gives us the command "Don't think of an elephant." As he then points out, by mentioning an elephant at all we will have difficulty in not summing up an image of an elephant, and alongside that image other images or thoughts which involve size, tusks, trunk, the jungle, and so on. The point is that once a frame is invoked it is very hard to block the ideas and images associated with the frame – even when it is negated. Lakoff (2004) gives an example from political discourse when Richard Nixon said: "I am not a crook." Despite Nixon's intentions, by using the term "crook" he has invoked a frame in order to deny it, and, therefore, loses control over the way that frame is interpreted.

Lakoff also suggests, however, that one can change certain “frames” by offering counter “frames,” that is, alternative ways of looking at the same object, event, or concept. Lakoff has argued that Conservatives in the United States have been particularly successful in using “framing” to get their message across. Progressives, on the other hand, do not seem to understand the way in which Conservatives have used language to set the “frame” for debates. Lakoff suggests, for example, that when Progressives argue against “tax relief” they do so within a Conservative frame, that “tax” is something bad, a burden that one needs relief from. Alternatively, Lakoff suggests that Progressives might like to provide a different image of “taxes” as “fees” for services, as in being a member of a Country Club, where everyone has to pay in order to access facilities. The same concept can be applied to society as in “we are all in this together,” so we should contribute to society since we all get something out of society.

There are a number of issues here, however: first, Lakoff’s position seems limited by its own relativism (see also Section 2; van Dijk, this volume). If we can invoke “frames” which are counter to a conservative or other view, this gives us choice, including the choice to ignore such frames or to retranslate new frames back into original frames in order to accommodate previous beliefs (see Pinker 2006). Second, in analyses of political speeches some analysts have found it difficult to code the appearance of “progressive” and “conservative” conceptual metaphors (Cienki 2005), since a simple bifurcation of political views does not always involve distinct metaphors, but rather includes the use of similar metaphors by each party to express different political values. And third, metaphors, particularly political metaphors, need not always be linguistic, but may be visual (cartoons, video, and so on: see El Refaie 2001; Lazuka 2012) or a mix of both linguistic and other modalities.

Further, politicians can also take the same frame, or metaphor, and, just like the analysts, use it for their own purposes. Consider the following alternative assessments of the metaphor “political policy is an iceberg.” In the first example UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher critically assesses the Labour opposition election manifesto of 1987 (see Atkinson 2011):

Thatcher: The Labour party iceberg manifesto, one tenth of its socialism visible nine-tenths beneath the surface (laughter).

Mrs. Thatcher is using the “iceberg” metaphor to criticize Labour for hiding its true socialist aspirations. In a later speech Labour leader Neil Kinnock, responded in this way:

Mr Kinnock: In a way she was right, it is a bit of an iceberg manifesto. it is re::ally cool and it is ah very tough and it is totally unsinkable! (laughter)

Taking the same metaphor Mr. Kinnock uses it to draw on positive aspects of the same frame, in doing so both supporting the Labour manifesto and making a meta-humorous comment on Thatcher’s humorous comment (see also Musolff 2004; Sclafani 2008).

The discussion so far presents a view of political representation that sounds particularly negative and controlling, and much work on political discourse views it as a “form of social practice with a malign social purpose” (see Torode 1991: 122, also van Dijk 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Fairclough 1989; Mehan 2012; Wodak and Auer-Boreo 2009).

But is there an alternative? Could there be a discourse that has no hidden agenda, produced in a cooperative spirit of mutual understanding (see Habermas 2000)? Or is it that what is true or false is determined by context, practicalities, and the language of both politicians and critics (see Wilson 1990). For example, Aristotle said: "We make war in order that we may live in peace." Is this a realistic or malign claim? And how does it sit with George W. Bush's claim that the Iraqi war was necessary in order to "free the Iraqi people"? Is this Orwell's "war is freedom" or simply a description of objectives based on evidence Bush believed true at the time he initiated the war with Iraq (see Bush 2010: 242)?

