SOCIOLINGVISTIKA/ SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Analysis of Political Discourse: Methodological Constraints

Piotr Cap

Abstract. The paper bridges considerations characteristic of the domains of linguistic pragmatics, discourse analysis, as well as psycholinguistics and social psychology. It poses the hypothesis that political discourse is as such an analytic determinant, i.e. that it dictates methods of investigation into it. These methods manifest a "bottom-up" or "top-down" orientation (cf. Beaugrande, 1991), which is different in intensity relative to what kind of text is investigated.

It is argued that certain texts which "include" an analyst (i.e. where an analyst is part of depicted events or part of discourse audience) or are more "familiar" to him/her generate observations on their function and structure at an early stage of their componental analysis, or even before it takes place. Once the global function of the text has been presupposed, the analysis proceeds "top-down", i.e. toward all micro-data chunks supportive of the initial hypothesis.

Conversely, the analyses pursued in a "bottom-up" manner result from an analyst having insufficient extralinguistic knowledge to postulate *a priori* claims about the text and its function. This constraint concerns analysts not being part of the reality investigated, or those undertaking diachronic studies or studies of highly-metaphoric discourse.

The argument undertaken in the paper is illustrated with first-hand examples of various political texts selected by the author, as well as some further accounts of political talk available from general literature on political discourse analysis.

Introduction

Analytic commitment to a specific mode of inquiry can be (partly) determined by the extent to which an analyst shares expectations of the actual text receivers. Determination of the analytic mode is usually further strengthened by other factors, such as the structure and length of text, the kinds and number of 'cues' occurring in it, or the density of text's figuration. All these factors come under investigation in the present paper, which discusses analytic determinism of texts representing the domain of politics and political rhetoric. In the first part of the paper I look at Wilson's (1991) accounts of two texts which, to my mind, inherently invite disparate research modes, i.e. the "bottom-up" and "top-down" mode. I try to establish how this natural determinism has affected Wilson's analysis, and which points could have been overlooked or misinterpreted as a result. In the second part, I support these observations with this time a first-hand inquiry, into a text which situates itself methodologically somewhere in between the preceding ones, and therefore calls for a twofold investigation.

Reagan's metaphor

In *Politically Speaking*, Wilson pays close attention to the pragmatic status of metaphorization. His discussion is illustrated with numerous examples taken from political language. In his observations, Wilson (1991: 115-21) devotes much space to a statement by Ronald Reagan:

(1) The Lady standing in the harbor has never betrayed us once.[1]

Wilson starts the analysis of *(1)* with noting that President Reagan made this statement as part of a speech delivered in the area of New York, against the backdrop of New York City, and in particular the prominent figure of the Statue of Liberty. The date of the speech (29 May, 1988) is, quite intriguingly, *not* given. Wilson admits that the statement does not stand a traditional test for truth validity and therefore applies the theory of relevance (cf. Sperber and Wilson, 1986) to interpret it. What is important for correct interpretation, he claims, is the awareness of distinction between "attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions" (cf. Katz, 1987). This, in turn, involves looking at Reagan's words in two parts: the subject part and the predicate part, where specification of the former will affect the meaning of the latter. If, Wilson says, the hearer follows the referential track, he or she will simply pick out the subject suggested (i.e. the Statue of Liberty) and match it against all referents accessible, that is all individual Americans. As a result, the metaphor will imply that it is America and individual Americans who have not betrayed their values, of which 'Liberty' is an example. If, however, the hearer attempts a focused, selective and better 'worked-out' *attribution* of these values (which is the case when he or she is more involved

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[1] US spelling modification, numbering and italics mine.

with the symbolism of the words rather than their automatic projection), then it is probably Ronald Reagan himself who only gets referred to. The first interpretation, Wilson claims, is more plausible because the hearer will probably treat the first part of the statement in terms of a "dead" metaphor since this understanding means less processing effort as confronted with basically the same level of comprehension (expressed by the second interpretation) achieved through complicated steps of comparison involving animate and inanimate objects. The likely function of the metaphor, Wilson concludes, is, hence, that of glorification of the American people.

