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Issue 3. Integrative theories and applied practices

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Transdisciplinary potential of semiotics for discourse studies: Political studies' perspective

Introductory note

Today's political studies isan extensive multi-paradigmatic area of knowledge that includes various approaches, schools and traditions. However, when it comes to the overall structure of its research toolkit, it is usually described in terms of the general distinction between *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods. Moreover, even though the introduction of the category of *mixed* methods slightly nuances the picture, the basic quantitative / qualitative dichotomy still plays the role of the central structuring principle (e.g.: Creswell, 2003; Given, 2008: xxix). At the same time, the foundations of this distinction seem to lack clarity. While quantitative methods can be defined as those based on the apparatus of mathematics (Muijs, 2004: 1-2), the methodological substratum of qualitative ones is rather amorphous. One can define their foundations "apophatically" (by negation), saying that qualitative methods are simply those, which do not involve the use of mathematic instruments, but it is difficult to accept this kind of solution as a satisfactory one. Even though one has to admit that qualitative methods do tend to be fragmented and toresist the attempts to impose a single meta-paradigm (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005: xv).

Is it possible to find a better way to define the fundamental structural aspects in the methodology of political research? As it is difficult to determine the essence of qualitative methods "cataphatically", should we, probably, be careful, at least, in using the very concept of the qualitative research? Should not we accept that, while quantitative methods based on mathematics, qualitative ones can have several different "mathematics" of their own (as each of those "mathematics" actually gives a separate type of a method)?

In this article, I propose to consider semiotics as one of those "mathematics" of social sciences and to explore how it functions in this role in the political discourse analysis and

in the political research in general. The *aim* of this article is to outline the structure of the semiotic toolkit in political studies, to explore its growing points and to locate the gaps that exist in it today. Since, as I mentioned above, the notion of *qualitative methods* is rather questionable, my analysis focuses on the set of techniques labeled as *semiotic methods;* the extension of this concept is less broad, but its intention is much clearer and distinct.

Political semiotics today

In 1993 American sociologist Charles Lemert wrote:

"Who, among readers of Lévi-Strauss in the late 1940s, could have dreamed of the extent to which virtually every corner of the human and social sciences would be, today, touched by the ideas and literature of semiotics?" (Lemert, 1993: 31).

Just as Wolfgang Drechsler (Drechsler, 2009: 73-74), I find it quite difficult to share Lemert's enthusiasm. Due to its almost omnipresent influence of structuralism, the 20th century has introduced semiotics into all social sciences giving rise to a number of today's widespread approaches. However, a genuine semiotic Copernican revolution in social studies and in political research still has not happened.

It is in the first half of the 20th century that one of the founders of the theory of signs Charles William Morris projected that semiotics can become a unifying metadiscipline and supply "the foundations for any special science of signs" (linguistics, logic, mathematics, rhetoric and etc.) . According to Morris,

"[t]he concept of sign may prove to be of importance in the unification of the social, psychological, humanistic sciences in so far as these are distinguished from the physical and biological sciences" (Morris, 1938: 2).

Even before Morris, we can see semiotics mentioned as one of the key elements in John Locke's triad of "sorts of science":

○ *physica* as the knowledge of things,

○ *practica* as the skill of right actions, and

○ *semeiotike* as the doctrine of signs (Locke, 1995: iv–xxi).

The same we witness in Charles Sanders Peirces's fundamental trivium of sciences:

○ *science of things*,

○ *science of forms,* and

○ *science of representations,* or *semiotic* (Peirce, 1982: 303).

However, it is to this day that semiotics has not acquired this metadisciplinary integrative position. Even for the trends in this direction that did take place, political science was, perhaps, one of the least touched areas (Drechsler, 2009: 73-74).

The semiotic methodological project does not implement itself coherently in political science. Moreover, probably, it has not even begun to do so. The semiotic research methods used today in political studies and rarely considered as elements of a wider metadiscipline. They exist rather as a nebula of techniques, scattered across various sub-disciplines, schools and traditions. Various versions of discourse analysis constitute one of the dominating areas in this fragmented field, but it also includes a wide range of other tools, such as content analysis, concept analysis, metaphor analysis, narrative analysis, conversation analysis etc.

In an attempt to structure all the multitude of semiotic research tools used today in political science and in the social studies in general, I suggest to locate them along the axis with the poles of a *descriptive* research and a *critical* research. All these instruments aim at the study of language, speech and discourse (with the broadest reference of these terms) in connection with certain social and political contexts. While on the descriptive pole, the research focuses on the intralinguistic issues, on the critical pole it almost exclusively deals with the study of social and political conditions of text production. Thus, the discourse studies deeply rooted in the direct analysis of texts can be located near the descriptive pole, while various poststructuralist, deconstructionist and postmodernist interpretations (aimed at exploring the social, historical and psychoanalytical conditionings of discursive practices) incline to the critical one.