## 2 Politics and Grammar: Things Turn "Critical"

In the late 1970s theorists such as Fowler *et al.* (1979) and Kress and Hodge (1979) suggested that the surface realization of language represented the transformation of an underlying reality (Wilson 1990). The work was based, mainly, on Halliday's (1985) functional linguistic theory, which viewed language as a "social fact." In this view social and cognitive aspects become reflected within grammar. Politics and ideology were seen as displayed through grammatical structure, and analyzing language in this way was referred to as "Critical Linguistics." This approach has since been expanded, both in methodology and theory, and is now seen as part of the broader analytic program known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see van Dijk, this volume). Wodak and Meyer (2009: 2) see CDA as moving the "linguistic" to a "multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological level"; although grammar remains a central tool in explaining how ideology, power, and domination become constituted through linguistic structures.

Van Dijk (this volume) argues that CDA should not be seen as a method but as a form of critically driven theory and practice operationalized by politically concerned discourse analysts, whose aim is to use a variety of methods in the study of power abuse and inequality within society. Such an approach has been criticized for its own internal politicization, since it seems to begin with the assumption that certain data sets produce power abuse and then sets off to find and describe such abuse. Consequently, it is suggested that critical analysts are in danger of confirming what they already believed from the start (see Sharrock and Anderson 1981; Stubbs 1997; Widdowson 1998). Further, CDA has been criticized for its claim to use linguistic analysis to confirm forms of power abuse. Widdowson (1995, cited in Stubbs 1997: 4) argues that because of its critical orientation CDA is "essentially sociological or socio-political rather than linguistic." And it is also possible that the political critique of political discourse for political purposes becomes a form of political discourse itself.

Whatever the case, in the past 20 years the "critical" approach to language, and to political discourse in particular, has been one of the fastest-growing areas of applied linguistic research. Many of the scholars writing on CDA have also been leaders in the field of political discourse; for example, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun van Dijk.

The critical analyst sees political discourse as the use of words and phrases, syntactic processes, and discursive positioning, to either hide or distribute responsibility in certain ways, or designate specific individuals or groups as belonging to categories that

may serve particular political purposes. Consider, for example, the various ways in which one might represent an individual rape victim:

A woman  
 A young woman  
 A young woman who is a mother of three  
 A divorced exotic dancer and mother of three  
 An unemployed party girl and single mother of three

Each choice may represent specific facts, and all of these may be true. The decision about which ones to use will vary with the speakers' aims. And these may range from trying to gain sympathy for the victim to trying to indicate some personal responsibility on the part of the victim (see Schiffrrin 2006).

Such choices are "systematic" and may reflect choices available within the grammatical systems of languages (Halliday 1985). At the grammatical level of "transitivity" for instance, choices may be made between several different and related processes. These processes include such things as the "material" – what is/ or happened, or the "mental" – including the way things are understood, felt, or perceived. Transitivity allows us to view how language is being used to describe, "who does what to whom and why" (Machin and Mayr 2012: 104). Machin and Mayr (2012: 105, see also van Dijk 2008) use the following two sentences to show transitivity in action.

Muslims win a transfer out of too "white" jail. (*Daily Mail*, March 21, 2008)  
 Terrorism convicts granted move from "white" jail. (*Daily Telegraph*, March 21, 2008)

In the first sentence the Muslims are active in gaining a prison transfer, while in the second they are "passive recipients of a privilege." Machin and Mayr (2012: 105) go on to say that in both cases the prisoners are described negatively in that they are being treated in an advantaged way, and this is negative "because prisoners should not be given privileges." Of course there is more to it than this, the actors are not simply prisoners but "Muslims," or "terrorists," forms of reference that compound the negativity of the claims.

