

SPEAKING OF EUROPE: APPROACHES TO COMPLEXITY IN EUROPEAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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BOOK REVIEW

SPEAKING OF EUROPE: APPROACHES TO COMPLEXITY IN EUROPEAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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191 pp., ISBN: 978-90-272-0640-4 (hbk €90, \$135), 978-90-272-7203-4 (e-book) [Published as Volume 49 of *Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture* (DAPSAC) series]

Europe – and more specifically European unification – has been the subject of political discourse and its analysis for decades. Furthermore, the discourses generated by European institutions have themselves attracted the attention of analysts. All this, it could be argued, has taken place on the background of radical technological, economic, and political changes globally. The volume edited by Kjersti Fløttum aims to raise awareness of both the impact of this complexity on European political discourse, and of the complex methods developed for its analysis in various European research clusters, the book itself being the product of the interdisciplinary Eurling Group based in Bergen, Norway.

The volume has four major aims: (1) to present new methodological and theoretical perspectives; (2) to explain the complexities involved in EU discourse; (3) ‘to show how national and EU perspectives are negotiated in discourse’; and (4) to theorise the role of audiences in the EU setting (p. 2). Of these, the first two aims are shared by all chapters, being in close relation with the cited sources of inspiration for the overall project.

The theoretical and methodological contributions reflect developments in Norwegian and French disciplinary traditions, while Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) – especially through its discourse-historical approach – has informed primarily the development of the ‘three main levels’ of complexities identified in relation to the second aim, as these are similar in many aspects to the four levels of ‘context’ developed by Ruth Wodak. Apart from this, as the editor stresses, ‘the Eurling Group does not have a critical objective as such’ (p. 11), and their analyses are oriented more linguistically – and less thematically – than what is common in CDA (p. 12).

The book speaks with two voices, a powerful methodological one, and a fainter one offering snapshots of a complex yet presumably comprehensible EU discourse. It is made up of nine contributions, of which the introductory chapter not only provides the glue that keeps the book together, but also offers valuable bibliographic information regarding studies on Central and Eastern Europe, a perspective that is admittedly missing from the volume. In fact, case studies centre chiefly on British and French discourses.

Jens E. Kjeldsen's chapter examines, from a rhetorical perspective, a speech delivered by Tony Blair in 2005 at the European Parliament. Adopting Kenneth Burke's theory of *dramatism* – describing the process by which life is experienced as a coherent narrative, a drama – he looks both at the 'rhetorical situation' as part of a 'textual-contextual analysis', and at the reception of the speech in the national press of five countries. The study shows how Tony Blair was able to manoeuvre between the different expectations set by his manifold audiences, achieving a predominantly positive reception even in French and German newspapers. Kjeldsen's main conclusion is that 'complexity in the historical-political context and the rhetorical situations, as well as in the technocratisation of society in relation to the EU, does not necessarily lead to more complex language use', but rather to 'a more dramatised, figurative and general, and personified rhetoric' (p. 40). On a methodological level, the chapter argues for the incorporation of the 'reception' perspective in political discourse analysis.

In the following chapter, Coco Norén adopts a 'linguistic method' coupled with Jesper Strömbäck's theory of *mediatisation*, and looks at the degree to which Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are governed by *political logic* or by *media logic*. Focusing on speeches delivered by French MEPs, she finds a lack of mediatisation in parliamentary debates: 'there is no allusion to the event as being broadcast' (p. 54). In addition, texts used a more specialised language – abounding in taken-for-granted abbreviations – than that observed by Kjeldsen in the previous chapter. After triangulating her analysis based on further French and Swedish data sources, she concludes that European parliamentarians 'follow political logic and not media logic' (p. 63). On a methodological note, however, 'a linguistic method of the type applied here will make it possible to describe any future changes in this respect' (p. 63).

In the following three chapters, the methodologically innovative voice manifestly takes over. Damon Mayaffre and Céline Poudat set out primarily to familiarise the reader with several innovations in text statistics, lamenting that 'these cutting-edge methods are unfortunately not very well known outside of the French-speaking scientific community' (p. 74). Nevertheless, the consolidation of a new bilingual (French and English) open-source corpus tool (the TXT platform) promises change in this respect. The authors seek to prove the efficacy of their methods on two corpora (*Sarkozy TV* and *Corpus V*) containing Nicolas Sarkozy's TV appearances and all the discourses of Fifth Republic presidents, respectively.