The problem with Wilson's account, however, is his utter disregard for temporal setting of the speech, while it is the time when the speech was given that is a cornerstone of its interpretation. In fact, President Reagan made his statement, along with many others, in support of the incoming Republican nominee George Bush, whose 1988 campaign was characteristically centered around expressing commitment to the continuum of Reagan's liberal policies. Therefore, as Norris and Whitehouse (1988) note, Reagan's words were most probably meant to justify this commitment by stressing that over the 80s liberalism had passed the test of time with success. This conclusion could have been reached in the quoted analysis by posing a question about audience's pre-expectations of the speech. The fact is that since Reagan's popularity was relatively high at the end of the term, *no* declaration of change in policies was ever desired or expected. In his analysis, however, Wilson does not pose such questions. Hence, instead of testing a *global* assumption about the function of Reagan's statement against text data, he generates a fallacious conclusion from data micro-chunks which, in his approach, dominate, rather than complement each other. Still, there are a few factors which seem to explain why Wilson undertakes such characteristically componential or "decompositional" (cf. Katz, 1987) analysis. The nature of Wilson's research is strongly determined by the actual text properties which attract him to the "bottom-up" mode of investigation.

First and foremost, it is the metaphoric status of the statement that encourages the "bottom-up" approach. Metaphors, not only in political language, impose step-by-step speculation about their meaning. They enforce perplexity, bewilderment and natural desire to decipher meaning through mental processing which involves intrinsically inductive computation (cf. Lakoff, 1987). In his analysis, Wilson sets upon the very first 'cue' to compute the meaning; he starts with finding referent for the word *Lady* and builds the entire interpretation of the statement around the postulated correlation. This seems to be a fallacious move, since the comprehension of the metaphor does not really depend on finding a 'correct' reference for the word *Lady*. Nor in fact does it depend on the second part of the statement being 'correctly' inferred from the first part, as Wilson claims. All we need to interpret Reagan's statement is a thorough *check of the words against a global, culture-dependent supposition*, a verification continual and unbiased in the sense of no word prescribing the meaning of another prior to it. But, without

doubt, the quoted metaphor offers enough peculiarities (status of the word *Lady*; a semantic falsity of the phrase *standing in the harbor*; an intriguing concept of betrayal, etc.) to discourage an analyst from taking such track.

Secondly, the analysis is motivated by the length of the text sample. Since in Wilson's case the sample consists of merely a single sentence, consecutive investigation of the subject part and the predicate part seems nothing but natural. Furthermore, since interaction between the subject and the predicate usually involves some sort of semantic dominance, the analyst is encouraged to collect data on the basis of left-to-right investigation of the sentence because it is the left-most part (subject) that enacts such dominance. If the subject, as is the case with Reagan's statement, is 'attractive' enough to provoke independent speculation, further inductive research is likely to follow (cf. Beaugrande, 1991). The conclusion, however, is going to be selective and particular; it will only reflect the line of thought motivated by a single, pre-established interpretation of the subject part. All this is readily seen from Wilson's study.

In conclusion to these observations, it seems reasonable to postulate that Wilson's mode of research has been dominated by his being an 'outsider' to the situation depicted. Himself British, Wilson disregards cultural and temporal setting of the speech and tries to derive interpretation from an autonomous analysis of the language form. This is obviously no methodological accusation since in a great many cases an analyst simply cannot have a full access to all cultural determinants of the analyzed text (let us just mention, for instance, studies in ethnography of communication). It is important, however, to stress that ignorance of such factors tends to get offset an apparently exaggerated awareness of 'objective' text properties, which come to dominate analysis. The analysis is thus essentially cumulative and inductive, especially when the text chunk is a short one.