Or consider the following two examples from Crichton (2007: 7):

The terror that targeted New York and Washington could next strike any center of civilization. (Bush 2002)  
 Terror, unanswered, cannot only bring down buildings; it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments. (Bush 2003)

Crichton argues that "terror" is given a material role as "actor" within the grammar of these sentences. As such "terror" becomes an entity that causes something to happen to someone or something (Halliday 1985). In an analysis of 12 speeches by George W. Bush, Crichton notes the distribution of the word "terror" and argues that its use within the material process obscures and leaves left unsaid those actual human participants involved in terror, or those who have suffered the consequences of terror. This personification of "terror" as an actor allows Bush to turn an abstract concept into an



image of “someone” who does something, and who therefore can be fought against and defeated.

It is accepted that choices at various grammatical levels may be made for specific representational purposes, but it is also true that a specific production does not guarantee a specific comprehension. If I say, “soldiers shot at rioters,” as opposed to “rioters were shot at by soldiers,” I may wish to emphasize one group rather than the other. However, the way a soldier or rioter interprets these sentences may be unaffected by the structure, since both possess the same grammatical system and may convert passive sentences into active sentences, or active sentences into passive sentences. Equally, in an “agentless” sentence such as “taxes will be raised from next year,” one could say responsibility is being avoided since there is no subject who is seen as carrying out the actions. On the other hand, in real texts sentences do not occur in isolation, and the agent or subject could be interpreted via previous claims, or be inferred logically from the aims of the text (see Stubbs 1997).

To be fair to CDA, Fairclough (1992: 89) notes that “it is not possible to ‘read off’ ideologies from texts” as they involve “discourses as whole social events – they are processes between people – not just to texts which are moments of such events.” Fairclough also highlights in this the role of “intertextuality,” the interdependent relation of texts to one another, and reminds us, like Stubbs, that “texts” do not occur in isolation (Dunmire 2009; Hodges 2011; Sclafani 2008).

### 3 Discourse and Political Pragmatics

Language frequently becomes politicized because specific structures are used in particular contextualized discourses. Consider President Bill Clinton’s famous phrase “I did not have sexual relations with that woman (pause) Miss Lewinsky.” Much has been made of the ambiguity of the phrase “sexual relations.” Since Clinton was accused of having an affair with Monica Lewinsky, “sexual relations” could mean he did not have “sexual intercourse” with Miss Lewinsky, but may have had other forms of sexual contact. Equally interesting here is the phrase “that woman.” The phrase is being used appropriately, referring to/pointing to an individual marked as a member of a gender set. But Clinton adds, after a slight pause, “Miss Lewinsky.” In this context most people would have known the referent of “that woman,” and hence, not to make use of a definite description would invoke Gricean rules (Grice 1975), which say that if one says less than one could have the hearer should infer further information through specific inferences referred to as “implicatures” (see Grice 1975, also Levinson 1983; Sperber and Wilson 1986). In this case the inference was that Clinton did not even want to mention Miss Lewinsky’s name because of his animosity toward her.

Clinton was, in a sense, assessing potential interpretations as part of “online speech production,” taking account of these and adjusting the detail in his response as he realizes the outcome of not mentioning the woman’s name. Sometimes, however, political plans that lead to the use of certain words, phrases, and sentences at one contextual point in time may be given a second negative reading at a later point in time. George H. W. Bush famously said during his presidential campaign in 1988, “watch my lips no new taxes.” Later, because of external economic factors, Bush had to raise taxes. Many

of these tax rises were not new, nevertheless his previous claims were critically invoked against him, and specifically that he had been dishonest or even lied.

