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The Dialectical Interconnection of the Institutional and Everyday Political Discourse

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The article analyzes the Democratic and the Republican Parties political platforms of 2008 as a means of conveying ideas and beliefs to ordinary citizens and the interconnection between the institutional and everyday political discourse which gives better understanding of how the US political elite manages to persuade ordinary citizens to adopt their words and ideas.

Keywords: institutional political discourse, everyday political discourse, political narrative, reframing.

Point

In recent years, the studies of political discourse have considerably increased in numbers. Political discourse today is being analyzed from various perspectives due to differences in theories, aims, and methods of analysis. Therefore scholars disagree on many central issues including the nature of the term *political discourse*. In “The Handbook of Discourse Analysis,” John Wilson considers the ambiguous nature of the term: “The term is suggestive of at least two possibilities: first, a discourse which is itself political; and second, an analysis of political discourse as simply an example discourse type, without explicit reference to political content or political context” (Wilson, 2003:398) Wilson believes that this ambiguity may present a serious problem for a researcher who faces the necessity to decide what to consider political discourse.

Today linguists mostly adhere to two opposite views on the term *political discourse* – the broad and the narrow ones. The narrow definition describes political discourse as the whole range of speech acts used in political discussions (Baranov et al., 1991) or the whole “class of genres defined by a social domain, namely that of politics” (Van Dijk, 1998:11). Thus, in this case, political discourse is limited to strictly institutional level.

The broader definition includes the analysis of everyday political discussion. Therefore, this approach considers political discourse on both institutional and everyday level. Researchers keeping to this definition believe that the study of political language will not be complete until it includes the language used by ordinary people in private conversations when they talk about politics. As Geoffrey Nunberg observes in “Talking right: how conservatives turned

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liberalism into a tax-raising, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, New York Times-reading, body-piercing, Hollywood-loving, left-wing freak show”: “Most of the books and articles on political rhetoric concentrate on the language of speeches and public pronouncements, rather than the language that ordinary people use when they are talking about political topics... but while the language of politicians and pundits is ultimately aimed at persuading people to act in certain ways, it can only get there by first persuading them to talk in certain ways.” (Nunberg, 2007:3)

In this article we will accept the broad definition of the term *political discourse* and will examine public speeches of professional politicians. These speeches belong to the institutional political discourse. However, analyzing them *as a vehicle* for conveying ideas and beliefs to ordinary citizens, we may understand better the phenomenon of interdiscursivity, that is interconnection between the institutional and everyday political discourse which will help us see how the US political elite manages to persuade ordinary citizens to adopt their words and the ideas these words stand for.

In “Talking right: how conservatives turned liberalism into a tax-raising, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, New York Times-reading, body-piercing, Hollywood-loving, left-wing freak show”, Geoffrey Nunberg discusses the importance of “narrative” which means that American political elite should be able to produce a story Americans will believe into, and it must be a coherent story, not a simple statement of political positions (Nunberg, 2007). This idea is close to George Lackoff’s idea of “reframing” American politics with the help of new rhetoric related to values (Lackoff, 2002). Lackoff claims that liberals and conservatives build their political discourse resorting mostly to their moral systems which differ greatly. However Nunberg believes that “having a narrative” is more complicated than

reframing, as it means “making that story part of the fabric of American political discourse” and it could be done by giving new meanings to words and by “...getting Americans to accept those new meanings” (Nunberg, 2007:16)

Nonetheless, both scholars agree that, in recent years, conservatives have been doing a better job “reframing” American politics according to conservative values (by Lackoff) or producing a better “narrative” (by Nunberg). They were able to escape undesirable language while diverting people’s attention to the ideas and values they wanted to focus on for some reasons.

Example

In this article we will analyze Democratic Party and Republican Party 2008 political platforms. First, they are carefully worded political documents produced by professional politicians stating parties’ positions on political issues and appealing to voters by referring to the issues important to them. Second, analysis of political platforms may give a better understanding of the interconnection between the primary and secondary political discourse, as platforms are inevitable tools in parties’ struggle for control of a nation.

