MEANING AND INTENTION IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ABOUT BREXIT

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Abstract: *Political discourse concerns strategies, attitudes, arguments, words and phrases used by people who have the political power or who wish to gain it. So normally, it implies attitudes, linguistic and sometimes philosophic knowledge. Whether it is a Prime minister talking, a president of a country or a member of a parliament speaking, we may be sure that we will be confronted with a speech characterized by cohesion and coherence, having a precise and defined message to transmit and a clear cut mission to convince his audience. Obviously, political discourse differ from other types of discourse in point of topic and, consequently, in point of effect. So, political discourse should be analyzed from various points of view and linguistic theories, such as discourse analysis, pragmatics, theory of argumentation or semantic theories such as prototype theory and frame semantics theory. All these various approaches can give us a thorough image and a complete meaning of political discourse.*

Keywords: *political discourse; argumentative discourse; meaning; prototype theory; frame semantics*

1. INTRODUCTION

Political discourse is the most common and widespread variety of discourse. Discourse is a linguistic category defined as a "sequence of sentences in use or a sequence of enunciations" (A. Reboul and J. Moeschler, 1998:41) characterized by cohesion and coherence. Among his most important characteristics we must emphasize that it is consists of a message transmitted by a speaker to an audience. As far as political discourse is concerned, the speaker is a politician and the message is about a political issue. Political discourse has consequences, so it implies a lot of responsibility on behalf of the speaker. Let us remember Charles de Gaulles's discourse on the occasion of the events that took part in France in May, 1968. In the middle of a social crisis, being asked to step down from office, the president declares boldly: "No, I will not step down, no, I will not retire. I have a mandate given by my people and I intend to carry it out". In those circumstances, his firm attitude and his firm words led to solve the social crisis; it also ensured peace and calm in the country. Many other ministers, presidents of states made outstanding speeches on historic moments. Political discourse is focused on matters and concepts such as democracy, property, rule of law, equality, citizenship, justice, civil rights, liberty or sovereignty. The message needs to convince the auditorium, so it must be built up according to the circumstances and it also must take into account the needs and interests of those to whom it is addressed. In the paper, we will deal with an analysis of various approaches to political discourse and with construction of meaning in such a discourse, with reference to the particular case of Great Britain's decision to leave the European Union. As the Prime Minister Theresa May pointed out, it was the British people who voted, as she put it, "for change" and her speech, or rather speeches, are meant to give the British citizens an image of the "brighter future" that awaits them.

2. POLITICAL DISCOURSE. LINGUISTIC APPROACHES

French linguistics is known to have given new approaches on discourse. Michel Foucault (1999:27-61) initiates a project to describe discursive events in order to search and analyze the units which are being formed in this particular context. He states from the beginning that this analysis will not be about language analysis. Michel Foucault describes his investigation field as a finite and limited assembly made up of existing linguistic sequences. He is the one who first spoke about "formations discursives" which, in his opinion, are enunciations which are produced by various enunciators but which are related to the

same topic, such as science, morals or politics. He illustrates it by discourses about evolutionism given during a period of time, starting with Buffon and ending with Darwin. He even identifies some constructing rules for these "formations discursives", such as: indication of object of interest, of enunciation modalities, indication of concepts and themes.

Patrick Charaudeau, another specialist of discourse and in its different manifestations, such as media discourse (1997), which he compares to a "social mirror" or in political discourse, considers that discourse is about information and about communication, two notions that refer to social phenomena. In one of his many studies (*http://www.youscribe.com),* the linguist Patrick Charaudeau pays special attention to aspects concerning language, since political discourse is very often considered from the point of view of political language. He reminds Claude Lefort's contribution to the study of political phenomena, in the way that he indicated that political phenomenon of a combination of the following facts: political facts, social facts, legal facts and moral facts. Patrick Charaudeau reviews some of the most well-known analyses with regard to the connection between language and action in political discourse, among which Max Weber's analysis, who bluntly stated that political power is directly connected with domination and violence. Another point of view mentioned by Charaudeau is that of Hanna Arendt who considers that political power is the result of a unanimous consent of a group of human beings willing to be and to live together. The third point of view is that of Jürgen Habermans who makes a distinction between a communicational power and an administrative power. Their cooperation may lead to discussion, which enables citizens to fight for their own point of view in some form of expression called public opinion.

Other French linguists, such as Jean-Jacques Courtine (1981) paid more attention to the study of discourse analyses from the point of view of social and political conditions in which political discourse is produced. He gathered a body of research and he dealt especially with the study of the linguistic aspect of this body of research. He paid special attention to enunciation system, syntactic structure of sentences and clauses, as well as to discursive effects of political discourse.

