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# Linguistic discourse analysis as a tool for analyzing political communication

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## **Abstract:**

This article –intended for non-linguists– introduces linguistic discourse analysis as a method for unravelling political communication mediated by mass media. After having explained what linguistic discourse analysis exactly means for me, I go on to illustrate a number of resources in this kind of analysis. With the development of linguistics, the toolkit for the analysis of the communicative roles of language has expanded over the years. Whereas early critical linguistics focused on elements like lexical structure and transitivity of the clause (e.g. the use of the passive voice), more recent linguistic analyses have pointed out the usefulness of analyzing phenomena like deixis, hedging, evidentiality and shift in footing. The elements discussed are illustrated with examples from earlier research and from a recent interview with a Flemish right-wing politician.

A careful and detailed linguistic analysis helps to reconstruct the ideational and interpersonal meanings a speaker consciously or unconsciously conveys. It brings to the surface answers to questions like which actors speakers find important in an event and how they conceive the relationships between them; whether speakers are confident that what they are saying is true or likely and if they think it is acceptable; how speakers perceive their own identity and membership of a group; whether speakers want to take the responsibility for what they are saying, and what is the source of their information.

**Keywords:** political communication, linguistic discourse analysis, pragmatics, journalistic interviews, transitivity, lexical structure, deixis, hedging, footing, evidentiality

## 1. Introduction: linguistic pragmatics and discourse analysis

This paper wants to shed some light on how a linguistic discourse analysis may contribute to the analysis of political communication as it is mediated by mass media. The interest in

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the language of political communication in the history of Western civilization goes back to Antiquity. Political speeches were studied as one of the areas of persuasive language use and scholars like Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian analyzed methods of persuasion and formulated advice for orators (Schuurs & Breij 2010:81-118). Throughout the centuries, rhetoric has kept an important place in (language) education, but gradually it evolved into the study of style or stylistics (Claes & Hulsens 2015:8) and it was not concerned with political communication anymore. The study of rhetoric witnessed a revival in the second half of the 20th century, initiated by the work of Kenneth Burke (1950; 1951). The 'New Rhetoric' approach had its roots in philosophy and literary criticism, but it also discussed examples from political communication.

### 1.1 Linguistic pragmatics

In the same period, linguists took up an interest in political communication as well. Orwell's influential essay *Politics and the English Language* (1946) may have played an important role here. With the development of linguistic pragmatics, linguists became interested in the effects of language and in the way human beings act by using language (Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Grice (1975), Levinson (1983), Brown & Levinson (1987)). The pragmatic approach is typically functional: it is interested in the functions of a linguistic utterance and in the intentions a language user has with a specific utterance.

Since the seventies of the 20th century, a number of scholars calling themselves discourse analysts have concentrated on this communicative function of language. Reisigl (2011) gives an extensive overview of the history of discourse analysis and its relation to linguistic pragmatics. The term discourse has become trending in a variety of scholarly disciplines and discourse analysis constitutes a vast domain of research. Therefore, we should start by defining what we mean by it.

### 1.2 Discourse and discourse analysis

Depending on the theoretical approach and research context, the meaning of discourse may vary considerably. The term can be used in a rather narrow sense, referring to the meaning of a specific utterance in a specific context, as in

[T]he analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs (Brown & Yule 1983:1)

or in a very broad sense, as in

the totality of utterances in a society viewed as an autonomous evolving entity in relation to which individuals only have partial self-determination (Chilton & Schäffner 2002:2).

Early definitions of discourse in linguistics typically tried to delineate it against text, often attributing characteristics like 'written', 'non-interactive' and 'variable length' to text, and

characteristics like 'spoken', 'interactive' and 'encompassing a certain length' to discourse (Crystal, 1987:116; Hawthorn 1992: 189), but the distinction between text and discourse has not proven to be a useful one.

Gee (2005: 19) uses the metaphor of a dance to define a specific discourse as an instantiation of a more abstract conceptual discourse:

A discourse is a dance that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times, and places and in the here and now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination. Like a dance, the performance here and now is never exactly the same. It all comes down, often, to what the 'masters of the dance' will allow to be recognized or will be forced to recognize as a possible instantiation of the dance. (Gee 2005:28)

In later work, he distinguishes discourse with a small d from Discourse with a capital D and defines the latter as being:

[...] composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities. (Gee 2008: 155)

thus, relating Discourse to identity. This is comparable to Roger Fowler's definition which relates Discourse to ideology:

'Discourse' is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies; these beliefs etc. constitute a way of looking at the world, an organization or representation of experience – 'ideology' in the neutral non-pejorative sense. Different modes of discourse encode different representations of experience; and the source of these representations is the communicative context within which the discourse is embedded. (cited in Mills 1997: 6)

An example of Discourse with a D would be the rhetoric of 'othering' as it has for instance been described in a number of articles bundled by Riggins (1997), which show how a certain language use can define ideological groups and include or exclude individuals from these groups.