The descriptive semiotic tools in political studies include the political content analysis, the analysis of political metaphors and concepts, cognitive mapping techniques and most of the research in political linguistics. A number of important developments in this domain contributed by the American researchers of political communication of the early 20th century made a significant contribution to the study of public opinion formation, political influence of media and political text analysis (e.g. Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2004; Lasswell & Leites, 1965).

As for the critical semiotic research, it is largely based not on the linguistic analysis, but on the Marxist and psychoanalytic perspectives. This approach is largely developed from the French school of philosophical discourse analysis (e.g. Baudrillard, 1968; Foucault, 1969; 2009; Lacan, 2002). For this tradition it is typical to focus not on the study of language itself, but on how and why discourse influences the production of knowledge. Together with Foucault's discourse analysis and other philosophical approaches to the study of discourse, the critical pole dominates in a number of approaches labeled

as *critical discourse analysis* (CDA). (Wodak, 2005; Wodak, Meyer, 2001; Dijk, 1991). In these approaches, both critical and interpretative aspects are forming a new tendency of paying attention to the analysis of concrete corpora of texts and to particular linguistic means inherent in ideology-biased communication.

Semiotics' transdisciplinary face

A deep fragmentation is typical not only for political discourse analysis and political semiotics, but to the field of semiotics in general. The rapid development of discipline-bias semiotic tools led to the situation of semiotics being "privatized" by a number of separate domains. The main role here is, of course, within linguistic semiotics, as today it is the most developed sphere of research. However, along with it, there are other intensely growing semiotic disciplines, like semiotics of literature, semiotics of culture, semiotics of cinema, zoosemiotics, biosemiotics, phytosemiotics etc. While these separate subject areas arise, the general foundations of semiotics are still not enough articulated and developed. In such a situation I suggest putting on agenda the issue of general semiotics (or as Ch. Morris suggested to call it, "pure" semiotics) and to considering how we can develop it into a functional metadisciplinary integrator.

The semiotics is facing the challenge, which I suggest to define, in terms of Charles Peirce, as the task to become not only an *idioscopic* but *cenoscopic* science. According to Peirce (who used the concept, originally proposed by George Bentham), *idioscopic sciences* are

> "the special sciences, depending upon special observation, which travel or other exploration, or some assistance to the senses, either instrumental or given by training, together with unusual diligence, has put within the power of its students" (Peirce, 2012: 66).

In contrast, *cenoscopic science* in accord with Peirce

> "deals with positive truth, indeed, yet contents itself with observations such as come within the range of every man's normal experience, and for the most part in every waking hour of his life" – these observations "escape the untrained eye precisely because they permeate our whole lives" (Peirce, 2012: 66).

It is crucial to bridge the gap between the adumbrative cenoscopic outlines of general semiotics and a much richer range of various particular semiotic idioscopies, since in the current situation these specialized semiotics with their often very advanced but subject-specific toolkits and unique languages risk to encapsulate itself hermetically. With these fields becoming increasingly isolated today, an efficient transdisciplinary interaction is almost impossible, because any attempt to transfer techniques and categories across

subdisciplinary borders is inhibited by the fact that they are either inextricably intertwined with particularities of a specific subject-matter or dependent on the personal artisanship of concrete analyst.

However, it is quite encouraging that even today there are still some semioticians, who continue to insist on the development of general semiotics and on the implementation of its transdisciplinary-bias potency. Among them, for example, vice-president of the International Association for Semiotic Studies Li Youzheng, who suggests developing general semiotics:

> "as a functional-operative organizer with respect to promotion of interdisciplinary interaction not only between different departmental semiotic practices but also between various social-human sciences" (Li, 2015: 38).

According to Li Youzheng, general semiotics can become an effective epistemological solution against the dogmas of ideologically changed "philosophical fundamentalism" (Li, 2015). Another prominent contemporary researcher John Deely also insists that semiotics is capable to provide the "cenoscopic antidote" to the intense specialization inherent in contemporary science (Deely, 2015: 31).

Since 2013, the transdisciplinary capacity of semiotics has been explored in our research project in the Center for Advanced Methods of the INION Institute (Ильин, 2014; Кокарев, 2014; Круглый стол, 2014; Авдонин, 2015; Фомин, 2014, 2015; Золян, 2016; Ильин, Фомин, 2016). In this project semiotics was studied alongside with two other methodological integrators – mathematics and morphology. We call those integrative transdisciplinary methodologies *organa* (sg.: *organon*).

In order to understand how such transdisciplinary organa function, we introduced the dichotomy of '*thick'* and '*thin'* methodologies. In our framework the methodology that is narrowed for and specialized in a certain subject-area (e.g. political semiotics or political morphology) are called *thick* versions of organa, seen as *saturated* versions of more abstract *thin* methodologies (e.g. general semiotics or general morphology). The thin versions of organa can be less effective, when it comes to the analysis of particular specialized subject-area or matter, but they are crucial for the development of a more integrated transdisciplinary vision. It is with those thin (*purified*) organa that it can be possible to "translate" research data from one disciplinary narrowed methodological language to another.