For her part, Corrine Gobin (2011) notes that from a certain period of time, she sees significant changes in political discourse which became more focused on a technocratic orientation. The new political discourse has become a discourse about

competence, about morality, but in fact this discourse is based on the use of a wooden language. Much more than that, this type of political discourse is tending to be generalized in the Member States of the European Union. The lexicon of this wooden language is primarily made up of terms which may appear to be expert and scholar termini, used by competent and educated persons, while the same discourse appears to be in use with many other international socio-economic or political instance. For the linguist, a question arises: is there a hard-core manufacturing this strange wooden language, made up of a lexicon, a syntax and an argumentative model which is to become universal? The French linguist Corrine Corbin notices that, starting with a unique pattern in political discourse, humanity may find itself in a great danger, that of a unique thinking which will dangerously lead to globalization.

As far as Anglo-Saxon linguistics is concerned, the most outstanding approach concerning political discourse is that of Teun van Dijk (http://discourses.org). In the respective article he expresses his intention to find the most adequate way of doing political discourse analysis. He does not deny that political discourse analysis is both about political discourse and about critical discourse analysis: "PDA is both about political discourse, and it is also a critical enterprise. In the spirit of contemporary approaches in CDA this would mean that critical-political discourse analysis deals especially with the reproduction of political *power, power abuse* or *domination* through political discourse, including the various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance. In particular such an analysis deals with the discursive conditions and consequences of social and political *inequality* that results from such domination." We find in this theory some important landmarks, as linguists call them: political discourse is identified by its actors or authors, more exactly the politicians. Political discourse is about "text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, it is about political communication." It may also imply that many other actors are involved and many fields of human activities are concerned. In his opinion, a broad definition of politics is about all the participants in the political process, being "a deep study of the nature or the activities or practices accomplished by political text and talk". Van Dijk considers that politics field should be limited to some major concepts denoting official and unofficial political actors, events, encounters, settings, political systems (like democracy and

communism), political ideologies (like 'perestroika'), political ideologies (like liberalism) and political (group) relations (such as power, inequality, hegemony and oppression).

The linguist considers that some relevant properties of the political context could be used as a set of criteria to distinguish political discourse from any other form of discourse. Such properties can be considered relevant categories leading to the definition of political text and context. Here is a comprehensive list: Societal domain and field (Education, Health, Law, business or Art); Political systems (communism, dictatorship, democracy, fascism); Political values (freedom, solidarity, equality, harmony, Submission, Sympathy); Political ideologies (communism, democracy); Political institutions (State, Government, Parliament, Congress); Political organizations (political parties, political clubs, NGOs); Political groups (opponents, dissidents, demonstrators, coalition, crowd); Political actors (politicians, demonstrators, lobbyists, strikers); Political relations (power, power abuse, hegemony, oppression, equality, inequality); Political process (governing, legislation, opposition, agenda-setting, solidarity); Political actions (a session of parliament, a meeting of a group of dissidents); Political discourse (propaganda, political advertising, political speeches, media interviews, party programmes, ballots); Political cognition (shared social knowledge, specific knowledge, models, concrete political events). If all these categories are taken into consideration, we will have a complex analysis of any political discourse which will emphasize refined characteristics of an epoch and of a social system.

Another approach of political discourse that is to be noted is that of Isabela and Norman Fairclough (2012), in which they suggest a new approach of the domain or rather a new direction of the same principal field, that of political discourse. Their contribution to political discourse analysis consists in suggesting a new frame of political discourse analysis, within the limits of critical political discourse. They consider that political discourse is an argumentative discourse, an argumentation, more exactly „a practical argumentation for or against particular ways of action". It is, mainly, about deciding what to do, about deliberating „over several possibilities" (2012:9). They also insist on the relevance of argumentation theory

for understanding two concepts which originate outside critical discourse analysis but have been

significant within this version of critical discourse analysis, imaginaries and political legitimacy, and the concept of power, which is fundamental for critical discourse analysis. (Fairclough, 2012:103).

Most of the political discourse analysis approaches follow the lines and directions of politeness theory, as it is the case with Sandra Harris's article (2001) who extends this theory beyond informal situations, dealing with adversarial political discourse. The linguist studies manifestations of face threatening acts, preserving each other's face, ways of minimizing the risk of confrontation in discourse using parliamentary debates in the House of Commons.

3. CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE. THERESA MAY'S DISCOURSE ABOUT BREXIT

If we take into account Isabela and Norman Fairclough's theory (2012), political discourse is an argumentative one, so it must have a meaning, relevant and powerful enough to convince the auditorium. From a linguistic point of view, meaning concerns words in their complex relationship they establish with other words in a context (J. Lyons, 1995). According to other contributions to define meaning (F. Rastier, 1989), this is a contextual phenomenon and a component of the meaning of an element can be described as a reference to that element. We can also speak about meaning from a conceptual point of view, and, as such, meaning would consist of the notion or rather the mental image of an object or situation in extra linguistic reality. Meaning is something to be constructed in a specific situation of communication, which implies a speaker and an interlocutor. It is very important that both participants, the speaker and the interlocutor(s), should have the same mental image or representation of the extra linguistic element about which they communicate.

When the extra linguistic element is Brexit, things are more complicated. A Prime-minister, in our case, Theresa May, the Prime-minister of Great Britain, is trying to communicate with the British people on the sensitive topic of Brexit. Theresa May had given quite a number of speeches on Brexit, but we are going to refer to those given on the 17th and the 20th of January, 2017. She uses quite a large amount of arguments, she even presents a well-shaped plan to describe the future United Kingdom after Brexit. She expresses her intentions on how to make things work in the intended direction and she

delivers a very well-constructed argumentative discourse with a view to persuade the general public that everything is under control. Everything is already well-thought of: "Let me be clear", "I want to be clear", "we will establish certainty and clarity", "I am confident". We cannot help noticing that she uses the first person singular and plural, "I", "we", since she never forgets to emphasize that she speaks on behalf of British citizens who voted in favour of Brexit, as she says, "with their eyes open" and, of course, on behalf of the government. These speeches are characterized by an argumentative intention, which, in a nutshell, consists in portraying the future United Kingdom out of the European Union. Her plan is structured in twelve objectives and it is not very clear why she chose that specific order in enumerating them.

Speaking about its argumentative intention, we also notice that the interlocutor of this speaker is the British people for which she constructs a future image of United Kingdom out of the European Union. At the same time, the speeches seem to equally address audiences abroad, since she uses very considerate words when speaking about European Union: she refers to them as "our friends and neihgbours", "our European allies". The arguments include promises for further collaboration as well as warnings: "United Kingdom will not accept", "we shall not tolerate" and even o more or less clear threat:" No deal is better than a bad deal for Britain."

The speeches Theresa May had given in January 2017 on Brexit may also be considered from another linguistic point of view, that of cognitive semantics. An approach from cognitive semantics' point of view is about constructing meaning, putting it into words and succeeding in sharing it with a larger community. Theresa May constructs an image of Great Britain after Brexit and, in our opinion, this image is the one of the best representative of a category: the best representative of a state when delivered from constraints and ties emerging from belonging to a union of states. Since the Prime Minister mentioned twelve objectives, we can conclude that the achievement of the twelve objectives may lead to the materialization of such a prototype.

So, considering the objectives envisaged, after Brexit, the twenty-seven remaining countries will be confronted with a new partner, with mixed new and old convictions, still able to have his say in relation to his former partners from the European Union. What will this new partner look like? We remind that this is a portrayed partner, having some attributes which enable it to be different from the former partner of the European Union.

The new state will be one that:

-   Will seek for new regulations concerning new customs agreement within Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and getting the greatest possible access to the single market embodied by EU members;
-   Provides means to finance farm payments
-   Provides clarity on university payments;
-   A state in which there will not be new barriers in living and in doing business within doing business within our own union, nevertheless maintaining the necessary common standards;
-   A state which will empower the UK as a trading nation;
-   A state which will ensure o secure border with the EU as regards with the border of the Republic of Ireland;
-   A state which will ensure openness to international talent, but controlled immigration; control of the number of people coming from Europe to Britain, with respect of the rights of foreign people living and working (and paying taxes) in UK as well as the rights of nationals living in other European Union states;
-   A state which will mean a truly global Britain, opened to free trade with our close friends and neighbours in Europe but also with new friends and allies from outside Europe (meaning the former Commonwealth).

Such a state would be the embodiment of a prototype of a modern, free and open state in which anyone would like to live. This kind of prototype was described in linguistics as opposed to the classic theory developed by Eleanor Rosh. According to Eleanor Rosh, a prototype is the best representative of a category (1978). In E. Rosch's conception a prototype can be established within the boundaries of a category and it is based on people's judgment of how good an example or clear case members are of a category. A prototype appears to be just that member of a category that most reflect the redundancy structure of a category as a whole. Coleman and Kay (1981) contributed to the development of the prototype theory. According to them, prototype is a mental object, scheme, cognitive image associated to a word which brings about categorization. A French linguist specialized in cognitive semantics, Danielle Dubois (1991), considers that it is quite possible that a prototype, as a mental construction, could not have a real representation. A prototype may be made up by a combination of values, never materialized, even if the respective values are frequently met with. It may

be an abstract representation, constructed on the bases of typical characteristics.