In the rest of this article, I will not keep up the difference between Discourse and discourse. It must be clear that an analysis always has to start from concrete instantiations/discourses in order to be able to say something about the Discourse of a group or an institution. What is important, is the way these discourses are analyzed.

This brings us to the domain of critical linguistics. Critical linguistics emerged with the publication of *Language and Control* by Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew (1979). It seeks 'to display to consciousness the patterns of belief and value which are encoded in the language - and which are below the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as 'natural' (Fowler 1991a: 67). This is done by studying 'the minute details of linguistic structure in the light of the social and historical situation of the text' (ibid.). Authors in this tradition typically try to lay bare power relations in discourses. The analytic tools they apply rely for a large part on the systemic-functional approach to language initiated by Halliday (for an overview, see Halliday 1985: Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). Halliday has introduced a meaning-based grammar, in which he has defined all parts of speech functionally. For example, instead of using the grammatical term subject of a clause,

he uses terms which describe the roles a specific part of speech expresses (e.g. Actor, Sayer or Sayer). This allows him to study the content of what is expressed by language in close connection with the form in which it is being expressed.

This systemic-functional approach offers a sound empirical basis for the analysis of communication. Fowler (1991a: 70-89) lists transitivity, lexical structure, modality and speech acts as useful tools for displaying ideology and power relations in discourse and illustrates how critical linguistics can be applied to journalistic discourse. These language phenomena will be discussed in section 3.

Critical linguistics gave rise to the very elaborate field of Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA. Critical Discourse Analysts like Fairclough (e.g. Fairclough 2014), Wodak (e.g. Wodak 1996) and Van Dijk (e.g. Van Dijk 2010) combine their critical stance with a preoccupation with language as a form of social action (Chilton 2004). They are familiar with Hallidayan linguistics and apply this theory (often in an idiosyncratic way) to the corpora they work on. CDA scholars often show a certain bias, in that they ‘focus upon a social wrong’ (Fairclough 2014: 13) and try to analyze how it is constructed in media discourse or in political communication. Fairclough (ibid.) admits that ‘what constitutes “a social wrong” is a controversial matter, and CDA is inevitably involved in debates and arguments about this that go on all the time’.

Gee (2004: 20) represents another approach to CDA, not building on systemic-functional grammar but rather on ‘American non-Hallidayan models of grammatical and textual analysis and sociolinguistics, combined with influences from literary criticism’. He compares his work to that of Fairclough and concludes that the two models show a lot of similarities. For Gee (ibid.) the combination of a model of grammatical and textual analysis with sociopolitical and critical theories of society is paramount in defining CDA but he also includes general analyses of language ‘not rooted in any particular linguistic background or theory’ in the domain.

On the contrary, Verschueren (2001) takes Fairclough’s version of CDA as the more or less prototypical form and warns for its diluted versions which have deviated from the empirical linguistic basis. According to him, this diluted form leads to a speculative interpretation of texts, which is not based on a solid linguistic analysis and which is often influenced by the researcher’s bias and presuppositions. Verschueren (2012) lists a number of pragmatic guidelines and procedures for studying discourse and applies them to a case of analyzing ideology in history textbooks.

I fully side with Verschueren in stating that discourse analysis should always start from verifiable linguistic phenomena. I would therefore call my approach ‘linguistic discourse analysis’ rather than critical discourse analysis. A linguistic discourse analysis does not start from hypotheses or presuppositions but rather from questions. When applied to political communication, it tries to find answers to representation questions concerning a political state of affairs or political personae. It tries to ‘read between the lines’ of the communication by seeking patterns in linguistic phenomena. The approach is typically qualitative and inductive, and often descriptive and it is therefore very suitable for interdisciplinary research, where it can complement or corroborate other forms of analysis.

### 1.3 Conversation analysis and its application to journalistic interviews

As the spoken word is part of discourse as well, a linguistic discourse analysis should also take aboard elements of conversation analysis (Ten Have 1999; Clayman & Teas Gill 2014). This is the study of how people interact in face-to-face communication and it has been applied to everyday conversation, but also to conversation in institutional settings, e.g. in classroom or courtroom interaction, or in political communication in media discourse.

Conversation analysis always starts from recordings of actual conversations, which have been transcribed in as much detail as possible, indicating stress patterns, pauses and intonation. The actual analysis, as Clayman & Teas Gill (2014: 124) put it, starts with a 'noticing'. The researcher watches and listens to a conversation a number of times and looks for patterns. Conversation analysis studies phenomena like adjacency pairs, turn-taking, self-repair and openings and closings of conversations.