Will and parliamentary questions in Britain

The structure of the analysis in 2. was one where the argument followed the actual text sample elected for investigation. A reverse structure is adopted by Wilson in his study of parliamentary questions in Britain. In his argument, Wilson (1991: 151-5) first outlines their form-based function and then supplies some cultural background for his hypothesis. Finally, he reiterates his claim in a thesis format. Only later comes the text illustration, which apparently concludes the analysis. I shall now quote the major points of Wilson's argument and re-quote the examples given, in order to show how (and why) the present account differs from the analysis of Reagan's metaphor in 2.:

> Most of parliamentary questions are indirect requests containing modal form *will*, which 'politely' commits the hearer to action [...] Rejecting any indirect request made through the interrogative use of *will* creates a problem situation for the respondent. Because of the increased politeness of *will*, any rejection of the indirect request is essentially a "face threatening

act" (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987). Rejecting any indirect request requires interactional sensitivity. As the general politeness of the indirect act increases the problem of sensitively constructing a rejection becomes more complex. If [...] *will* carries an increased politeness marking, while at the same time indicating a specific expectation that the response/request will be fulfilled, then it is a useful discourse marker (cf. Schiffrin, 1987) for making any refusal or rejection that much more difficult for the respondent. Such a claim seems consonant with the context of parliament, where despite rivalries and antagonisms, members are expected to maintain a civilized and respectful form of confrontation. By constructing a parliamentary question using *will*, members can indicate their expectation of a response while at the same time laying adherence to a specific polite form [...] These facts suggest some reasons why *will* may be the preferred form within the oral question and answer sessions. First, it commits (through implication) the hearer to the action; and second, it is a polite request, and, therefore, any simple rejection of the request reflects back on the individual who has refused to perform what has been implicated as a reasonable action.

(2) Mr. Mallon: Will the Secretary of State confirm that a sizeable section of the population of Northern Ireland is in favor of the accord and wants to see it working? Will the Secretary of State consider directing some of his remarks to that section of the community at the earliest possible opportunity instead of expressing his own inherent Unionism at every opportunity? [2]

(3) Mr. Heffer: Will the Government inform their colleagues in America that they should consider United States history? The United States gained power after a struggle against the British, and only later did it have democratic elections. Nicaragua is in precisely the same position. Nicaragua has a democratically elected government. The United States of America should not support those who are trying to overthrow a democratically elected government who are carrying out policies on behalf of the people.

Let us first deal with example *(2)*. The role of the text chunk provided by Wilson is to show that *will* is part of an integrated expression of indirect request and institutional politeness formula. This integrated function follows from, as has been *a priori* postulated, the cultural context of the event. Since the nature of both an act of request and any politeness-marked act is interactional, Wilson's thesis invites consideration of the meaning of words in terms of the anticipated answer (or problems therewith) rather than, say, a self-contained assertion of belief. The way the thesis has been formulated prior to text illustration leaves the analyst with a constrained commentary space; all that

remains to be added is a prediction of the effects of a Yes/No answer expected from the addressee. And indeed, within the space of one sentence Wilson rightly observes that a positive response admits to a long-standing bias on the part of the government while a negative answer sounds strongly arrogant. However, none of these (truthful) observations does a full justice to the overall pragmatic load of the analyzed question. The fact is that a more componential approach to the text, while not detracting from the text's global function (understood as creation of a problem situation for a political opponent), reveals many intricacies that get overlooked if the analysis starts from largely cultural premises.