To work with the texts of parties platforms, we chose a computer program LITL developed in the Computational Linguistics Laboratory at Katanov State University of Khakasia by V.A.Yatsko and M.S. Starikov. The program allows the user to “... conduct various searches on his/her own corpora and get statistical information on distribution of various words, patterns, and phrases...” (Yatsko and Starikov, 2010)

After processing the texts, the program showed the following results:

First, it is necessary to analyze the length of the documents. Comparing the platforms, it is easy to notice that Republicans use fewer words/sentences/paragraphs while Democrats produce

Table 1. The Analysis of the Democratic and the Republican Parties platforms of 2008 by LITL

The Democratic Party 2008			The Republican Party 2008		
paragraphs	sentences	words	paragraphs	sentences	words
4793	5862	7190	3972	4557	5002
The Most Frequent Words			The Most Frequent Words		
We	966		We	439	
America	239		our	296	
Democratic	226		American	92	
Obama	224		support	88	
Change	190		health	83	
new	164		government	78	
American	146		all	75	
Party	119		federal	74	
Americans	108		people	60	
health	102		tax	53	
support	102		Americans	51	

longer speeches which may have some important consequences. On the one hand, Republicans risk leaving some issues unaddressed or not explained clearly enough. On the other hand, however, Democrats may easily annoy their fellow citizens with a too-long document which, by diluting their main message, may leave the audience confused about it. The golden mean here is not easy to achieve. It will depend on many factors including how many issues the party wishes to address, whether those issues are urgent and major or minor and have been previously repeatedly discussed. And, certainly, a lot depends on wording because the vocabulary party leaders use to relate to the audience and how often they use certain words influence voters view of the party and, as a result, their decision on Election Day. Therefore, to influence voters’ decision making process, the party must produce a coherent, carefully worded and, thus, appealing document.

Second, the wording of the paper is of vital importance. In his article “Teaching Progressives to “Speak American””, David Kusnet writes: “After all, we had just lost a presidential election

to an aristocrat named George Bush, whose economic program boiled down to tax breaks for multimillionaires but who managed to convince a narrow majority of the voters that his opponent was some sort of cultural elitist. And our candidate, a high-minded fellow from Massachusetts, seemed unable to respond effectively to those attacks or to connect emotionally with most voters” (Kusnet, 2006:130) Kusnet argues that learning from the opponent is an essential part of every campaign. It is important to relate to the audience and the following steps may help:

1. Lead with Principles, Not Programs.

The power of statistics is not enough to influence people’s decision on Election Day. It is necessary to explain what stands behind the data – that is party’s beliefs.

2. Be Tough and Caring.

Kusnet warns that it is possible to misunderstand George Lakoff’s ideas of the progressive-conservative divide when conservatives are viewed as strict parents and progressives – as nurturing parents. Kusnet reminds that Lakoff believes it is necessary

to carry out the core principles of caring and responsibility with strictness which became especially indispensable after the 9/11 terrorist attack when voters felt insecure and wanted a leader able to defend the country. Some examples of such leadership include Robert F. Kennedy, Tony Blair in the UK with his slogan “Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime.” and Bill Clinton with some “tough” decisions and actions.

3. Use the Power of Populism.

It is important to address to regular people, not to economic elites, and to manage to persuade working Americans that you are fighting for their interests.

4. Speak in Parables.

Parables that are part of American culture may become a very effective part of the rhetoric. Some examples include *Rot at the Top*, *Virtue Unrewarded*, *The Caring Community*, *The People Rising*, etc.

5. Speak with Your Natural Voice.

It means politicians, in order to sound natural, should show that they are individuals different from others.

6. Engaging Ordinary Voters.

And, finally, it is necessary to engage everyday language which many voters speak and, thus, understand best of all. (Kusnet, 2006)

In conclusion, David Kusnet writes: “Appealing to common values, developing populist parables, and speaking engaging everyday language—that is how progressives can communicate to our fellow citizens and persuade all Americans to follow their best instincts and their best interests” (Kusnet, 2006:140)

George Lakoff in his book “Moral politics: how liberals and conservatives think” argues that “policy debates are not matters of rational discussion on the basis of literal and objective categories. The categories that shape the debate are moral categories; those categories are defined in terms of different family-based conceptions of morality, which give priority to different metaphors for morality” (Lackoff, 2002:169). Lakoff gives the moral categories systems of conservatives and progressives as well.

Thus, we may analyze the “narrative” of both parties in order to see what kind of appeal they are using to relate better to their audience. And by observing and studying the frequency of word occurrence in one of the major official papers produced by both the Democratic and The Republican Parties, it is possible to understand which of the linguistic tools mentioned above parties used to achieve the desired effect – voters’ approval of a party’s candidate. It will also help us analyze and

Table 2. Conservative and liberal categories of moral action (Lackoff, 2002)

Conservative categories of moral action:	Liberal categories of moral action:
1. Promoting Strict Father morality in general. 2. Promoting self-discipline, responsibility, and self-reliance. 3. Upholding the Morality of Reward and Punishment. a. Preventing interference with the pursuit of self-interest by self-disciplined, self-reliant people. b. Promoting punishment as a means of upholding authority. c. Ensuring punishment for lack of self-discipline. 4. Protecting moral people from external evils. 5. Upholding the Moral Order.	1. Empathetic behavior and promoting fairness. 2. Helping those who cannot help themselves. 3. Protecting those who cannot protect themselves. 4. Promoting fulfillment in life. 5. Nurturing and strengthening oneself in order to do the above.