This kind of analysis has extensively been applied to (political) interviews in the work of Clayman and Heritage (Clayman 1992; Clayman & Heritage (2002a; 2002b; Bull 2012) and is also applied to other genres of political interaction in Ekström & Patrona (2011). Spoken language is more spontaneous than written language. Interviews are prepared by the journalist as well as by the politician, but there is always an unpredictable factor, and meaning is built up in the course of the conversation, jointly by both parties. The main findings of Clayman & Heritage (2002a) are that the interviewer attitude towards politicians in the second half of the twentieth century has changed from a deferential to an adversarial tone and that the adversarial interview (where journalists take a very critical but neutralistic stance towards the politician) was the norm around the turn of the twenty-first century.

An example of a conversation analysis of television interviews with Belgian politicians can be found in Temmerman & Sinardet (2008), where the focus is on the interviewing styles of the journalists and where it is shown that the same Belgian politicians are approached differently on the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking public channels: whereas the format of the television interviews on the French-speaking channel in the investigated period stays close to the adversarial interview, the interviews on the Dutch-speaking channel incorporate influences of other tv-formats and sometimes take the shape of a discussion between interviewer and interviewee, rather than of a traditional interview.

Later work (e.g. Hutchby (2017) shows that there is a further evolution of the political interview in the direction of a hybrid format. Political interviews take over features of entertainment programs, and in some cases interviewers abandon the neutralistic stance which has been common since the beginnings of the genre. This means that in some instances *personalization* (Thornborrow & Montgomery 2010) occurs, which brings personal matters and feelings of the interviewer and interviewee into play and in some instances interviewers assume a *tribune* position (Hutchby 2017: 110-114) with which they take sides in a debate and show their preferences and emotions, thus exposing politicians to new challenges in public communication.

Conversation analysis aids to describe these changes in the interviewing styles. Whereas the typical adjacency pair in a political interview was question-answer, Hutchby (2017) shows that in a hybrid interview other question structures occur like question-answer-concession/conjunction/assertion (the so-called hybrid pivot).

Concluding this section, I can summarize that the kind of linguistic discourse analysis I advocate unites elements of critical linguistics (firmly rooted in a linguistic approach based on the insights of pragmatics and systemic-functional grammar) and elements of conversation analysis (paying attention to empirically verifiable patterns in spoken language). Linguistic discourse analysis starts from the data and typically works bottom-up: it looks for recurring patterns in specific discourses and can be an element in an interdisciplinary approach to link linguistic characteristics to social behavior, and to overarching beliefs and values.

## 2. Applying linguistic discourse analysis to mass media political communication

As the political is one aspect of human interaction, the insights of linguistic discourse analysis can be applied to the specific domain of political interaction as well. Though I am aware that political communication can be defined in a much broader way, for the sake of clarity I will limit it to mass media communication by politicians here.

Discourse analysis is often applied to media communication and journalism, but numerous authors have also applied it specifically to political communication and to how it is mediated by the press and the media (e.g. Fetzer & Lauerbach 2007; Cap & Okulska 2013; Weizman & Fetzer 2015). Chilton (2004) gives an elaborate overview of the different linguistic aspects of political communication. Two main aspects are important here: on the one hand, we use language to give a representation of the world as we see it, in the context we refer to; on the other hand we use language in interaction, in order to negotiate and establish meaning together with the other participants in the interaction. But representation and interaction cannot be separated, or only for the convenience of analytic purposes (Chilton 2004: 197). In section 3, I will discuss the representational aspect under ‘ideational component of language’ (3.1) and the interactional aspect under ‘interpersonal component of language’ (3.2), thereby taking over the terminology of Halliday (1985) and bearing in mind that the two aspects are sides of the same coin.

Another important remark Chilton (2004) makes, is that just like politicians, analysts have their convictions:

‘Some of us in the past have felt it important to give prominence to this point, to the extent almost of treating critical discourse analysis as a mode of political action in itself’ (Chilton 2004:205).

Chilton formulates this as a caveat, but at the same time he admits that researchers cannot work ‘entirely decoupled’ from their political standpoints. Working in a team (preferably interdisciplinary, with e.g. scholars from history and political science) might offer a solution to create the necessary balance.

In the end, linguists are first and foremost interested in the way language works in itself and how it makes communication possible and they try to contribute to the knowledge about that. But at the same time, ‘discourse analysts [...] help answer questions about the roles of

language in human cognition [...] and social life which have been asked for centuries' (Johnstone 2008: 7).

Discourse analysis has been used in the study of [...] how decisions are made, resources allocated, and social adaptation or conflict accomplished in public and private life. To the extent that [...] discourses are at the center of human experience and activity, discourse analysis can help in answering any question that could be asked about humans in society.

Especially in times in which *post-truth* and *Postfaktische Politik* are buzzwords, it is interesting to take a close look at the words of politicians. Language allows people to lie or to cause false implicatures being drawn from what they say but a linguistic analysis in some cases can reveal that communicators try to hide something and/or are uncertain or insecure about their own words.