What are these missing points in Wilson's argument? There is, quite evidently, some acute criticism of the addressee which never gets adequately accounted for. This criticism is of the addressee (Secretary of State) considered both as a person and a politician. On the one hand, ridiculed is his mental ability to react promptly to changes in situation. This is achieved by the use of phrase *consider directing some of his remarks*, which not only implies that a straightforward action requested from the addressee needs unnecessary abundance of time (*consider*) to be completed, but also acknowledges inherent limitations upon a successful performance of that action (*some of*). On the other hand, the addressee is shown to give unjustified preference to private beliefs over what is implied to constitute a global cause. To that end the speaker chooses to portray the addressee in terms of an isolated party (*expressing his own inherent Unionism at every opportunity*). Lastly, it is worth noting that even the observations which **have** been made in Wilson's argument could further benefit from such componential analysis of the text. In fact, a problem situation for the respondent arises right from the beginning of the question, due to a specific lexical choice made by the speaker. The presupposition of truthfulness of the proposition following verb *confirm* puts the addressee in a position in which indeed neither of the responses anticipated by Wilson seems reasonable.

Also in the case of *(3)*, the pre-postulated interactional character of analysis leads to merely an isolated comment on the anticipated answer to Mr. Heffer's question, at the expense of some conclusions which could be drawn from an independent study of the question contents. Wilson observes that the question puts the addressee in an uncomfortable position in the sense that it can only be answered by directly stating that Nicaragua does **not** have a democratic government, i.e. by making a premise whose contents and structure detract from the politeness formulae enacted by the speaker through the application of *will*-sequence. This is certainly true, but Mr. Heffer's question is again part of a larger strategy of criticism which equally manifests itself in the use of specific words and phrases whose function is much more assertive (in fact, accusatory) than directive. The presence of phrase *their colleagues in America*, for instance, implies that the British government is at least indirectly supportive of certain negative actions undertaken by its American partner and other allies (...*trying to overthrow...*).

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[2] US spelling modification, numbering and italics mine.

Conclusions from Wilson's research

We have seen that Wilson analyzes the texts quoted in 2. and 3. in a radically different way. In the former study, he proceeds from one data chunk to another and inductively generates a conclusion. In the latter, he starts with a thesis, and subsequently verifies it, in a "top-down" manner, against individual data. These regularities seem to be explained by a couple of factors, some of which concern the person of the analyst. First of all, Wilson's familiarity with cultural background of the analyzed discourse is greater in the second case and, consequently, his ability to predefine language norms as following from this background is considerably larger there. Secondly, the cue for the postulated macroproposition of the parliamentary texts is virtually one lexical item, which, by occurring at the beginning of the text, constrains further investigation. This is evidently not the case with Reagan's metaphor, whose internal structure is sufficiently complex to attract the analyst to componential research. Thirdly, it is also because the texts in 2. and 3. differ in overall length that a closer look is given to the former, while the latter is accounted for in a less detailed and hence predictive way. These variations in approach cause limited effectiveness of both analyses, though each gets affected in a different way. While in 2. the analysis is shown to take a fallacious track, in 3. it is not so much incorrect as incomplete. The macroproposition described in 3. is truthfully identified, and so are its auxiliary, politeness-based components. The missing element of the analysis, however, is some acknowledgement of the assertion structures playing, ironically, a very similar auxiliary role. Wilson has shown how certain indirect acts in parliamentary sessions create a problem situation for the addressee, yet has failed to mention the role of multiple assertive chunks contributing toward precisely the same objective. But more importantly, the quoted analyses prompt consequential methodological questions, namely: are the described limitations set upon by the operation of "bottom-up" and "top-down" modes going to generate comparable analytic shortcomings in the case of other political texts studied by other analysts? Is the adoption of or over-attachment to the former mode *always* more hazardous, as has been shown thus far? And lastly, which of the modes should be more popular with a majority of political discourse analysts?

Analysis of Taliban's statement

The questions I have posed cannot be possibly answered in full, but their investigation seems capable of revealing more regularities about the adoption of the particular research mode (i.e. "bottom-up or "top-down"). In what follows I refrain from making a simple commentary and undertake a first-hand analysis. This analysis differs from the studies quoted from Wilson in that the goal is to pursue the analytic processes and their textual and non-textual determinants, rather than concentrate on reaching a ready-made conclusion. The character of analysis is hence speculative; it involves adoption of different political standpoints, a purposeful over-attachment to one research mode at the expense of the other, a simultaneous and consecutive application of both modes, a purposeful exclusion of cultural background from the investigatory

activity, and many other analytic ploys. The tentativeness of the study serves to account for the full complexity of a situation where none of the modes seems clearly dominant or where both may successfully complement each other.