John Major, Conservative prime minister of the United Kingdom, found himself in a similar position. The Labour opposition claimed Major and his government intended to raise Value Added Tax (VAT). Major said: "I have no *plans* and see no *need* to raise VAT." But Major's government did raise VAT by 2.5 percent to 17.5 percent. As in the case of George H. W. Bush, Major was accused of doing exactly what he said he wouldn't do, that is raise VAT. Osborne (2005) says of Major that he "broke his pledge." But did he? Remember what he said was he "had no plans" or "he saw no need" to raise VAT. His original statement was, he could argue, a time and contextual-based claim, and that what he said at time X was true. However, because circumstances changed at time Y, plans were required to raise VAT. So was Major lying in his first statement, or simply a victim of changing circumstances? Strictly speaking it is quite possible for Major's statement at time X to be true, but the public do not necessarily read such claims as time based or contextually constrained, they read them as general statements, and as, Osborne suggests, they saw Major's statement as a "pledge."

As we have seen politicians are often thought of as covering up the truth, manipulating language, and of downright lying, although determining the truth conditions for lying is not always straightforward (see Meibauer 2011; Wilson 2004). It is not simply that something is false, since speakers can always be mistaken; and even when a person has an intention to mislead they can do this without making false assertions, since one can also create misleading inferences that may then be cancelled (Meibauer 2011; Wilson 2004). Worse still, some analysts argue that in politics there can be different types of "lies," for example, "justifiable lies" as opposed to "downright lies" (Pfiffner 2006).

Recently there has been a growth in the use of another specific type of speech act that is perhaps less expected of politicians, the act of "apologizing" (see Lakoff 2001: 23ff.). In 1998 Bill Clinton went on television and made a public statement regarding the evidence he had given about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. In it he "regrets" misleading people, although he does not claim he was lying. Whether this was an apology has stirred some debate among analysts (Morgan 2001), but this is often because the elements which make up the "speech act" of apologizing, such as sincerity, regret, and admission of wrongdoing (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), may be expressed in many different ways. In the case of a growing number of public political apologies certain aspects of the classic speech act of apologizing may need reconsideration.

Cunningham (1999) notes that in public apologies "sincerity" has become a central issue. This is not surprising in that public figures may be called upon to apologize for historical events in which they were not involved and for which they are not individually responsible. Hence, genuine regret may be less prevalent in public apologies.

Harris, Grainger, and Mullany note that the concept of a "political" apology has received limited attention, and have tried to distinguish a number of factors that define political apologies (2006: 721–3), for example, they are highly mediated and in the public domain; they are both generated by and generate controversy; and they require a form of words for acceptance or blame and responsibility (illocutionary recognition).

Harris and co-workers also make the point that one of the most important factors in producing a political apology is the relative seriousness of the offense, and this can range from "social gaffes" to "leading a country to war." There is also the issue that

many recent political apologies have been for actions that may be historically distant, and politicians may be apologizing on behalf of a previous administration. Prime Minister Tony Blair apologized for the Irish famine, and Bill Clinton apologized for America's role in the slave trade (Harris, Grainger, and Mullany 2006: 725).

But such apologies may be problematic or contextually constrained. In 1997 Australian Prime Minister John Howard spoke to a convention that was exploring the process of reconciliation between "indigenous" and "white" Australians. Howard says an apology:

will not work if it is premised solely on a sense of national guilt and shame. Rather we should acknowledge past injustices and focus our energies on addressing the root causes of current and future disadvantage among our Indigenous people. (Augoustinos, Le Couteur, and Fogarty 2007: 98)

Hence, Howard equates a public apology with "guilt" and plays down the need for an apology for past deeds – which did not involve most modern Australians – in favor of concentrating on the needs of the present.

Similarly, in 2012 the British government was called upon to apologize for British forces' use of brutal torture during interrogations of "mau mau" prisoners in 1950s Kenya. The British government agreed British forces' actions were unacceptable, and they agreed to apologize. But is this apology also an acceptance of responsibility? A number of "mau mau" prisoners saw it this way and took legal action against the British government.

The issue of regret and responsibility is at the center here. However, a government can, with hindsight, accept that the actions of a previous administration or government were morally wrong. But this is different from accepting the present generation must now take on both the guilt and responsibility of the past and the actions of previous generations.

