

Types of Political Discourses and Their Classification

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Abstract

The aim of the given work is to identify and classify the types of political discourses that (may) exist in any particular society. Compared to existing definitions and classifications, our purpose serves a practical goal of schematic classification of political discourses. The article intends to give a starting point for a general classification and typology that will be elaborated within the framework of future research, as typology of discourse specimens is the least developed area of the field (van Dijk, 1997). Definitions/typologies that have been made until now are more of a theoretical character and, therefore, it would be useful to create more concrete mental pictures (expressed in the forms of schemata) that will enable us to operate easier with the concepts discussed while studying the subject. The article starts with the general definition of the term(s) and links the concept of discourse to other concepts like narrative, frame, ideology, discursive strategy. As we try to show the ideology/narrative/discourse link, formulation of corresponding schemes also gain importance in order to have a clearer mental picture of the above mentioned correlation. In parallel with the above mentioned points we also emphasize correlation between the dominant / secondary discourses with specific focus on ideological differences/power struggle.

Keywords: Discourse, dominant discourse, discursive strategy, frame

Introduction

Crystal (2006) defines discourse as “continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence,” “it is a set of utterances which constitute any recognizable speech event” (p. 148). Discourse is a socially determined entity and specific principles of a speech system according to which the reality is being classified and represented during certain periods of time. It is, according to Foucault (1972), a historically given material practice by means of which power relations are exercised. It is a communication realized in discursive “practices”. The term ‘discourse’ depicts the formal way of thinking that is expressed through and by means of language. It also represents a specific type of a social boundary that determines what can be said regarding certain issues. There exist many types of discourses in any particular society. Opposing discourses struggle for domination against each other. Finally, one particular discourse holds a dominating position. This phenomenon is known as Discursive Dominance (Sharma, 2011).

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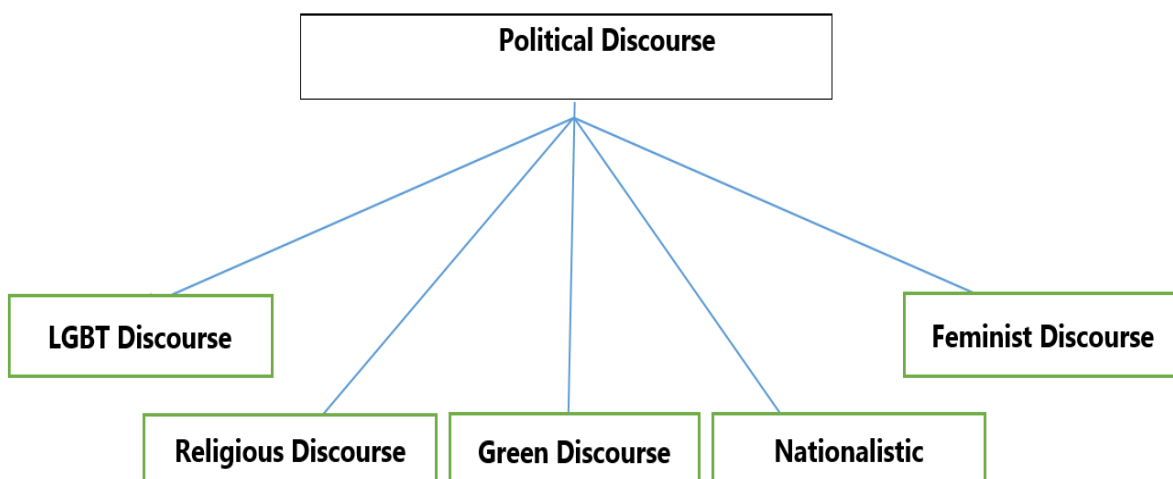
Dominant Discourse (Gee, 1989) is a type of discourse which is superior to other discourses, lowers the meaning and optionality of approaches of the so-called subordinated, minor discourses. Dominant Discourse is the discourse of those who hold a dominant position within the social and political hierarchy. Dominant Discourse is a way of transferring ideas and behavior type regarding any particular issue – it is a certain type of speech and totality of corresponding behavior patterns that are most commonly disseminated and accepted within a particular society. Such type of discourse reflects an ideology of those groups which hold relatively more power than others. Dominant groups force other members of society to accept types of behavior and speech patterns that are determined by themselves as a standard.