### 3. Linguistic discourse analysis illustrated

Discourse analysis takes as its starting point that every utterance in a discourse is a construction and that every utterance can be regarded as a choice. There are always different ways to say the same thing, and discourse analysis wants to investigate what it means to make a particular linguistic choice.

Of course, as discourse analysis works in a qualitative way, it is difficult to eliminate the 'observer' from the observation. 'Discourse analysis is a kind of microscope: it focuses in on different objects at different levels of magnification, at the whim of the analyst.' (Chilton 2004: 205) Therefore it is very important to make the data one works with accessible (also in the original language if one works with multilingual data) and to illustrate every step in the analysis with contextualized instances. This together with a minute description of the language mechanisms investigated allows for an empirical verification of the analysis.

I will now continue to discuss a number of language phenomena which have been analyzed by discourse analysts up till now. As mentioned in section 1.2, Fowler ((1991a: 70-89) lists (1) transitivity, (2) lexical structure, (3) modality and (4) speech acts as linguistic resources that can be used to reveal text mechanisms. In his illustration, he limits speech acts to verbal processes and notices that these are frequently explicitly mentioned in newspaper reports, testifying to 'the importance of linguistic practices in human interaction' (ibid.: 88). This does not add much to an analysis of what is being communicated, so I will leave speech acts out of the discussion here.

Mautner (2008) also lists (1) transitivity, (2) lexical structure and (3) modality, and adds (4) coherence and cohesion, (5) the presence of different voices and (6) source attribution. In the next sections, I will explain and illustrate these categories in an accessible and simplified way. I will group them in two main categories: (A) ideational components with (1) transitivity and (2) lexical structure and (B) interpersonal components with (3) deixis as an element of coherence and cohesion, (4) hedging as a complement to modality, (5) (shift in) footing as a means to bring different voices in the discourse and (6) evidentiality as indication of source.

I will always start by explaining what is exactly meant by each category and illustrate this with examples from applied research, if possible from the domain of political communication. In section 4, I will give a brief illustration of how all categories can be applied to a recent interview with a radical right wing politician on Flemish television.

### 3.1 Ideational component: representing the world outside the text/conversation

#### 3.1.1 *Transitivity and agent-deletion*

A systemic-functional transitivity analysis (cf. Halliday 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014) is an analysis at the level of the clause of how processes are represented. In systemic-functional grammar, language and human experience are inextricably entwined and processes form the linguistic expression of experiences, actions or situations. Each clause represents a process and a process is composed of three elements: the process itself (typically expressed by a verb), the participants in the process (who are the actors, who carries out the action, who undergoes the action etc.) and the circumstances (the setting in which the process takes place). In the clause

(1) *the police have neglected the complaint*

the actor<sup>1</sup> in the neglecting process is clearly the police and the speaker makes clear who is to blame for the neglect. This is a choice the speaker makes. However, the speaker could have chosen not to blame the police openly. In this case, the speaker can opt for a passive voice and choose not to mention the actor, as in

(2) *the complaint has been neglected*

This is an example of agent-deletion: language makes it possible for its users not to express who has committed a certain action. The clause construction in which the actor carrying out the action is the grammatical subject of the clause, is considered to be the unmarked form in Indo-European languages. If a speaker chooses another construction, there must be a reason for that choice, and it is worthwhile investigating in which contexts these choices occur. The question why a speaker does this, can only be answered conjecturally. As explained in the previous section, this is why a conjoint and (if possible interdisciplinary) approach is preferable when applying discourse analysis.

An example of transitivity analysis can be found in e.g. Clark (1992), who shows how in the representation of violence against woman in *The Sun*, the perpetrators often are not mentioned, thus shifting the blame to the victims.

#### 3.1.2 *Lexical structure*

Lexical choices are another indicator of the opinions and convictions of a speaker concerning a particular state of affairs. The way a speaker names another person or a situation, may give away how the speaker feels about that person or situation. In connection with political language, a much cited example is the way we refer to people coming from abroad to live in a new homeland: the terms ‘immigrant’, ‘migrant’, ‘refugee’, ‘asylum seeker’, ‘expat’ and ‘global nomad’ make up a paradigm from which each choice carries very different connotations. In Flanders, the term *allochtoon* (lit. ‘coming from another

origin') is used to indicate people from abroad coming to live in Flanders, but also people born in Flanders with roots abroad. This term has been heavily contested over the last few years, with some newspapers and cities deciding not to use it anymore because they feel it is denigrating and de-individualizing<sup>2,3</sup>.