## 4 The Discursive Production Politicians and the Political Stance

While much research on political discourse focuses on political actors in a variety of contexts, this is often done, not surprisingly, with the politician as the producer of discourse, as opposed to the politician as a product of such discourse. Wodak (2011) set out to look at politics and politicians as they discursively construct what it is they do, why they do it, and how out of all this they produce their own individual and political group identities. The main focus of Wodak's research is the European Union and the European parliamentary context. She explores a variety of phenomena and uses a range of discourse tools to unpack European politicians' views on a variety of topics, including how the politicians expressed their Europeaness. Drawing on Goffman's concept of "footing" (1981; see also Tannen and Wallat 1993, and Davies and Harré 1990 on "positioning"), that is how people align themselves with, or adopt a "stance" toward, a concept or topic, along with a focus on narratives of personal experience (Duranti 2006; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Schiffrin 1996), Wodak explores how members of the

European Parliament's (MEPs) identities become linguistically constructed. The findings draw out how MEPs make use of the cultural and historical bonds of Europe to position the political and cultural concept of Europe and the context of being European. In contrast, Wodak also found that issues of localism, regionalism, specific personal interest politics, and individual agendas were also central in an MEP's identity construction. This is perhaps unsurprising, after all you need to convince your local electorate to vote for and send you to Europe. Hence, the broader concept of being European must always be tempered by regional and local politics as found in individual states and polities.

Wodak's work on political alignment reflects a growing interest in how language is used to encode or reflect specific "stances." According to Du Bois (2007) a "stance" is a social act, something we do through communication when we evaluate or align ourselves with objects or others, and such evaluations may reflect a host of issues from gender, through formality, to politeness (see Coupland 2007; Dailey, Hinck, and Hinck 2008). For example, in his deposition given to the Paula Jones inquiry President Bill Clinton believed that the lawyers were "out to get him," so he did not see it as his job to be helpful. Hence, in his testimony he adopts a specific form of epistemic stance by making use of "discursive hedges" and "evidential modals"; "I'm not sure"; "it's possible that"; "I believe so"; "as I remember/recall." His testimony was criticized as less than forthcoming, but this is exactly what he set out to do, this is exactly the "stance" he took toward the court and the process of deposition.

Similarly, more recent examples can also be found within the Bush administration's statements about WMD. Here "evidentiality" is also present, but in this case "hedging" is replaced with higher degrees of certainty through reference to external evidence and epistemic markers of "fact":

Simply stated there is no doubt that Saddam Hussien now has Weapons of mass destruction.

*We know for a fact* that there are weapons there. (Ari Fleischer, January 9, 2003)

*Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt* that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised. (George Bush, March 18, 2003)

(examples from *Counterpunch*, May 2003)

## 5 Sounds Political

In studies of political discourse there has been relatively little attention given to how politicians make use of phonetic, phonological, or suprasegmental features of language for political purposes. Sociolinguistic research indicates that the way we sound has an impact on how people perceive us, and this can range from our attractiveness and intelligence to our trustworthiness and employability (see Giles and Powesland 1975; Lippi-Green 1997).

We know that Margaret Thatcher modified her speech to make herself more attractive to voters, and that UK Prime Minister David Cameron's upper-class accent

“turns off” some voters (see Beattie 1982; Bull 2003). In the United States recent work has suggested that ex-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice adopts selected African American speech forms in specific speech contexts (Podesva *et al.* 2012), and Hall-Lew, Coppock, and Starr (2010) claim that American politicians’ production of “Iraq’s” second vowel marks “political conservatism” when produced as /æ/ but political liberalism when produced as /a:/.