So, in the Prime minister's view, the Global Britain she presents to British citizens is, for the time being, a prototype, a non- existent country but a country for which the British citizens long for. They want to get out from that single-market agreements, so as to extend their relationship with old friends and new allies from outside Europe (meaning that they hope to reinstate relationship within Commonwealth); they want to be able to control immigration, meaning that Brexit must mean control of the number of people who come to work and live in United Kingdom from Britain; they want that the Northern Ireland border keeps being that common travel one, so no hard border between the two countries. In the end, we wonder whether this prototype of a country presented by the Prime Minister Theresa May can ever materialize.

In order to convince the British citizens, especially those who voted against Brexit, the Prime Minister chooses to use words that would touch the general public, being part of their everyday life. In her speeches about Brexit, Theresa May speaks repeatedly about the disadvantages of the membership of a *single market*; she insists on the importance of *leaving the customs union*; her point of view on immigration implies a strong will to *take control over the number of people coming to work and live in the UK from the European Union*; she intends to engage in negotiations for a Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement; she expresses her satisfaction with regards to the *budget question*, saying that UK will not pay huge sums of money to the European Union on a regular basis; she very frequently mentions Great Britain's intentions to extend their relationship with *old and new partners and allies*, referring to the members of the Commonwealth; the ultimate goal of the British government will be to construct o *global Britain*.

Using these words and phrases, the Prime Minister intends to build a future image of a bright Great Britain after Brexit, which will be what British citizens want for their children and their grandchildren. Many of these words and phrases are chosen on purpose, as they have a certain echo in the general public's mind. We shall try to explain how the general public would be able to understand the dimensions of the changes that Brexit will bring through a semantic theory which concerns construction of meaning. This semantic theory belongs to Charles Fillmore (1982:111) and he named it "frame semantics" thinking of the term "frame" which, according to him, denotes "any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits". In his conception, the term "frame" would be more appropriate and more comprehensive as compared to other terms which have been used to describe natural language understanding. He thinks that the term "frame" can be considered as a hyperonym for many other terms such as "script", "scenario" "schema" or "cognitive model".

In Charles Fillmore's opinion, "frame semantics offers a particular way of looking at word meanings" (Ch. Fillmore, 1982:111). He starts from the idea that "words represent a categorization of experience, and each of these categories is underlain by a motivating situation occurring against a background of knowledge and experience". This means that language and thinking are completely different things, but they are related and work together to form human knowledge and human vocabulary. Human beings have some mental representations about the extra linguistic reality which they have to put into words. In order to simplify the theory, Fillmore finds an analogy between the tools offered by frame semantics theory about word meaning and a set of tools, such as a hammer, a knife or a clock. We are supposed to know about those tools if we know what they kook kike and how they are used or even what kind of people use them. We are supposed to know what is the shape and the make or model of a knife, we are supposed to know who uses it, why and in what circumstances. In the same way, we may consider a linguistic text as some kind of record of tools used to construct meaning, tools belonging to phonology or morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics.

The origin of frame semantics theory dates back to the period when Charles Fillmore was interested in lexical structure and lexical semantics, exploring co-occurrences of words, specific contexts in which verbs tend to appear accompanied by certain arguments, so it was the beginning of the frame semantic theory when Fillmore identified the importance of the concept of frame which lead "to the discovery of important functioning word classes or grammatical categories" (Ch. Fillmore, 1982:112). Using his studies concerning the use of English verbs according to the surface-syntactic frames in which they appeared but also according to their grammatical behaviour, acquiring great knowledge about deep structure syntactic frames which were hospitable to it, he developed first his theory about semantic roles. He considers that verbs

