



Book reviews

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Marta Degani, *Framing the Rhetoric of a Leader: An Analysis of Obama's Election Campaign Speeches*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; ix + 315 pp., \$100.00/£66.00/€94.94 (hbk), \$95.00/£63.00/€89.66 (pbk), \$79.99/£51.99/€76.99 (ebook).

Reviewed by: Annalisa Zanola, *Department of Economics and Management, University of Brescia, Italy*

In this new book, Degani provides a particular perspective on American political discourse, focusing on the acclaimed public figure of Barack Obama as a 'virtuoso of rhetoric' (p. 3). The study fills a substantial gap in linguistic research on political language and cognition by proposing an application of Lakoff's (1996) 'Strict Father' and 'Nurturant Parent' models of political morality to the analysis of American political discourse. So far, linguistic applications of the models have been few and their results have been somewhat inconclusive. In light of this, Degani's book intends to reconsider Lakoff's models and their usefulness for understanding political language and ideology in the United States, the context for which the models were conceived. Taking the example of Obama, the book explores the validity of Lakoff's prediction that Obama, as a Democratic candidate, would rely on Nurturant Parent morality to gain consensus from his electorate.

In a comprehensive application of Lakoff's theory to political speeches, which goes beyond the analysis of conceptual metaphors, the study tests whether Obama indeed appealed to Nurturant Parent values in his election campaign speeches. The research is based on the crucial period of Obama's first presidential election campaign in 2008 and takes a close look at his speeches using corpus-based and discourse analytical methodologies. During his career and as President of the United States, Obama has turned into one of the most acclaimed American political leaders. Many commentators have praised Obama's rhetorical ability and his successful communication through new media. They have also interpreted his success in relation to aspects connected to his personality, subjectivity and identity. While supporting this positive evaluation, Degani's study moves a step further and demonstrates how Obama's capacities are coupled with skilled language use to convey ideological content.

The book addresses all major aspects related to a thorough investigation of Lakoffian thought in political discourse through eight chapters. Two substantial chapters devoted to

the relation among politics, metaphor and cognition (Introduction and Chapter 2) introduce and precede the analytical part of the book. Chapter 2 is devoted to highlighting the different aspects involved in devising a political speech, from considering potential content to evaluating the speechwriters' role. As observed, this process is particularly relevant at crucial times such as election campaigns, when opposing candidates fight hard to build consensus. An introduction to the cognitive semantic approach to the study of political language opens up the discussion in Chapter 3. This is followed by a detailed description and a critical evaluation of Lakoff's morality models, which are enriched by an articulate and informed examination of major studies on conceptual metaphor in political discourse. Chapter 3 is crucial for understanding the nuts and bolts of the linguistic analysis, and the author's approach is critically contextualised in relation to previous studies applying Lakoff's models.

The quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis represents the core of the book, comprising Chapters 4–7. The analysis is carried out on a well-motivated selection of 30 speeches delivered over a period of 9 months, from February to October 2008, during Obama's first election campaign. This corpus is analysed according to a cogently balanced combination of semantic, rhetorical, cognitive and lexical considerations. The semantic analysis revolves around the identification of values in the speeches and their classification according to how they relate to Lakoff's models. Values are also considered against the background of Obama's general electoral message, which includes personal, social and historical components. Furthermore, the study highlights Obama's skilful use of certain rhetorical strategies for communicating his values successfully. The cognitive analysis pays attention to the relation between metaphoricity and literality in the expression of values, and it considers the type and range of metaphors that are associated with values. The lexical analysis focuses on a range of key lexical items that could be related to Lakoff's models, and sheds light on Obama's lexical preferences in connection to his electoral message. Overall, the different close analyses confirm Lakoff's predictions about Obama's nurturant framing of political issues and offer insights into the role of metaphor and lexical choice in this process.

Apart from being an exemplary study of political speeches, the monograph also provides useful information about the specificities of political discourse in the United States and the art and craft of speech making as a form of political communication. These are not just additional details functioning as a corollary to the main discussion. Instead, reflections on the significance of speech making in American politics resonate well with the general discussion about Obama's capacity to connect to his audience on the level of political morality in his electoral speeches. The study refers to Obama's natural inclination for talking in public and his standing as a real professional of public speaking. Furthermore, the book provides an efficient contextualisation by locating the discussion against the background of the rhetorical studies tradition in American academia. In this respect, attention is devoted to describing some of the major trends in American rhetorical studies of presidential language. The fact that observations about rhetoric and public address in American political discourse are accompanied by examples from Obama's 2008 election campaign speeches renders the book particularly illustrative of various claims and notions in political rhetoric.

The study also contains interdisciplinary reflections on the close relation between Lakoff's ideas and Hunter's (1991) well-known and extremely influential theory of 'culture war', pointing to the interconnections between them. Hunter postulates a values divide among American citizens and describes the repercussions of cultural oppositions on political behaviour. Degani suggests that Lakoff appears to adapt and translate Hunter's theory into his own linguistic framework, thus emphasising the connection between Hunter's culturally relevant theory and the linguistic analysis presented in the book.

Necessarily complex, *Framing the Rhetoric of a Leader* skilfully melds together perspectives from the areas of political discourse, rhetoric, public speaking and public address. Written by a passionate scholar in the field of political discourse, this work should rightly be seen as a significant contribution to a growing literature in the public-speaking domain both in Europe and in the United States.

References

- Hunter JD (1991) *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: Basic Books.
 Lakoff G (1996) *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Aditi Bathia, *Discursive Illusions in Public Discourse: Theory and Practice*, New York: Routledge, 2016; vii + 172 pp., \$160.00 (hbk).

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In this book, Bhatia seeks to develop a comprehensive theorisation of 'discursive illusions', understood as subjective conceptualisations of reality that have been naturalised into social consciousness through recurring representation to the point that they become recognised as the default framework for understanding (p. 13). Drawing on the author's previous research on the framing of socio-political constructs such as terrorism, revolution and climate change in public discourse, the book is both a convincing attempt at developing a theoretical framework for the analysis of the discourse of illusion and an investigation of how various contextual factors constrain the creation of discursive illusions.

The book comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 defines discursive illusions, arguing that our subjective conceptualisation of reality does not in itself create illusions; only when subjective realities are taken to be objective and gain the status of facts are illusions produced. It is worth noting that by emphasising the distinction between reality and representation in examining discursive illusions, Bhatia is taking a position long valued in the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

Chapter 2 provides a three-pronged framework for conceptualising the discourse of illusion, elaborated through three interrelated components: historicity, linguistic and semiotic actions, and the degree of social impact. Historicity is an important feature of the discourse of illusion since all subjective conceptions of realities are products of history, the results of past knowledge and experiences. Linguistic and semiotic actions provide the necessary means for these subjective conceptions to be objectified. Finally, the language and actions of an individual or group lead to various forms of social impact, engendering categories