In studies of prosody within political interviews, Strangert (2005) notes that politicians reflect a very fluid and positive style, with only short pauses in syntactically appropriate positions. It has also been claimed that the sounds of politicians’ own names, along with the rhythmic patterns they project, can also assist, or hinder, a politicians’ aim of attracting voters (Smith 1998). Duez (1997: see also Touati 1991) has attempted to correlate aspects of acoustic patterning with degrees of political power. Duez suggests that aspects of acoustic delivery within the speeches of ex-French President François Mitterrand were affected by whether Mitterrand was in the role of challenger or opponent, as opposed to holder of the position of president. While in the role of president, Mitterrand made use of a slower articulation rate, but when in the position of challenger, or opponent, the articulation rate was much more rapid. Hence, Duez suggests that temporal organization could reflect relative distance from “power.”

A number of studies have also attempted to integrate the prosodic level of language with discursive and pragmatic levels. Braga and Aldina Marques (2004), for example, argue that suprasegmental features may be harnessed and used in correlation with syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic features to achieve specific political effects. In a study of political debates in European Portuguese they focused on a set of prosodic features, including pitch, emphasis, and focus and noted that particular patterns were found to match argumentative goals such as assertiveness, irony, emotion, and hyperbole.

While the study of sounds and sound patterns involves a variety of technical forms of analysis, it is nonetheless an important component of the consideration of political discourse, and as we have seen above it is an area that deserves further consideration in terms of how it interfaces with other levels of discursive production.

## 6 Conclusions and Summary

One of the core goals of political discourse analysis is to seek out ways in which language choice is manipulated for specific political effect. In our discussion we have seen that almost all levels of language are involved, from sounds through lexis to pragmatics. Words, for example, can be used to gloss over negative perceptions, or to give a positive spin on events (Geis 1987; Johnson and Milani 2010; Silberstein 2004). In grammar, studies indicate how selected functional systems are manipulated to reflect specific different ideological frames (Dirven, Hawkins, and Sandikcioglu 2001; Fowler and Marshall 1985). There are studies of pronouns and their distribution relative to political and other forms of responsibility (Allen 2007; Wilson 1990) and studies of the political role of pragmatic features like implicatures, metaphors, and speech acts (Chilton 2004; Harris, Grainger, and Mullany 2006; Holly 1989). Even the way politicians articulate their own names can have an impact on voters (Smith 1998).

As mentioned, defining political discourse is not a straightforward matter. Some analysts define the political so broadly that almost any discourse may be considered political. At the same time, a formal constraint on any definition such that we only deal with politicians and core political events excludes the everyday discourse of politics that is part of people's lives. The balance is a difficult one, and perhaps all we can expect from analysts is that they make clear in which way they are viewing political discourse, because they too, like politicians, are limited and manipulated in and by their own discourse. In many cases social and political judgments are made before an analysis commences, while in other studies (see Chilton 2004; Geis 1987; Okulska and Cap 2010) the political is derived from language in terms of linguistic assessments and constraints. These different approaches are not mutually exclusive, and neither one has any analytical priority, but we should keep in mind that some analyses of political discourse may become as much political as linguistic.

Since the 1980s there has been a growing interest in political discourse, and recent texts such as Wodak (2011) and Wodak and Chilton (2005) are beginning to bring together various aspects of research on political discourse. Other studies have also begun to challenge the language centric nature of political discourse studies by calling for a multimodal perspective on political data (Kress 2010; Lazuka 2012; Serafini 2010), and there will be a growing need in the future to combine the level of language with a range of other modalities, and to broaden the range of subject matter as politics develops, shifts, and changes within emerging states. In this latter case there is the example of the growing influence of women politicians in Western society and their emergence as a potential force in Africa and the Middle East (Dahlerup 2007; Wilson and Boxer 2012). Equally, the role of social media as a reflection of and a production of political discourse is becoming more central (see Bimber and Davis 2003; Howard and Hussain 2011; Khondker 2011). However, while the inclusion of multimodal analyses of political discourse, along with a growing focus on other forms of social media, further enhances our understanding of the production and contextual realization of political discourse, language still remains central and at the heart of the study of political discourse.

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