Metaphor is a chapter in itself within naming analysis. It is a much studied phenomenon and a highly interesting case, as a consistently used metaphor can be regarded as a 'mini-frame' in a discourse (for literature on framing, see e.g. Entman, Matthes & Pellicano 2009; Scheufele & Iyengar 2014). Deschouwer & Temmerman (2012) analyzed metaphors used by four leading politicians in Belgium and found that metaphor is an idiosyncratic language tool: some speakers use it a lot more systematically than others. In the period under study, there was a recurrent metaphor used by the (at that time) separatist N-VA politician Bart De Wever, which designated Belgium as an 'evaporating state'. He framed the situation as if the state of Belgium would disappear, leaving two independent federal states. This was a powerful image but it can be considered to be misleading, because it represents the disappearance of Belgium as a natural process and does not make explicit what would be the 'source of heat' causing the gradual evaporation or disappearance.

De Landtsheer (2015) shows how metaphor is especially popular in the discourse of radical (in this case extreme right) parties and that a party which tries to soften its image also tones down its metaphorical style.

### 3.2 Interpersonal component: expressing roles/attitudes/relations of speaker and hearer

Fowler (1991:85) explains how transitivity and lexical structure in Hallidayan terms are ideational features of language: they help to represent how a speaker experiences the world and what the speaker wants to communicate about that world. Next to ideational features, a language also has interpersonal features: these help to express how speakers experience their personal roles and attitudes and their social relationships. I will highlight four linguistic features carrying interpersonal meanings: deixis, hedging, (shift in) footing and evidentiality.

#### 3.2.1 *Deixis: the personal pronoun 'we'*

An important linguistic feature which allows the speaker to refer to the outer world as well as to the communication itself, is deixis. Deixis encompasses all linguistic devices which refer to people, objects, situations, times, places in the context of the communication (exophoric reference) and to linguistic elements within the text or conversation (endophoric reference). Deictic elements in themselves have no meaning, they are 'empty signs', but they receive a meaning by referring.

In research in political communication, recently a lot of attention has been paid to the deixis of pronouns (Duszak 2002; Inigo-Mora 2004; Bull & Fetzer 2006). Especially the pronoun of the first person plural ('we') receives a lot of attention in these times of division in which the need is felt to define groups and memberships. From the whole spectrum of deixis, we will take this pronoun as an example for further investigation.

Applied to newspaper language, Temmerman (2008) shows how ‘we’ used in newspaper editorials in Flanders on the publication of the Mohammad cartoons in Denmark in 2005 never included Muslim readers in the argumentation. The referents ‘we’ pointed to, were found to be the author of the piece, the editors, the Flemish, Belgian or Western community, but always as opposed to ‘the Muslim world’. This is something which could easily pass unnoticed, as it only becomes clear when all referents of ‘we’ are determined by analyzing the context. The ‘us-them’ contrast created by this specific use of ‘we’, would by some be defined as a characteristic of populist language (cf. Reinemann et al. 2017). However, it is very difficult to determine what makes language populist and perhaps ‘polarizing’ is a better term in this context. I will come back to this in section 4.3.

Deschouwer & Temmerman (2012) show that politicians of government parties generally refer to the whole country or to the government when they speak of ‘we’, whereas politicians from opposition parties refer to their own party or their own rank and file. Bull & Fetzer (2006) point out however that ‘we’ is often used equivocally by politicians, leaving the audience uncertain about whom is referred to exactly. Again, like agent-deletion, this is an ‘escape route’ language provides for speakers who prefer not to be fully transparent in their communication.

### 3.2.2. *Modality and hedging*

Modality, typically expressed by modal verbs like ‘can’, ‘may’ and ‘will’ expresses meanings concerning truth, obligation, permission and desirability in the eyes of the speaker (Fowler 1991: 85-87). If a speaker uses these modal verbs, we can derive how certain s/he is about a state of affairs and if s/he deems the situation to be allowable, necessary or desirable.

A language feature which carries a similar meaning and which I would like to focus on as it has been less studied in connection with political communication, is the phenomenon of hedging. As White (2003: 259) argues, it is interesting to group all resources of intersubjective positioning, as they ‘all provide the means for speakers/writers to take a stance towards the various points-of-view or social positionings being referenced by the text and thereby to position themselves with respect to the other social subjects who hold those positions’.

Hillier (2004: 75-76) defines hedging in a functional way by giving examples of two kinds: on the one hand, there are comment clauses like ‘I think’, ‘I suppose’, ‘you know’, ‘you see’ and on the other hand adverbs like ‘maybe’, ‘anyway’, ‘sort of’. These can all be used in situations where a speaker is not really sure or wants to keep a certain distance from what s/he is saying. I will illustrate the use of hedging in section 4.4.

### 3.2.3 *Footing*

The notion of footing is another interpersonal concept. It was introduced by Goffman (1981) and it stands for the position or role language users take in communication vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the (content of) the communication itself. Speakers can make an utterance in their own name, but they can also quote someone else, sometimes with the aim

of distancing themselves from what they are saying. This is the kind of ‘shift in footing’ I will focus on here. If a speaker says

(3) *her eyes are irritated by the smoke.*

s/he represents the proposition as true and gives his/her own opinion. However, if the same speaker says

(4) *she says that her eyes are irritated by the smoke*

s/he adds an extra layer by distancing him/herself from the truth value of the utterance. By ‘shifting footing’, which, in this case, is the same as ‘embedding the utterance’ or ‘quoting’, the responsibility for the truth value of the utterance is not with the speaker anymore.