Table 3. The analysis of words and word forms in the Democratic and the Republican Parties platforms of 2008 by LITL

Words/Word Forms	Democratic Party	Republican Party
Work*(worker/s, work/ing/s/ed, etc.)	222	77
Democr*(democracy, democratic, democrat/s)	356	47
Chang*(change, chang/ing/es/ed, etc.)	268	24
New	182	42
Immigr*(immigration, immigrant/s, etc.)	25	15
Environment*(environmental)	42	31
Econom*(economy, economic, etc.)	105	72
Fair*(fairness)	40	17
Responsib*(responsible, responsibility, responsibilities, etc.)	40	21
Help*(help/ing/s/ed, helper/s, etc)	110	20
Develop*(development, develop/ing/s/ed, etc.)	90	40
Str(o/e)ng*(strengthen/ing, strong, etc.)	90	36
Feder*(federal, federation, federalist)	44	80
Value*(values)	18	32
Abort*(abortion/s, etc.)	3	15
Tax*(taxes, taxation)	49	99
Author*(authority, authoritative, etc.)	3	13

conclude why the Democratic Party's rhetoric was persuasive enough to make Obama the U.S. President in 2008.

Both parties appealed to the nation with the most frequent words being *we*, *our*, *America*, *Americans*, *people*. It is important to make people believe that, as a leader, you are not susceptible to "class wars" and all Americans are equally important as a nation. Moreover, by using pronouns *we/our*, both Republicans and Democrats were trying to relate to people by presenting themselves as nation's integral part, as one of them, and not a stranger from the privileged elite (what Kusnet calls "power of populism"). Moreover, both Parties use the words *support* and *health* to appeal to voters by showing they care about people ("tough and caring").

However, other frequent words are quite different for both parties with Democrats promoting change and democratic views (*new*,

change, *Democratic*) and Republicans pushing their strongest argument – taxation (*tax*).

To better understand both Parties' appeals, it is necessary to consider other words and word forms that appear quite often in the paper.

The table above shows that both parties discuss similar matters in their platforms. It can be explained by the fact that both Republicans and Democrats can't but address the sensitive issues that tear the nation apart. Had they failed to do so, they would have been accused of ignorance of the most debatable issues (taxes, immigration, environment, etc.). However, by studying how often the parties use those words/word forms, we may understand the message the party is trying to convey to people.

The Democratic Party follow major steps mentioned by David Kusnet appealing to regular Americans trying to persuade them the Party is protecting the interests of those

who work honestly (*work, help*). Democrats, in their attempt to succeed a Republican president, also needed to promote the necessity of change in government (hence the words *new, change, develop, Democratic*). Moreover, Democrats fit into the frames described by George Lakoff: Democrats traditionally promote fairness (*fair*), help those who cannot help themselves (*support, help*), fulfillment in life (*development*), and strengthen oneself in order to do the above (*strengthen*).

Republicans, on the other hand, while appealing to the whole nation as well (with the most frequent words *America, people, Americans, etc.*), promoted ideas of self-reliance (the word *help* is seldom mentioned in the text) and upholding the Moral Order (the issues like *abortion* and *traditional values* are discussed). They also raise the question of taxation (promises of tax cuts helped the Party in previous campaigns).

It is worthy of note that both parties discuss economic and environmental matters almost with the same frequency which means

those are the issues not susceptible to partisan ideology.

Resume

Therefore, the analysis of the Republican and the Democratic Parties' platforms allows us to conclude that both parties carefully worded their political documents to appeal to voters by referring to the issues important to them. However, in 2008, Barack Obama and the Democratic Party, whose ideas he was pushing forward in his presidential campaign, made a wise decision of promoting the necessity of change. Americans got tired of all the mistakes their previous Republican president had made (wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, aggressive foreign politics, profound budget deficit of the country, etc.) and were ready for that change and eagerly let those ideas and words into their conversations. Thus, the Democratic Party managed to win voters' discourse and, therefore, their votes on Election Day while Republicans failed to suggest issues of equal value which eventually cost their candidate, John McCain, presidential office.

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О диалектическом взаимодействии институционального и бытийного политического дискурса

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В статье анализируются политические платформы Демократической и Республиканской партии 2008 года как инструмент передачи идей и убеждений простым гражданам, а также связь между институциональным и бытийным политическим дискурсом, что позволяет лучше понять механизм влияния политической элиты США на простых граждан страны.

Ключевые слова: институциональный политический дискурс, бытийный политический дискурс, политический нарратив, рефрейминг.