The text I have selected is the final decree of Afghan Islamic clerics (Ulema), on US demands for the handover of Osama bin Laden, the world number one terrorism figure, apparently responsible for the attacks on US Pentagon and World Trade Center which took place on September the 11th, 2001. The text was distributed nine days later by the Taliban (a self-appointed ruling group in Afghanistan suspected of harboring bin Laden) in the Pashtu language and was translated by The Associated Press:

(4) Afghanistan's Ulema is sad over the losses in the United States and hopes that the United States will not launch an attack on Afghanistan. Ulema hopes that the US will show patience and flexibility and will take more time to properly investigate the incident.

The Afghan Ulema demands the United Nations and the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) hold an inquiry into the incident in the United States to know who were behind the incidents and to prevent the killing of innocent people in the future.

The United Nations and the OIC should take note of the American president's remarks, who said that the war will be a crusade.

In order to prevent such kind of incidents and that there should be no misunderstanding in the future, this Ulema council requests the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to persuade Osama bin Laden to leave Afghanistan and select a new place for himself.

If the United States attacks Afghanistan after these proposals, any US action will be against the sacred Islamic law. It will amount to an act against Islam. We have found it in all Islamic jurisprudence if the non-Muslims attack Muslim land, jihad is obligatory on the Muslims and Quran, Sayings of the Prophet and all the books of jurisprudence urge the Muslims to wage the jihad.

If the non-Muslim invades or attacks the land of Muslims, in this situation Muslims can seek assistance from the Muslims and non-Muslim governments but with the condition that the Islamic orders should remain supreme. This has been proven in the books of Islamic jurisprudence.

Apparently, this text has a background as well as idiosyncratic properties which encourage an analysis involving both "top-down" and "bottom-up" processes. The prompts for a "top-down" study include primarily a uniform perception of the background, i.e. the terrorist attack which has been denounced worldwide, providing a broad understanding for and expectation of a retaliatory action against a country harboring the perpetrators. In view of a prospective US intervention, the Ulema statement could be seen as a move to avoid war by

promising a handover of chief terrorist Osama bin Laden. However, since such move would discredit the Ulema and the ruling Taliban in the eyes of some of the more radical Arab audience, a safer presupposition about the text would be that it stands open to interpretation rather than any direct reading. In other words, the delicacy of the situation in which the text was written could make an analyst postulate its flexibility with the fulfilment of expectations of all addressee groups. This, in turn, means that the analyst could safely presuppose about the occurrence of specific language forms and logical formulae in the text, such as implicature, impersonalization, or ambiguity of reference of some deictic expressions.

Also, the Ulema statement invites "top-down" approach on account of the text length which makes the hypothesis-data-thesis formula feasible (cf. 3). The length and structure of the text sample prevents an inductive computation of meaning (cf. 2) since, as we shall see in a moment, the major inferential cues are randomly scattered across the text. Additionally, there are text elements which have no "cue" status whatsoever, and this encourages selectivity in data presentation.

The fact that the status of macropropositional cues in the text calls for a "top-down" analysis follows from little possibility of interpreting them relative to any immediate context. For instance, *should take note of* may be judged (generally) to constitute a directive, but whether its (specific) function is to simply denounce the *remarks* or possibly draw some share of importance by identifying with them cannot be successfully inferred from the text surrounding. From the deductive standpoint, it seems logical to assume the former interpretation and this is what an analyst is prompted to do, given the knowledge of the Taliban attitude to Americans. A similar problem arises with single words such as *were* in the second paragraph or *select* in the fourth paragraph. The use of *were* rather than 'was' could follow from an option provided by grammatical rules, yet it could also imply that Osama bin Laden had, according to the Taliban, nothing to do with the terrorist attacks. Furthermore, the use of *select* could suggest that there are multiple places in the world where Osama is welcome, but again, the overall coherence of the passage is such that it cannot be determined which interpretation should be a correct one. The loose connections between major cues for the macroproposition encourage looking beyond the text to postulate deductive, *a priori* claims about its function.