Clayman (1992) has shown extensively that interviewers typically quote other sources when they want to keep a neutral(istic) position, not speaking in their own name. Politicians use the same technique in order not to be held accountable for what they say.

#### 3.2.4 Evidentiality

The last category I want to discuss is that of evidentiality, which is defined by Aikhenvald (2004:3) as “a linguistic category whose primary meaning is source of information” and by Chafe (1986: 271) as “any linguistic expression of attitudes towards knowledge”. Bednarek (2006) has explored evidentiality in news discourse and defines it as the linguistic rendering of the source of information of the speaker: what the speaker bases his/her knowledge on and how certain the speaker is of that knowledge. She distinguishes between the source and the base for the knowledge. The source can be the speaker him/herself (Self) or somebody else (Other). The base is the ground the speaker relies on for making the utterance.

Hsieh (2008) has analyzed evidentiality in Chinese news stories and states that journalists “engage in attaining a maximal balance between their awareness that they cannot be neutral and their belief that they should fulfill the requirement of objective reporting” (Hsieh 2008: 219). She has found that journalists mostly make use of reportative evidentiality (attributed to external sources) or sensory evidentiality (where the author goes by his/her own perception and takes direct responsibility for the utterance).

As I will illustrate in section 4.6, also in political communication, it is important to pay attention to the way evidentiality is marked, i.e. to the way the speaker makes clear what the sources and bases are for the information s/he provides.

## 4. Brief illustration: the categories applied to an interview with a Flemish politician

I will now apply the linguistic categories introduced in section 3 to a fragment of a recent interview with a Flemish politician. Due to space limits, only one or two examples per category can be discussed.

The interview was broadcast on December 4, 2016 in the Sunday morning political program of the Flemish public broadcasting company VRT<sup>4</sup>. The interviewer was VRT-journalist Ihsane Chioua Lekhli. Interviewee Tom Van Grieken is chairman of the Flemish

radical right party Vlaams Belang. He became chair in 2014 at the age of 28. His party strives for the independence of the Flemish region and is outspokenly anti-immigration. It has never been part of the Flemish government, as all other parties have been maintaining a ‘cordon sanitaire’ against it up till now.

The reason for the interview was the fact that three eminent party members of Vlaams Belang had been publicly sanctioned by the party executive after a visit they had paid to representatives of the neo-fascist party Golden Dawn in Greece. A transcription of the interview in Dutch can be found in the appendix<sup>2</sup>. I have translated the relevant excerpts (literally) into English in the discussion below. The transcription conventions can be found in the appendix as well.

#### 4.1 Transitivity

If we take a look at the processes used in the utterances of Van Grieken, we see that the participants performing the processes get the subject position in the clause in almost all cases. The interview starts with a question in the passive voice, leaving the actor out of the process:

001-002 <ICL> *[Anke Van dermeersch] is uit het partijbestuur gezet*  
[Anke Van dermeersch] has been put out of the party executive

but Van Grieken answers in the active form:

011 <TVG> *heb ik de sancties genomen die er zijn*  
I have taken the sanctions there are

In the whole interview, actor and subject of the clause almost always coincide. This means that he comes to the forefront and that he takes responsibility when speaking about himself. Also, when speaking about other people or organizations, the constructions are transparent:

149 *die kanker daar die homoseksuelen van gebouwen gooit*  
that cancer there [ref. to Islamic State] which throws homosexuals from buildings

164 *geert bourgeois die op de k thee en koekjes gaat eten daar*  
geert bourgeois [prime minister of the Flemish government] who goes for c tea and biscuits there  
[=to mosques in Flanders]

Van Grieken speaks in a simple way: clearly, viewers of the program will have no problem to understand the construction of his sentences, all the more as each clause is rather short.

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank my student Véronique Vasseur for the transcription of the interview.

## 4.2 Lexical structure

Van Grieken makes rather radical and evaluating naming choices. He calls a leading Antwerp politician of a moderate party a ‘troublemaker’ (*ruziemaker*) (l. 41) and, in an ironic way, people in favor of a multicultural society ‘multicultural enrichers’ (*multiculturele verrijkers*) (l. 179). He uses names which are a little outdated like *communisten* (l. 42) for the political party PVDA, which calls itself ‘socialist 2.0’, *islamieten* (l. 125) where the more common contemporary name is *moslims* (‘Muslims’) and *homoseksuelen* (l. 149) (‘homosexuals’) where it is *homo*’s.