Sarkozy remains the focus of attention in both ensuing contributions, with Didriksen and Gjesdal looking at the function of three argumentative connectives (*mais*, *donc*, and *parce que*) in his speeches to the EU parliament, and Gjerstad analysing the different voices that coexist in these talks. Furthermore, Gjerstad compares them with a speech by Tony Blair, the same one taken under scrutiny by Kjeldsen.

Both chapters are informed by the French tradition of 'enunciative linguistics', more specifically the theory of 'polyphony' in a version developed by ScaPoLine (théorie SCAndinave de la POLyphonie LINGuistiquE) (p. 86). 'Linguistic polyphony' in this sense resembles the Bakhtinian notion of *dialogism*, seeing language as expressing a plurality of 'voices' or 'points of view' that interact (p. 89). In the usage of Didriksen and Gjesdal, it represents 'a toolkit for the formalisation of the argumentative movements coded by connectives' (p. 90), and they combine this polyphonic analysis based on 'points of view'

with a logical-semantic examination. Their method – is argued – helps deal with the ‘unspoken fundament of political discourse’ (‘what is not said’) by offering pointers on ‘who said it’ (p. 109).

Gjerstad, on the other hand, focuses on what he calls ‘discursive polyphony’, supplementing ScaPoLine with the theory of *praxematics* (originating in Bakhtin and developed by Jacques Bres and his colleagues) and the discourse model developed by Eddy Roulet. The empirical results of his undertaking place Sarkozy’s speeches in a new perspective, and show that while Blair’s speech may use a simplified narrative (as argued by Kjeldsen), it involves a complexity of voices.

In the next two chapters, Andreas Musolff and Annelise Ly both deal with the uses of ‘metaphors’ in political discourse. Musolff compares the micro-historical ‘discourse career’ of the metaphor ‘at the heart of Europe’ in the British context with the ‘long-term discourse history’ of the ‘heart’ metaphor in the millennial tradition of European (above all English) political theory. In doing so, his aim is to take first steps towards a ‘diachronically informed cognitive linguistics’ as opposed to the current practice of interpreting merely synchronic variation (p. 142).

While Musolff’s chapter seems more grounded-theoretical in arriving to a contestation of some basic premises of cognitive linguistics, Ly starts from Lakoff’s cognitive metaphor theory and moves to a more flexible definition of metaphor ‘that includes the ideas of context and time’ (p. 154). Armed with the rigorous *Metaphor Identification Procedure* developed by an interdisciplinary group of researchers in 2007, she sets out to examine how MEPs depict the EU linguistically in their interventions during two debates on climate change, concluding that the metaphors used are rather conventional, with only one recorded exception. This – in her interpretation – can be seen as proof that the MEPs ‘do speak a common language’, reinforcing a sense of ‘togetherness’ (p. 168).

The concluding chapter was probably the best possible choice for the volume. Here, Peter Svensson and Dag Stenvoll offer a vigorous plea for ‘risky readings’, arguing that overinterpretations and speculations are quintessential for ‘the *political* analysis of political discourse’ (p. 171). While one can sense the facetiousness of anchoring a defence of interpretative speculation in the rationalisation of speculative investments in the financial realm (cf. p. 179) – especially in the wake of the global financial crisis – a ‘risky reading’ of the analogy itself would identify it as an instance of the subtle humorous undertone of the chapter, rather than a flaw in argumentation. This playfulness manifests itself recurrently, lastly in the concluding remarks, where a comparison between ‘risky readings’ and revolutionary experiments in the history of music turn the chapter into a call for a rock-and-roll revolution in political discourse analysis. Although driven by introspective reflection throughout, the chapter is not an apologia or vindication of the analyses performed earlier, but a valuable contribution to the wider debate around data interpretation in interdisciplinary settings.

Overall, the book has primarily a methodological novelty value, especially for discourse analysts in the Anglo-American tradition. In contrast, the picture of Europe as portrayed is quickly evanescent. While this may disappoint some readers, it is probably most illustrative of the need for theories and methods fit to capture the dynamic complexities of the EU. Linguists and empirically oriented political scientists with a basic understanding

of discourse analytic approaches will find the volume most rewarding, but it offers plenty of food for mind to social researchers in general. Regardless of the audience, the information and ideas developed in the book need to be consumed, savoured, and debated while they are still fresh, innovative, and under development.

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