Dominant discourse has an ability of transforming speech acts into actions, whereas minor (opposing) discourse(s) have lesser chances of transforming speech acts into actions and are forced to oppose dominant discourses.

Political discourse can be defined as a communicative act participants of which try to give specific meanings to facts and influence / persuade others. In other terms, political discourse can be defined as a manipulative linguistic strategy which serves concrete (ideological) goals. Political discourse may involve both the formal debates, speeches, and hearings and the informal talk on politics among family members (Liebes & Ribak, 1991).

Discourse Typology

Let us try to picture a general schema of a discourse typology. Here we take a concept of political discourse dividing it into its sub-genres. If we are to assume that the (general) category of discourse can be divided into various sub-categories (or sub-genres), the schema for political discourse may be formulated in the following way:



As it can be seen from the above-given schema, each type of discourse at the same time represents a discourse of a particular segment/group of society. Hence, each segment (based on professional, class (socio-economic), gender divisions) produces discourses that are typical to them. Discourses produced by those segments are the reflections of their ideological stances. Therefore, a specific link between ideology (worldview) and discourses can be established from this point, "for people acquire, express and reproduce their ideologies largely by text or talk, a discourse analytical study of ideology is most relevant" (Van Dijk, 2006). As for the notion of political discourse, it can be identified as an intentional act which in every individual case is meant to reach certain objectives and those objectives as a rule are of a material character; in other words: production of a particular (political) discourse serves a purpose of articulating, protecting/preserving, challenging/deconstructing certain interests. Hence, the link: ideology, expressed in discourse(s) serves material goals.

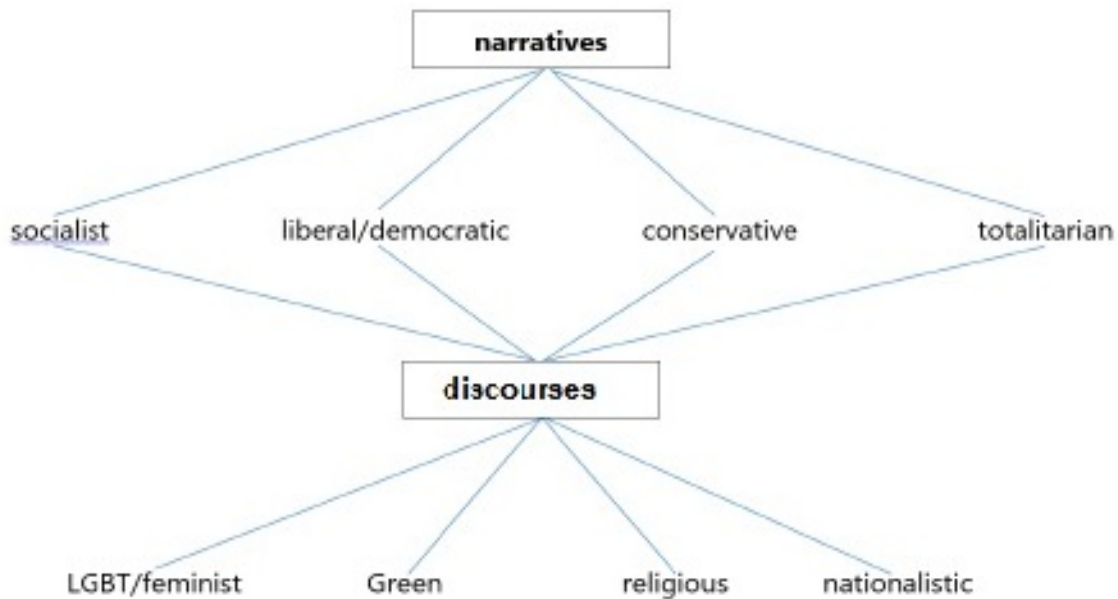
To make the statement clear, for example, LGBT (or Feminist) discourse articulates (their) lack of rights while trying to challenge (or in some cases – deconstruct) the status quo which is a manifestation of interests of those segments which the former ones are trying to challenge (in this case, discourses, which LGBT and Feminist segments and discourses produced by them try to challenge, would be: religious and/or nationalistic discourses, just like the Green/environmentalist discourse challenges the discourse of established capitalist system).

