REVIEWS

Anita Fetzer and **Gerda Eva Lauerbach**, Eds., *Political discourse in the media: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 2007. Pp. viiii + 379. ISBN 978 90 272 5403 0.

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Political discourse in the media addresses the phenomenon of media communication seen from a cross-cultural perspective, with particular focus on political discourse on television (political interviews, debate, public address or a complex media event). The cross-cultural approach pursued in this collection of papers is two-folded: on the one hand, it includes the description and comparison of culture specific discourse practices of journalists and politicians who conceive their discourses to meet the needs of a culturally homogeneous audience, and on the other hand, it engages in the ways international broadcasting caters to a culturally heterogeneous audience (p.3).

The book is structured into four parts, the first being an *Introduction* by the editors, G.E. Lauerbach and A. Fetzer, who present an overview of political media discourse across cultures, by first investigating the elements involved in the analysis of political discourse from the perspective of the theory and method of constructivism, and second, by analysing the relation between politics, the media and the public sphere. From a constructivist point of view, social phenomena are achieved or produced through the dynamic interaction of the members of the respective social domain. On the other hand, in a cross cultural discourse analysis, the results of research carried out in a specific culture are confronted with cultural phenomena of another culture, and thus challenges its underlying assumptions, by 'de-naturalising' the dominant readings of one culture (p.7).

Departing from the traditional view of culture seen as an "autonomous, homogeneous territorially confined unity, 'contained' within the boundaries of a nation state", G.E. Lauerbach and A. Fetzer adopt a different stance, which considers three main aspects involved in the communication processes between the members of a culture: 1) shared knowledge about symbolic sign systems, especially language; 2) shared knowledge regarding pragmatic principles and social practices, especially verbal interaction; 3) shared systems of knowledge about the physical, social and subjective world, including cultural artefacts. Moreover, members need to have shared knowledge of how these systems interact and of the normative conditions governing appropriate interaction in all three dimensions mentioned above (standards of social tact and politeness and of rational

argumentation and the way in which these standards are expressed in speech acts and genres in culturally situated discourses) (p.8). As for the political discourse in the media, it can be considered as a multifaceted phenomenon, consisting of institutional discourse (subject to institutional goals and procedures), media discourse (public discourse addressed mass media audiences) and mediated political discourse (the meeting point of two different institutional discourses: of politics and the media) (pp.14-15).

Part II, '*From linguistic device to discourse practice*', consists of two chapters. The first one, *Presupposition and 'taking-for-granted' in mass communicated political argument. An illustration from British, Flemish and Swedish political colloquy*, by A.-M. Simon-Vandenbergen, P.R. White and K. Aijmer analyses to what extent taken-for-grantedness is used as a persuasive strategy in political media language as a genre across cultures and whether at interpersonal level there exist similar choices. The data set is drawn from English, Flemish and Swedish radio and television interviews and debates. The authors focus on two types of devices for achieving taken-for-grantedness: 1) the discourse marker 'of course' and 2) presuppositions. The second contribution, *Metaphors in election night television coverage in Britain, the United States and Germany*, by R. Scheithauer, departs from Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive constructivist theory of metaphor. The author makes a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the metaphors used by nine television stations during the 1997 British general election, the 1998 German parliamentary election and the 2000 US presidential election. The analysis revealed surprising similarities across cultures in the use and frequency of occurrence of conceptual metaphors. The authors identified widespread use of metaphors, both from domains that refer to the semantic field of controversy, such as WAR, SPORT, CONTEST, and to less sensational domains, such as JOURNEY or NATURE. Differences between national and international channels were also identified, as well as minor differences between public-service and commercial channels. It is worth mentioning that the issue of gender-biased metaphors is touched upon, although not exhaustively.

Part III, '*Discursive practice in political interviews*', consists of four contributions. A. Becker's *Are you saying…? A cross-cultural analysis of interviewing practices in TV election night coverages* analyses and cross-culturally compares the form and function of question-answer routines in political and expert interviews, by resorting to an integrated framework informed by pragmatics, conversation analysis, and appraisal theory. The data were gathered from the same set of television programmes as those of the previous contribution. 65 questioning turns from the opening sections of nine election night broadcasts were quantitatively interpreted in terms of five criteria: 1) addressee orientation, 2) complexity, 3) question type, 4) appraisal, 5) discursive functions. The findings were grouped into nine preliminary channel profiles. However, it was concluded that there is no such thing as a clear national interviewing style, but they differ according to sub-genre (determined by the social and discursive roles of the interviewers), to the type of channel (within the same sub-genre), to interviewer's