have "two kinds of features relevant to their distribution in sentences: a deep – structure valence description expressed in case frames and a set of rule features". So, it became normal to say about a verb that it occurs in a linguistic context involving a number of nominals, among which an Agent, performing the action, the Patient, the one that who undergoes the action performed by the Agent and perhaps an Instrument, or an Object or a Force. Such a syntactic-semantic valence description of verbs lead to the creation of some kind of a small abstract scene or situation for each case frame, "so that to understand the semantic structure of the verb it was necessary to understand the properties of such schematized scenes". His first attempt to describe a cognitive structure was in the case of verbs like *blame, accuse, and criticize*, for which he imagined some characteristic scene schematization. He also imagined a scene schematization for the verbs buy and sell, describing the categories speakers bring into play when describing other situations then the actual speech situation. Our understanding of the meaning of a word is based on cognitive frames and interactional frames. Under the influence of cognitive semantics, he proposed a description of word meanings that made use of the notions of categories and prototype. He noticed that, very often, the frame against which the meaning of a word is defined and understood is based on the notion of prototype, able to provide with the most frequent mental image of the reality described by the word. He offers as examples the notions of orphan and breakfast, describing the most usual situations in which the words are used and taking into account the most usual phrases in which the word occurs, the most frequent word associations containing orphan or breakfast. To conclude, this theory is essential in constructing and understanding meaning trough a word, since "a word can give us a category that can be used in many different contexts which are determined by the multiple aspects of his prototypic use". Human mind should be capable of putting together all the information given by the different contexts in which a word is used and it should be capable of making choices whenever a specific use is indicated.

According to Charles Fillmore's frame theory, Theresa May's choice of words in her political speeches about Brexit was not a random one. Some of the words or phrases she uses have a certain echo in the British citizens' minds, they have a certain meaning.

One such word is security, used four times by the Prime minister. Of course, it is not exceedingly used, it is not misused, but it is cleverly used.

Here are the contexts:

(1) There is growing concern about European *security*.
(2) With the threats to our common security becoming more serious, our response is […] to work together more.
(3) I am proud of the role Britain has played […] in promoting Europe's security.
(4) After Brexit, Britain wants to be a good friend and neighbour in every way, and that includes defending the safety and security of all our citizens.

From the first sentence, we may construct the following scenario in order to understand the meaning of security: there is an unidentified place in the world where somebody, also unidentified, is very much afraid that Europe can be attacked by enemies. It means that the respective country is not free from danger, fear or anxiety of being attacked. The rest of the meaning is to be constructed if we know for sure what are the limits for that part of the world called Europe; then we should define who are the enemies; will the territory named as Europe be under attack of: mosquitoes, a hostile neighbour, a single person, such a terrorist or a deranged person, or an army.

The next examples reinforce our conviction that Theresa May presents an image of Europe under attack or at least threatened to be attacked. And we tend to conclude the meaning of those sentences is that every time European security was in danger, United Kingdom was not concerned as it was capable of offering support and acting like a friend in need. Of course, when addressing British citizens, it is very flattering to portray United Kingdom like a protector, mounting guard at the gates of Europe. From the point of view of other European citizens, the situation is far from being correctly depicted. What would the Greeks, the Italians, the Spaniard or even the German say? Do not protect the frontiers of that part of the world called Europe?

Another word or rather phrase we intend to analyze is "a global Britain". It is the logo she chose for Great Britain after Brexit. The logo is printed on the background of her tribune and it is also mentioned in her speech.

(1) We seek a new and equal partnership between an independent, self-governing global Britain and our friends and allies in the EU.
(2) We will take this opportunity to make Britain stronger, to make Britain fairer, and to build a more global Britain, too.
(3) The great prize for this country is to use this moment to build a truly global Britain.

(4) A Global Britain must be free to strike trade agreements with countries from outside the European Union too.

What is the meaning one can construct about the adjective "global"? What can be global? Global warming, global fame, a global life insurance, the we have globalization, a phenomenon very much spoken about and much disliked in some parts of the world. So, the meaning of global Britain that Theresa May presents to British citizens and voters in favour of Brexit is mainly the last one, a global Britain will be that country which is free to strike agreements with countries from outside European Union, too. That is the primarily meaning she wants to induce to the British citizens, although, from a linguistic point of view, the approach is not correct, it favours some aspects which are supposed to offer comfort, support and empathy on behalf of both sides.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is not true that political discourse concerns only politicians or actors involved in politics as a field of activity. As we have tried to demonstrate, political discourse is also a matter of mastering language, manipulating people's minds and having an extensive knowledge about human nature, human psychology and about social and political trends at a certain point in history. If your country decides to leave a community in which she played an important part, you find acceptable arguments in favour of this decision.

The study of language can shed some light on politics, politicians, on their intentions and their concerns. Most of the linguistic researches about political discourse are related to semantics and to theories about constructing meaning. Cognitive semantics is one of these fields that gave us the possibility to understand, on the one side, how meaning is constructed by the speaker, and, on the other side, how meaning is understood by the interlocutor. It is quite interesting to discover how general knowledge, encyclopedic knowledge is used as an instrument by politicians in order to construct the meaning which is convenient to them and to the political party they belong to.

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