From this point, we can link the notion of narrative to the above established relationship between ideology and discourse(s). As for the difference between narrative and discourse, it can be formulated in the following manner: narrative – what is being told to us; discourse – how it is being told to us.

Based on ideological background, discourses may be divided into left/right wing discourse types which themselves are extensions of particular narratives. The following narratives can be distinguished based on ideological basis: socialist/communist, conservative, liberal/democratic, etc.

Particular narratives produce corresponding discourses: liberal/democratic narrative produces environmentalist/green, LGBT, Feminist discourses (which can be labeled as "emancipatory") discourses. From the Conservative narrative originate religious and nationalistic discourses. At the same time, there may exist variations between narratives and their corresponding discourses. For example, nationalist discourse may originate from conservative, as well as from liberal narratives. Therefore, it is possible to speak about both: Conservative and Liberal nationalistic discourses.

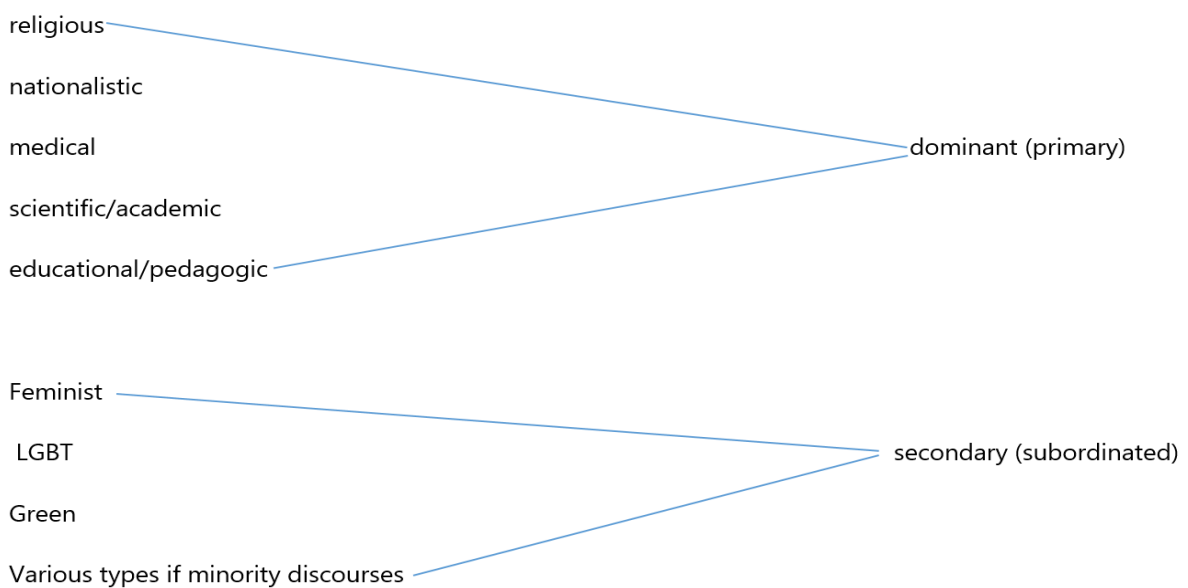
Link between ideologies, narratives and corresponding discourses can be formulated as follows:



To elaborate on the above-given scheme: there are certain types of narratives that are reflections of concrete ideologies and from them stem corresponding discourses.