For all these "top-down" prompts, it would be a mistake to say that the Ulema statement contains no text elements which fit the canons of a "bottom-up" analysis. In fact, albeit the loose connectedness holding **between** the particular sections of the text encourages a "top-down" approach, a corresponding lack of coherence **within** single sentences seems to prompt an inductive computation of meaning, comparable to one we have seen from Wilson's analysis of the Statue of Liberty metaphor in 2. This can be readily observed from the structure of the first sentence in the Ulema text which, though clearly non-metaphoric, invites speculation almost identical to that generated by Reagan's words. The reason is the presence of the two apparently disparate thematic segments (*is sad over the losses* and *hopes that the United States will not launch an attack*) linked together by conjunction *and*. Since this structuring evokes natural bewilderment, there arises a temptation to search for the sentence function via establishing some common ground between the themes. In fact, having recognized little such ground, an analyst may ultimately define the speaker's intention as one to present the threat of American intervention in terms of an **action** rather than (justified) **reaction.** Yet whatever the specific conclusion, such kind of analysis as a whole should be considered manifestation of "bottom-up" processes, as the latter clearly underlie the analyst's investigation of analogies and disanalogies holding between the themes.

Also, an analyst investigating the Ulema statement must leave a margin for 'the unexpected'. In other words, a text motivated by the political situation so complex as in the Taliban case can hardly be judged on the basis of sole anticipation of meaning. For instance, if in actuality Osama bin Laden *is* harbored in Afghanistan, an expectation of the Taliban trying to buy time by their response seems perfectly logical. Consequently, a phrase such as *requests* (...) *to persuade* (...) *to leave* can be approached as a manifestation of this strategy, linguistically expressed in infinitive duplication (cf. Halliday, 1985). If, however, the above condition does not hold and bin Laden has his shelter elsewhere, the expectation of the time-buying strategy is nothing but wrong and the fact that the infinitive has been duplicated is, for the analyst, quite unlikely to testify to such function. As a result, the phrase is going to be either completely ignored in analysis or, possibly, associated with some other function. But considering that the analyst is unaware of bin Laden's whereabouts, he or she is likely to approach the cue without a ready-made conclusion at hand and hence devote more attention to its linear investigation. This again entails more time to be spent on the "bottom-up" componential analysis, thoroughly grounded in the study of all the lexical items involved.

This last "bottom-up" prompt might indeed show that the methodological hazards which are consequential for the ultimate meaning interpretation are more likely to occur in studies of inductive orientation (cf. Wilson's analysis of Reagan's metaphor) and less likely in deduction-based analyses (cf. Wilson's analysis of the parliamentary questions in Britain), but a more important conclusion is that in the case of many political texts both these approaches will merely complement each other. It seems that the quoted situations in which an analyst is exposed to either a hundred percent figurative text, being at the same time ignorant of its background (cf. 2), or to a text which fully reiterates his or her daily experience (cf. 3) are non-representative of a vast majority of the standpoints underlying analyses of political discourse. I have, nevertheless, decided to comment on Wilson's considerations in order to pre-establish, in a purposefully extreme and atypical context, what *exactly* are the kinds of conflicting tendencies which are going to pervade analysis of a text such as the Ulema statement. This last text has been discussed in a more detailed manner because of

bearing, to my mind, all the many characteristics of what might be called a representative example of political discourse. It appears that the common features, qualities and determinants typifying a political text could be identified as:

- the speaker trying to instil a belief and further mental compliance therewith in at least one of the addressees (cf. *We have found it...* in the Ulema text)
- the speaker using reference to indisputable issues or credibility sources in order to establish this belief (cf. *...Quran, Sayings of the Prophet...*)
- the speaker attempting to get at least one of the addressees to perform an action as part of the compliance with the belief (cf. *...urge the Muslims to wage...*)
- the speaker standing in ideological conflict with at least one of the addressees (cf. *...an act against...*)
- the speaker seeking alliance with some of the addressees, against the adversary (cf. *...can seek assistance...*)

Conclusion

Even though these observations may seem primarily indicative of the language of military conflict, a closer look at many other contexts (say, rhetoric of a studio debate) does not appear to detract from their general accuracy. The ultimate finding is that, as the Ulema example has proved, an analysis of the above regularities *must* invite *both* the "bottom-up" and the "top-down" approach. For instance, an ability to judge and measure the speaker's reliance on some attitudinal 'anchors' requires awareness of the audience predispositions, which is voiced in the actual argument prior to formulating a thesis. On the other hand, the measurement of the performative value of the text, that is of the speaker's attempts to get the addressee to undertake an action (such as joining the Muslim alliance in the Ulema case), does not always require looking beyond the actual words as they are used in the analyzed sample. In other words, studying some of the properties of a political text postulated above necessitates a "top-down" perspective, but investigating some others apparently not. And vice versa, there are conclusions which can be reached on the basis of a sole "bottom-up" look, without deduction-based considerations. However, as has been seen from the first of Wilson's accounts (though not really proved in the analysis of the Taliban statement), an analyst might probably feel slightly 'safer' in adopting the deductive mind-set, if, naturally, any such 'conscious' decision should ever be made.

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Piotr Cap

Politinio teksto analizė: metodologiniai apribojimai

Santrauka

Straipsnis aprėpia svarstymus, būdingus lingvistinei pragmatikai, diskurso analizei, o taip pat psicholingvistikai ir socialinei psichologijai. Čia pateikiama hipotezė, kad politinis diskursas, kaip toks, yra analitinis determinantas, t.y., kad jis diktuoja jo tyrimo metodus. Šie metodai pasireiškia kryptimis "iš apačios į viršų" ir "iš viršaus į apačią" (Beaugrande 1991), kurie skiriasi savo intensyvumu, priklausomai nuo to, koks tekstas yra tyrinėjamas. Yra ginčijamasi, kad tam tikri tekstai, kuriuose yra analitikas (kur analitikas yra vaizduojamų įvykių dalis arba diskurso klausytojų dalis) ar yra labiau jam ar jai suprantamas, sukuria jų funkcijos ir struktūros stebėjimus jų sudėties tyrimo ankstyvoje stadijoje, arba dar prieš tai, kai tie įvykiai įvyksta. Kai yra iš anksto numanoma visuotinė teksto funkcija, tuomet analizė vyksta "iš viršaus žemyn", t.y., link smulkių duomenų dalelių, kurios pagrindžia pradinę hipotezę. Ir priešingai analizė vyksta "iš apačios į viršų" tuomet, kai analitikas neturi pakankamai ekstralingvistinių žinių, kad galėtų pateikti išankstinius pareiškimus apie tekstą ir jo fukciją. Šis apribojimas nelaiko analitiko tiriamos realybės dalimi, kaip ir tų, kurie užsiima diachroninėmis studijomis arba daug metaforų turinčio teksto studijavimu.

Šiuos ginčus straipsnyje iliustruoja įvairių politinių tekstų pavyzdžiai, kuriuos parinko autorius, o taip pat kai kurių politinių pokalbių ataskaitos, paimtos iš specialios literatūros, analizuojančios politinį diskursą.

The author

Piotr Cap, Ph.D., University of Lodz, Poland.
Academic interests: sociolinguistics.
Address: Department of English Language, University of Lodz, Al. Kosciuszki 65, Lodz, Poland.
E-mail: strus_pl@yahoo.com