On the prospects of semiotics in political science

One of the most important contemporary challenges for the semiotic methods in political research is to eliminate the gap between the descriptive and critical approaches, since both these extremes have a number of deficiencies. Content analysis is often effective

for certain tasks. Though from the point of view of the general semiotic triadic structure of discourse levels – *semantics, syntactics, pragmatics* (Morris, 1938) – we see that this method allows an effective analysis only at the semantic level, while the level of syntactic representation lacks proper investigation. Thus, a pragmatic level studies is described by interpreting outside the methodological scheme itself. In a sense, the opposite situation revealed in case of critically oriented methods. For example, in CDA the researchers often tend to reduce the analysis of discourse to the study of pragmatics, while the sematic and syntactic levels ignored or analyzed superficially. As it goes, it is crucial for contemporary semiotic studies to develop a more comprehensive methodological framework to study the semantics of politics, the syntactic links between semiotic entities in it, as well as their pragmatic (identitary, axiological, ideological etc.) aspects.

It is also important to pay more attention to the "cryptosemiotic" categories already used in political studies though not systematically conceptualized and operationalized as semiotic ones. For example, the categories of *symbol*, *image*, *myth*, *brand* or *meme* often used in a quite sloppy manner can actually be developed into potent research tools, if filled with more concrete semiotic essence (Kull, 2000; 2014; Фомин, 2014; 2015).

Another crucial task for the field of political studies is to pay more attention to the tools that would allow analyzing not only writing and speech, but the texts / discourses of other modes as well (sound, image, movement etc.). One of possible solutions here is to look for instruments that can be borrowed for this purpose from other fields. For example, the work by Gunter Kress and his colleagues shows that semiotic studies can effectively apply some of the concepts from the domain of design, when it comes to the analysis of multimodal texts (Kress, 2010; Kress, 2015). At the same time, according to Kress himself, the aim of *multimodal social semiotics* is not to add "yet another thing to be attended to" the usual linguistic framework, but

"to achieve a comprehensively transformed perspective of a problem domain, and to turn that new perspective into the 'taken-for-granted' basis informing research and practices" (Kress, 2015: 53-54).

The ability to apply semiotic apparatus at its full potential can also become a way to go beyond the ideographicity in humanities. For today's political research, it is much more common to use mathematic tools for this goal, though from the point of view of semiotics it is also possible not only to study social phenomena as unique objects, but also to explore them nomothetically, as the results of more general laws and regularities of semiosis. Besides, the development of general (*thin*) semiotic tools, as well as systematic elaboration of their saturated (thick) versions more targeted at political research, can

contribute to political studies becoming more integrated into a wider field of social studies. It can be productive both for semiotics and political science to build a methodological and conceptual interface that will, *on the one hand*, enrich the tools of semiotics by their political reconceptualization and, *on the other hand*, will advance the apparatus of political science by making it more susceptible to the semiotic aspects of political phenomena.

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Круглый стол «Математика и семиотика: две отдельные познавательные способности или два полюса единого органона научного знания?» *In:* МЕТОД: Московский ежегодник трудов из обществоведческих дисциплин, 4. Москва, 2014. 122–142.

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Discourse analysis in translation studies' perspective

Introduction

Discourse analysis is not a new tool in the field of interpretive social studies. Although the modern theoretical framework of discourse analysis was established in the twentieth century, its genesis might be traced back to the history of exegesis and hermeneutics. As an interpretative tool of written and spoken texts, discourse analysis may be applied not only to discover the true meaning of the analysed discourse but also to evaluate the translation equivalence provided that the outcome of the discourse analysis of the source text and that of the target text is comparable and statistically significant.

Since not long ago have translation studies shown an interest in discourse analysis (Nida et al., 1969) though the importance of interpretation theory was emphasised a long time before (Tytler, 1781; Schleiermacher, 1838). As an interdiscipline combining social science and humanities, translation studies have grown significantly since ancient times with the interpretation theory included in the translation process. The translator, being the reader of the source text and the first reader of the target text is expected to possess interpretative skills developed to such an extent so as to translate professionally any type of verbal and nonverbal discourse.

Understanding the true meaning of the discourse in the source language and the target language is a psychological process indispensable for the translator to perform his job professionally. Therefore, the discussion of the discourse analysis might shed light on the conceptual framework of this interpretive tool to be applied in the translation studies. The aim of this article is to illustrate the multidisciplinary nature of discourse analysis and elaborate on the main levels of discourse analysis in the translation studies. By examining the nature and levels of discourse analysis, we show that the objective of discourse analysis in the translation studies is to interpret the true meaning of the source text as well as that of the target text and evaluate the quality of translation equivalence achieved in the process of translation.

Origins and development of discourse

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins* edited by Hoad (1986) the English term *'discourse'* dates back to the fourteenth century. The meaning of this term derives from Latin '*discursus*', which originally denoted 'conversation, speech'. *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2013) indicates that the meaning of the Middle English term 'discourse' was borrowed from the French word 'discours' to denote a "process of under-