As it was mentioned above, there exist dominant and secondary (subordinated) discourses. Certain types of discourses gain discursive dominance over others as a result of power struggle. Therefore:

Dominant and secondary (subordinated) discourses:



Here, dominant discourses subdue secondary discourses as they set the status quo within the power structure of any given society. "Discourses can generally be subdivided. Discourses are complex, and often can be subdivided into subcategories that are also divided by the rules that govern them" (Whisnant, 2012, p. 8).

Apart from the above given typologies there are other areas where classification is being made. Another approach to categorize discourses is a professional domain as well: "based on the above mentioned fact, it would be inevitable to understand political and social issues without understanding language, the Discourse Analysis deals with discourses of different social groups. Accordingly, one can speak of medical, political, juridical, educational and other types of discourses" (Msakhuradze, 2014, p. 16).

As we mentioned above, discourses can be conflicting as well as cooperative. When the conflict between discourses is the case, each of the conflicting parts tries to maximize their own interest while trying to minimize that of the other. When discourses are cooperative, they try to maximize their own interests via mutual understanding.

Here, a fundamental question can be formulated: Why are discourses in conflict with each other? The notion of political conflict may be helpful in answering the question. It can be defined as follows: The actual political problem is the direction of subjective mental distinctions and categories of one particular individual or group of individuals towards other groups or individuals whose intentions, as well as perceptions are entirely subjective too (Amaglobeli, 2009).

According to this definition, when, for instance, LGBT activists apply their discursive strategies (using specific gender neutral language) in communication with conservative groups, they try to move forward their own projections of identity trying to challenge (and, at the same time to deconstruct) the traditional "gender binary" status quo.

By analyzing the discourse, a speaker uses, one can often tell things about the speaker's gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class position, and even more specifically the speaker's implied relationship to the other people around him (Whisnant, 2012).

As for the notion of discursive strategies, for example, within the context of political discourse, when female politicians adopt a "masculine" way of talking – it may be considered a specific discursive strategy for achieving certain (political) goals (Jones, 2015). What we are dealing with here is some kind of a language game when one sex adopts the rules of the opposite sex language usage.

As mentioned in the previous work (Amaglobeli, 2016), each type of discourse is produced and operated within a certain type of frame. A frame is a mental structure by means of which we perceive and give meaning to the objective reality. By means of frames we construct what is defined as reality. Frames structure ideas and concepts, determine our style of thinking. For the most part frames operate automatically and unconsciously (Kaufman, Elliott & Shmueli, 2013). Again, the notion of framing may also be linked with the notion of discursive strategy. Framing is the process by which a communication source constructs and defines a social or political issue

for its audience (Nelson, Oxley & Clawson, 1997). Therefore, we can speak of frames defined in terms of ideological features and thus, link them with the notion of discourse, so that every particular discourse has its own frame within which it operates: religious, feminists, conservative, socialist, green frames (as the reflections of particular types of discourses). Accordingly, the relation between these elements can be set: ideology – discourse – frame.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can identify the following: 1. Each ideology has its corresponding discourse (and vice versa), and, ideologies are generally explicitly expressed, acquired and reproduced by discourse. 2. Political discourses are being produced and operated within certain (ideological) frames. Thus, discourses reflect particular ideological frameworks using specific linguistic strategies. 3. Political discourse can be identified as an intentional act which in every individual case is meant to reach certain objectives and those objectives as a rule are of a material character; in other words: production of a particular (political) discourse serves a purpose of articulating, protecting/preserving, challenging/deconstructing certain interests.

It is essential to know the type of political discourse and its characteristic in order to be effectively involved in it. Political discourse can be classified according to the ideologies it tries to promote (socialist, liberal / democratic, conservative & totalitarian) or sub-genres (LGBT, feminist, green, religious, nationalistic). It may be dominant (primary) or subordinated (secondary) according to the presence/absence of the power / hierarchy.

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