Consistent with the style of his party (cf. De Landtsheer 2015), he uses a lot of metaphors, often referring to sports. He uses them clearly deliberately, as in the following example, where he calls one of the sanctioned prominent members of his party a ‘deep-lying right striker’, implying that his party is on the radical right side of the spectrum, but adding that its members should go by the rules:

030 *filip is in uh voetbaltermen een diepe rechtse spits,*  
filip is in soccer terms a deep-lying right striker

031 *maar mag niet buitenspel staan*  
but he shouldn’t be offside

In another of his metaphors, we see that he monitors his word choice very carefully:

164 *geert bourgeois die op de k.. thee en koekjes gaat eten daar*  
Geert Bourgeois [prime minister of the Flemish government] who goes for c.. tea and biscuits there  
[=to mosques in Flanders]

He states sneeringly that the Flemish prime minister pays visits to mosques in Flanders by using the metaphor ‘goes for tea and biscuits’, but we see that he probably first intended to say *koffie* (coffee) instead of *thee* (tea) and that he applies self-repair in order to make the metaphor more consistent.

## 4.3 Deixis – use of ‘we’

In the language of Van Grieken, we find many us-them contrasts. When he uses we (‘we’) in l. 160, he refers to his party, but with *onze* (‘our’) the reference encompasses more than his party alone, just like the reference of we in l. 162.

160 *[...] maar we zijn ook van oordeel*  
but we are also of the opinion

161 *dat die religie nie compatibel is met **ONZE** manier van*  
that that religion is not compatible with OUR way of

162 *leven en da we die vooral niet moeten subsidiëren zoals*  
living and that we should certainly not subsidize it like

- 163 *mevrouw homans doet hè, veertig NIEUWE moskeeën worden*  
mrs. Homans [vice prime minister] does, forty NEW mosques
- 164 *gesubsidieerd en geert bourgeois die op de k thee en*  
are being subsidized and Geert Bourgeois who goes for c tea
- 165 *koekjes gaat eten daar, ja sorry daar doen we niet aan mee*  
and biscuits there, yes sorry we don't join that

But we in l. 165 refers to his party again. We see that the use of *we* creates a contrast with the Muslim population in Flanders, but the shifting reference of it makes it equivocal (cf. section 3.2.1, Bull & Fetzer (2006)). This is a polarizing way of putting things and an argumentative strategy for including the whole audience and not only the members of his party in his way of thinking.

#### 4.4 Hedging

Van Grieken is rather straightforward in his utterances, he does not use a lot of hedging. In l. 174-180, he uses *ik vind* ('I think') twice but in the first instance it is not clear whether this is hedging or embedding. It might be a mitigating way to say that a debate about religion should be possible, but it might also be a way to bring himself to the forefront and emphasize that what he is saying is his own conviction.

- 174 *[...], nee ik vind dat je het debat toch mag voeren*  
no I think that one can conduct the debate
- 175 *over religie en zeggen ik ben het hier NIET mee eens ik*  
about religion and say I do NOT agree with this I
- 176 *vind echt onze cultuur TOP vrouwen kun iedereen kan naar*  
really think our culture [is] TOP women ca everybody can
- 177 *het school gaan, vrouwen hebben dezelfde rechten als*  
go to school, women have the same rights as
- 178 *mannen, daar sta ik voor en ik laat dat NIET zomaar op een*  
men, that is what I stand for and I will not let it be
- 179 *draffe afvoeren uh door door uh multiculturele verrijkers nee.*  
carried off hastily by multicultural enrichers no.

This is certainly the case in the second instance, where *echt* ('really') emphasizes that what he says is his own point of view. This is explained further in the next section.

#### 4.5 Shift in footing

The previous example was an example of embedding one's own utterance in a kind of reported speech: instead of saying 'our culture is "top"', the speaker says 'I think our culture [is] "top"', thereby staging himself as a participant in the interaction and emphasizing his own opinion. In the next example, we find a genuine example of reported speech:

- 060 <TVG> *ja ook filip heeft daar klaarheid over geschept [inflection*  
yes also filip has clarified that
- 061 *error]. **uh hij zei ik heb het zelf betaald** uh en de fondsen*  
he said I have paid it myself and the funds
- 062 *die eventueel aanspraak zou op maken ja die gaat daar*  
he could possibly claim, well he is
- 063 *geen beroep op doen om ook dat hoofdstuk af te sluiten en*  
not going to claim them to also close that chapter and
- 064 *daar ben ik heel blij mee.*  
I am very glad about that.

'he [referring to one of the sanctioned party officials – about the costs for the trip to Greece] said I have paid it myself'. Van Grieken quotes what his party member has said, thereby shifting the accountability for the utterance to the other speaker.

#### 4.6 Evidentiality

Finally, I also want to show how evidentiality is marked in this interview. As Van Grieken often speaks in his own name, he mostly does not have to make explicit what the source of his knowledge is. Concerning the case of the three party officials who have been sanctioned, he takes the responsibility for the sanctioning, but as the following excerpt shows, he also makes clear that the party council backs him up and that it 'has given a signal' that everything is settled now.

