

BOOK REVIEW: LEGITIMATION AND PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN SPEECHES: DISCURSIVE AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS [ЛЕГИТИМАЦИЯ И ПРЕДИЗБОРНИ РЕЧИ: ДИСКУРСИВНИ И ПРАГМАТИЧНИ АСПЕКТИ] BY BORYANA KOSTOVA-STAMBOLIYSKA

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Whenever studies focus on discourse, they invariably mention the fact that it is a conveyor of power and ideology. The definition frequently reiterated and commonly referred to is the one presented by Fairclough (1995) in which he defines discourse as a social activity and a type of social interaction, a kind of knowledge and a creation of reality, mostly due to the fact that we create our understanding of the world based on our interactions with the surrounding world. The link between knowledge and power is also supported by Foucault who claims that it is in discourse that objects acquire meaning and that power “produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (1975). These characteristics make discourse an interesting object of analysis, especially when it comes to studies focused on the way different individuals express their ideas and in particular when these people also happen to be endowed with political power.

Elections, especially those of presidents, mark important occasions in the life of people in general and when they are related to one of the super powers, they invariably affect life worldwide. That is the reason why scholars pay special attention to political speeches, especially those uttered by highest tribune possible and look into the effects they have on the people they target. The pragmatic function of political speeches has been observed in a very nasty way recently (January, 2021) when Trump willingly or not stirred his supporters into storming the Capitol – an unprecedented event in US history which unequivocally shows the power of words in general. “Our President wants us here” used as the headline by The New York Times (Barry et al., 2021) clearly summarizes the effect the speech uttered by Trump has had on his supporters. Lord Acton has stated that “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. For this and other reasons political speeches have been an object of analysis in different studies with focus on different discursive strategies or pragmatic functions employed in their construal.

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Legitimation, defined as the act or result of making something legitimate, therefore, considered reasonable and acceptable, on the one hand, while on the other, with the “process of collective recognition of an authority under the substantial profile” (Lippi, 2024), is invariably linked to the acumen of political leaders and the way they house their discourse and proves a fertile ground for exploration. The book *Legitimation and presidential campaign speeches: Discursive and pragmatic aspects* [Легитимация и предизборни речи: Дискурсивни и прагматични аспекти] by Boryana Kostova-Stamboliyska encompasses all aspects mentioned above and positively contributes to the host of research in this direction by providing a comprehensive account of the speeches of American presidential candidates over the span of 120 years.

In her book Boryana Kostova-Stamboliyska uses a very broad theoretical, as well as sociological and political base for an in-depth exploration of the problem of legitimation as reflected in the political speeches by presidential candidates. The focus of the book is on political discourse and as such it follows in the steps of an array of other recent studies analysing political discourse, and strategies of legitimation, such as the one by Zorica Trajkova and Silvana Neshkovska (2019), which is on a smaller scale, however, analysing both legitimation and deligitimation strategies in the speeches of Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump during the elections in 2016. Another analysis of Trump’s speeches focuses on the intermingling of legitimation and manipulation (Abuelwafa, 2021) in the way Trump incited his supporters into storming the Capitol. In a study published in May 2022, Wang (2022) yet again analyses the speeches delivered by Donald Trump, this time compared to those by the president of China, Xi Jinping, in order to explore the legitimation strategies used to justify the decisions and actions undertaken by the two presidents in order to control the spread of the Corona virus. A similar topic has been undertaken as a subject of analysis in presidential speeches, however, in Tanzania by Seleniya (2023) in terms of the political discourse around vaccination.

As could be seen Trump is one of the main actors who have piqued scholars’ interest when it comes to presidential speeches. Compared to the above mentioned case studies, Kostova-Stamboliyska’s book provides a more comprehensive account of the legitimation strategies employed by presidential candidates over the span of 120 years, i.e. from 1900 to 2020, covering 53 speeches in total. As such the analysis stands out with its diachronic nature and wider scope.

In four successive chapters Boryana Kostova-Stamboliyska builds her analysis up, starting first with the main concepts such as discourse as the basis of the modern linguistic toolkit, the link between discourse, context, political discourse and its critical analysis, as well as reviewing the relationship between politics and language, with focus on expression of ideological beliefs, expression of political position and evaluation, manipulative influence and persuasion.

The second chapter examines the generic variety within political discourse, the campaign speech as a genre of political discourse, genre characteristics, compositional structure, trends in the production and reception of contemporary political speeches, medialization, profanization, the problem of authorship and intertextuality, as well as approaches and methods for the study of political speeches.

In Chapter Three, the author dwells on political discourse as a strategic action, the communicative-speech strategies in political discourse, the concept of legitimation in political discourse, the socio-political dimensions of legitimation, the difference between legitimation and legitimization, as well as the discursive dimensions of legitimation.

Kostova-Stamboliyska then continues on with the specificities of epistemic legitimation as a strategy and the ability of the actors to employ epistemic modality and evidentiality, lexical means and personal deixis, among other means of expression in their speeches.

Intertextuality is the focus of attention in chapter 5 and political myths as a narrative strategy are analysed in chapter 6. Boryana Kostova-Stamboliyska outlines the etymology, structure and functions of ten political myths and proves that this culturally specific characteristic is a part of the macro-argumentative structure of the political speeches comprising the corpus of the book.

The conclusion of the book outlines the main findings of the research and provides a classification of the verbal strategies used for legitimation and the way they have been applied.

I really find *Legitimation and presidential campaign speeches: Discursive and pragmatic aspects [Легитимация и предизборни речи: Дискурсивни и прагматични аспекти]* by Boryana Kostova-Stamboliyska an interesting and commendable read as it sets a frame for future big scale analyses which could be conducted even on a comparative basis. The book can be used both by scholars working in the field of media studies, political discourse, CDA and students making their first steps in political discourse analysis, as it provides a comprehensive methodology which is widely applicable to further research, a fact which has been proven by the similar theoretical bases employed in the book as well as in the analyses quoted at the beginning of this review.

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