

Analysis of Political Discourse: Methodological Constraints

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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 componential 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 highlymetaphoric 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.