socio-cultural identity (within the same channel) and even to the interviewer's tendency towards accommodating themselves to the interviewee's tacitly assumed native style. M. Johansson's *Represented discourse in answers. A cross-cultural perspective on French and British political interviews* analyses the communicative function of represented discourse from a cross-cultural perspective in a dialogic framework. The analysis reveals the differences between represented discourse in the two socio-cultural contexts, by emphasising its different functions and contexts of use: in the British data RP is used as a device to construct an oppositional stance in negatively loaded contexts, while in the French data, it is employed to give opinions and to build agreement. A. Fetzer's *Challenges in political interviews. An intercultural analysis* addresses the linguistic realisation of challenges in British and German political interviews from the general elections in Britain (1997) and Germany (1998). The study reveals language- and culture-specific preferences for communicating, interpreting and contextualising challenges. The British socio-cultural context makes more reference to both interpersonal and information domains, while the German one makes more reference to the interpersonal domain (p.194). E. Weizman, I. Levi and I. Schneebaum's *Variation in interviewing styles: challenges and support in Al-Jazeera and on Israeli television* examines patterns of interviewers' challenge and support in television news interviews on the basis of data drawn from news interviews broadcast on the Arabic channel Al-Jazeera and on Israeli television, conducted by two interviewers: Faysal al-Qasem, in Arabic (on Al-Jazeera) and Ben Kaspit, in Hebrew. The focus is on topic introduction in the openings, explicit comments and elaborative reformulations in triadic interviews (one journalist interviewing two politicians representing opposing political views). The results of the analysis have revealed that the Al-Jazeera interviews were framed from the very beginning as unbalanced, while the Israeli interviews had more informative and neutral openings. According to the authors, these differences may entail that "the search for neutrality is not a universal, and cultures may differ in terms of their perception of the interviewer's role" (p.221).

Part IV, *'Media events: from public address to election nights'*, consists of three chapters and provides a textual macro-outlook, as well as an analysis of political media events and the multi-generic macro-texts of election nights (p.23). C. Sauer's *Christmas Messages by heads of state: multimodality and media adaptations* examines the multimodal quality of Christmas Messages by European heads of state on television, using a functional-pragmatic and semiotic framework of analysis. The author investigates the discourse facets of Christmas messages, with examples from the 'multimedia show' by the British Queen in 2003 and the 'sermon' given by the Finnish president in 2004. It is concluded that there is a growing need for visual representation within the political arena, and the multimodal character of televised Christmas messages may lead to a gap between what the TV viewers see and what they hear. R Schieß's contribution, *Information meets entertainment: a visual analysis of election night TV programs across cultures* examines the semiotic work, techniques and conventions used by television channels to render the transitions between studio and outside broadcasts

and to create a spatially fragmented, yet coherent televisual text. The author compares and contrasts the techniques used by British, German and US television stations, in particular the 'precarious boundary between information and entertainment' in election night broadcasts (p.276). Drawing on Klein's (1997, 1998) framework of entertainment categories (variety, light-heartedness, interestingness and catchiness), the author makes an analysis of four elements of election night broadcasts: 1) the title sequence, 2) the studio setting, 3) the graphics and 4) the visual management of outside broadcasts. The results revealed that none of the programmes under scrutiny provided 'full-fledged infotainment' (p.308), as there is one-side focus on entertainment, with little attention to the notion of information (p.310). The last contribution of the volume, G.E. Lauerbach's *Presenting television election nights in Britain, the United States and Germany*. Cross-cultural investigates and compares the practices of presenting television election nights in the three countries mentioned in the title. The data are drawn from both public and private national channels, covering the British and German parliamentary elections of 1997 and 1998 respectively, and the US presidential elections of 2000. The focus is on the discursive practices of presenters through which they manage to 'construct and organise the broadcasts and orchestrate the multitude of voices that make up the discourse of election night' (p.318). The findings underpin differences, on the one hand, between the Anglo-Saxon channels and the German ones, at the level of generic patterning, and on the other, differences between the Anglo-Saxon channels at the level of micro-level realisations.

In conclusion, the volume *Political Discourse in the Media* gives valuable insights into a field that tackles at the same time the discourse *of* political agents in the media, the discourse of journalists *with* politicians in the media, as well as the discourse of journalists *about* politics and political agents in the media (p.15). It is therefore a useful tool for linguists (in particular discourse analysts), sociolinguists, as well as for specialists in media/communication and cultural studies, especially for analysts of mediated political discourse.

References

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