- 010 <TVG> *[...], dus*  
so
- 011 *heb ik de sancties genomen die er zijn en ik ben ook heel*  
I have taken the sanctions there are and I am very
- 012 *blij dat de **partijraad** uh mij volmondig steunt, mij en*  
glad that the party council backs me up, me and
- 013 *mijn partijbestuur, maar ook tegelijkertijd **duidelijk***  
my party executive, but also at the same time
- 014 ***signaal geeft** uh dat het nu afgerond is*  
gives a clear signal that this has been concluded now

Concerning the question who paid for the trip to Greece of the three party officials, Van Grieken answers as base and source of the utterance that the party has not paid for it.

- 067 <TVG>     /ɟa. en **ik kan ook heel**  
                  yes. and I can also be
- 068             **formeel zijn/ wij hebben het ook niet betaald,**  
                  very clear we haven't paid for it either

In the next excerpt on the same topic however, he is not the source but he quotes one of the officials involved thereby indicating that he does not have proof for the utterance but that he believes what the other has told him:

- 084             *maar filip is [formeel] naar mij toe*  
                  but filip is very clear towards me
- 085 <ICL>     /oké/  
                  okay
- 086 <TVG>     *en uit uh eigen uh middelen heeft gefinancierd.*  
                  and has financed [the trip] with [his] own means

This brief illustrative application of six linguistic categories to the interview with Van Grieken shows that this politician gives a simplified representation of the events he talks about: he uses unmarked sentence constructions and transparent, often rather radical and evaluative names. As shown in his use of the pronoun 'we', he does not hesitate to represent the Flemish culture as opposed to the Muslim culture. As far as the interpersonal meanings are concerned, he often speaks in his own name, thereby showing authority as the chairman of his party. In the few cases where he evades responsibility for the truth value of his words, he uses reported speech to let others speak for him.

## 5. Summary and conclusions

In this article, I have only been able to touch upon a number of the numerous linguistic factors which can be looked into when analyzing (political) communication. Since Antiquity scholars studying language have been interested in its pragmatic and persuasive uses. The study of pragmatics came to full growth in the second half of the twentieth century and gave rise to critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis, both often taking political communication as their domain of study.

I have advocated linguistic discourse analysis of the spoken and the written word as a form of discourse analysis firmly rooted in the study of verifiable linguistic phenomena. Linguistic discourse analysis is in the first place interested in the way language and communication work. The more we understand about language, the better communicators we become. On the one hand, clear expression is a token of clear thinking. On the other,

we are aware of misleading communication if we understand possible ways of misleading better.

Linguistic discourse analysis starts from the assumption that every utterance is a construction and that every utterance can be regarded as a choice. It looks for patterns in communication and is able to define regular patterns and 'marked forms'. If a construction is marked, the speaker must have a reason to choose that form. Often the reason can only be established conjecturally.

As Halliday (1985) states, every linguistic expression has an ideational and an interpersonal component. The first shows how speakers interpret the world outside. The second expresses the speakers' perception of their role in the communication and of their status in comparison to that of the other interlocutors and their attitude towards the utterance is in terms of certainty, agreement and accountability. Whereas critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis mainly focus on the linguistic categories of transitivity, lexical structure and person deixis, I have shown that, especially for the study of the interpersonal component, categories like hedging, footing and evidentiality are useful as well. Applying these categories to an interview with a Flemish right-wing politician, I have illustrated how ideational and interpersonal meanings come to the surface when concrete utterances are analyzed in depth.

It is difficult to prove anything with linguistic discourse analysis, but it is a way of analyzing communication at a very fine-grained level. It can be regarded as offering a piece of a jigsaw puzzle and it is typically part of a joint and multidisciplinary approach. In terms of Gee (2008), it is only by analyzing many different discourses with a small 'd' that we will be able to sketch the contours of some Discourses with a capital 'D'.

## Notes

- 1 Halliday (1985) defines six different kind of processes and uses six different names for the roles performing the processes, but for the sake of simplicity, I will use 'actor' as a cover term for all performers here.
- 2 De Morgen (20/09/2012): 'Waarom wij, De Morgen, 'allochtoon' niet meer gebruiken.'<http://www.demorgen.be/tvmedia/waarom-wij-de-morgen-allochtoon-niet-meer-gebruiken-bdb769b8/> [consulted 09/01/2016]
- 3 De Morgen (14/02/2013): 'Gent schrap het woord allochtoon'  
<http://www.demorgen.be/binnenland/gent-schrap-het-woord-allochtoon-bf6a209d/> [consulted 09/01/2016]
- 4 Interview in De Zevende Dag, emission of Dec. 4 2016  
<http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/videozone/programmas/dezevendedag/2.47745?video=1.2835343>

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