

**Chilton, Paul. *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and practice* London: Routledge, 2004. 224 pp. \$32.95 softcover.**

**"What does the use of language in contexts we call 'political' tell us about humans in general?"**

The title of this review is from the preface (xi) of Chilton's new book. It is the question "behind the book" (xi), and Chilton's tentative answers to it include recourse to various language-related disciplines: rhetoric, generative linguistics, and especially critical theory and cognitive linguistics (x).

In Part I, "Political animals as articulate mammals," Chilton sets forth what language sciences know about language usage, including a review of the literature from Aristotle on and an effort to establish the framework on which Chilton can build his theory: The relationship of politics to language and vice versa on the one hand, and two basic types of meaning on the other, namely social interaction of individuals in groups and cognitive representation of the world in the individual mind.

Chilton prefers not to define politics at the outset; it "varies according to one's situation and purposes" (3), but "*shared* perceptions of values" (5) define political association and "political activity does not exist without the use of language" (6). The empirical logic of the book is formulated as follows: "When we examine recognizably 'political' discourse, we shall repeatedly encounter certain uses of certain linguistic structures" (21).

Interactive language use has to do with "signaling social roles, boundaries and bonds" (48), and representative language use includes "communicating representations of the world" (49) as well as "a pervasive feature" referred to by Chilton as 'legitimation': "The evident need for political speakers to imbue their utterances with evidence, authority and truth" (23). Speaker and listener alike must operate within a realm of indexical or deictic expressions, the dimensions of which are not only time and space, but also a third dimension of 'modality' according to which "Self is not only *here* and *now*, but also the origin of the epistemic *true* and the deontic *right*" (59).

Parts II and III are dedicated to "practical analyses of actual specimens of political text and talk" (xi) in the domestic (British) and global arenas, respectively. The nine transcripts include a total of 661 lines of political discourse. The three domestic chapters include Political interviews, Parliamentary language, and Foreigners (speeches about attitudes towards foreigners); the three global chapters include

Distant places, Worlds apart, and The role of religion (George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden contrasted on the basis of religious presumptions).

Part IV is a single short chapter, "Toward a theory of language and politics" (197-205) with twelve propositions that characterize political discourse, now defined as "the use of language in ways that humans, being political animals, tend to recognize as 'political'" (201): Political discourse proceeds indexically and interactively to negotiate representations, which in turn constitute "sets of role-players and their relations" (203); political discourse uses binary conceptualizations and exploits spatial cognition and metaphorical reasoning in order to provide concepts of group and identity; both the recursive and the modal properties of language foster political interaction; finally, political discourse is connected to emotional centers in the brain and is "anchored in multi-dimensional deixis" (204).

His last two paragraphs raise an important issue, unfortunately for the first time: "Discourse analysis has its own version of the uncertainty principle" (205): The analyst's own political intuitions enter into all analyses of political language behavior. But Chilton presents this not so much as a parting note on the problems of scientific methodology, but rather as an argument for a psychological approach to political discourse, a "focus on the processes of our minds" (205).

This, then, is where Chilton lands in terms of a scientific discipline: cognitive linguistics. His analyses are not so much of the "structure and lexicon" (201), both of which are "the aspects of language" (201) that presumably ground his final twelve propositions, but of *context*, construed as a thoroughly subjective phenomenon, "as representations of the world stored in the mind and accessed when presumed relevant" (155). Consequently, Chilton would reject the objective notion of context presented by conversation analysts, along with their emphasis on context-free analysis of local management (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Accordingly, he also disregards Clayman and Heritage's (2002) *The News Interview*.

There are some structural and functional flaws in this edifice constructed by Chilton. First of all, it seems to be the case that his characterizations of man's interaction in the polis pertain to all serious conversation; man is indeed a political animal, always and in all settings. As Chilton himself acknowledges, his corpus is limited to the English language. The corpus also includes corrected "idealized model" (94) transcripts, translated transcripts, discontinuous transcripts, and transcripts with notations not included in the Notation Appendix (206). Some back channeling is wrongly characterized as interruption (72).

There are also empirical problems with these data. They are disparate from one another. Descriptive and inferential statistics are entirely lacking. No objective, reliable criteria are provided to certify that we "repeatedly encounter certain uses of certain linguistic structures" (21) in political discourse. And even when we do, it is trivial unless these same linguistic structures are *not* repeatedly encountered in other genres of discourse than the political.

Neither the conceptual nor the empirical components of Chilton's new book are satisfactorily cogent. Its contribution to the research literature must therefore be evaluated as modest, not substantive.

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### References

- Clayman, S., & Heritage, J. (2002). *The News Interview: Journalists and Public Figures on the Air*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). *A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-taking for Conversation*. *Language*, 50, 696-735.