



## Book Review

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Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines

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Kranert, M. (2019). *Discourse and Political Culture: The Language of the Third Way in Germany and the UK*. John Benjamins. 316 pages; ISBN: 978-9027204219; \$309.47 (hbk).

The constructionist nature of political ideologies (e.g. socialism, fascism, and liberalism) is a hotly discussed topic in the domain of discourse studies, and language resources which are crucial for the construing of political ideas are approached from a number of interpretative traditions. Following the established comparative approach of conducting socio-political research (Schröter, 2013), Kranert juxtaposes the English tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1993) and the German tradition of politico-linguistic discourse analysis (Hermanns, 2012) to see how the newly emerged political ideology of the Third Way is construed differently in the UK and Germany. The idea of the Third Way as a reformulated perception of social democracy, as pointed out at the beginning of this book, is readily accepted in the UK because of its obvious association with the well-recognized discourse of economic liberalism, but it stirs many controversies in Germany where it is taken as an unwelcome imported discourse from the UK. The contrasting political realities prompt politicians of the two countries to shape the language of the same ideology in different ways.

This book is structured into eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides a general background of the reported discourse project. The methodological framework of Chapter 2 integrates the analytical strength of Linguistic Discourse Analysis (LDA) (Kuße, 2012) and the theoretical rigor of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), a particular branch of CDA. Rooted in 'speech act theory and the pragmatic function of language' (p. 9), LDA emphasizes the role of language in the mediation of modern political activities and urges one to examine political communication on the basis of a thorough analysis of linguistic behaviors in terms of textual features, e.g. lexis,

metaphors, frames, and arguments. DHA, like other CDA methods, is interested in the critical explanation of ‘the discursive construction of social reality’ (p. 13) and prioritizes the empirical exploration of the contextual dimensions of political activities. Kranert manages to unite the two seemingly separate paradigms with Fairclough’s (2003) dialectic definition of discourse, i.e. the mutually constructivist relationship of discourse and social lives. In the case of political activities, political actors’ use of language is controlled by a number of existing socio-political elements, at the same time, they may also influence the future change of these contextual elements.

The following sections of this book define the meaning of the Third Way discourses, explore the British and German contexts of the Third Way ideology (Chapter 3), and investigate how the contexts influence politicians’ construction of the Third Way texts/talks in terms of genre (Chapter 4), lexical strategies (Chapter 5), argumentative structure (Chapter 6), and metaphor (Chapter 7).

The first part of Chapter 3 is a comprehensive review of the development, decline, and modernization of social democratic parties in the UK (the Labour Party) and Germany (the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, i.e. SPD). The Third Way discourses, as both parties’ shared means of rejuvenation, include a number of notable ideological tenets, e.g. the employment of post-ideology pragmatic positions, the denial of materialist causes for political problems, and the renewal of ethical principles (pp. 44-46). These ideological values form a rich context against which the author may interpret British and German politicians’ discursive activities. The second part of Chapter 3 reports the author’s decision of combining three prominent types of political documents as the data, i.e. media publications, conference speeches and election manifestos.

In Chapter 4, discursive features of party conference speeches – one particular type of Third Way speech – are examined from the perspective of genre theory. The author’s detailed analysis of political leaders’ inclusive/exclusive self-referencing behaviors points to significant differences in British and German politicians’ strategy of soliciting public support in political conferences. While British party conference speeches are more like ‘an emotional mass ritual that is framed with entertainment and warming-up events’ (p. 74), the German ones demonstrate a number of solemn features of legislative deliberation and German political leaders need to employ more formal rhetorical devices to influence public opinions on decisive matters.

Chapter 5 points out the importance of semantic struggles for the politicians of modern media societies. Social democratic party leaders in the UK and Germany are both adept at using catch (i.e. ‘multicultural society’, ‘market’, ‘responsibility’) and symbol words (i.e. ‘freedom’, ‘liberty’, ‘human rights’) to legitimize their political policies and to stigmatize the position of their opponents. The author defines catch words as the widely-circulated idiosyncratic phrases which are typically associated with the ideology of a certain political group, and symbol words as lexical items referring to common features of modern democratic societies. The two groups of political lexicons may both go through subtle linguistic processes of adaption, redefinition, and recontextualization, so that their fluid meanings can be

temporally and spatially confined to political actors' communicative situations.

Chapter 6 highlights the importance of argumentation in the process of political decision-making and provides an informed analysis of British and German politicians' contrasting argumentative patterns when they explicitly advocate the changing ideology of social democratic parties in publicly accessible policy texts. After delineating the interconnection of three related notions – argumentation, (de)legitimization, and topoi – the author is able to identify contrasting topical structures in the Third Way ideological publications produced by the Labour Party and SPD. Blair, the charming leader of British New Labour, openly mobilizes his personal charisma as a strategy of glorifying the party's institutional profile. He repeatedly tells stories of personal success and achievements to portray his trustworthy image and to facilitate the credibility of his arguments among the public. On the contrary, in the slightly conservative German political environment, the Chancellor, Schröder, needs to share his party (SPD) leadership with his respectable colleague Lafontaine. The accentuation of one leaders' individual work in the discussion of party achievements may be face-threatening to another, and it seems more appropriate for the Chancellor to take a formal register of talk, to tone down his personal role, and to attribute strategically the success to the collective leading group.

Chapter 7 examines how political leaders utilize metaphorical devices to publicize the complicated notions that the Third Way discourses have conjured for the purpose of rejuvenating social democratic parties. A number of commonly used metaphors, i.e. politics is a journey, politics is building, and politics is battle, substantially simplify the connotation of complex political concepts and facilitate their acceptance by the public. Chapter 8 briefly summarizes the significance of the reported study and points out the possibility of further research.

A few minor drawbacks may be identified in the structure of the book. Firstly, given the length of the book, the bulky size of some of its sections may create for readers an unnecessary burden of comprehension. For example, readers find no sub-sections in the book's fourteen-page-long introduction of the Labour Party and SPD (Section 3.1). Secondly, the author uses discourse and ideology interchangeably in his reference to the Third Way policies, without explicitly mentioning their conceptual difference and similarity. It would have been useful to see a central discussion of the two notions in some section of the beginning chapters. Finally, in Chapter 5, corpus analytical results of political lexis are independently positioned after the detailed qualitative analysis, rather than as fully integrated text. Possibly, the major statistic findings of corpus analysis may be rearranged into separated parts, with each of them followed by the correlated section of qualitative interpretations.

To sum up, the book is a valuable comparative attempt to explore the impact of local contextual constraints on the shaping of global political discourses. Political actors with varying promotional agendas employ a rich set of linguistic and lexical strategies to build carefully tailored appearances of the same political message. The discursive knowledge thus revealed is of

apparent practical significance, considering publicly accessible political texts/talks in modern media societies are the major information source for the public to understand the nature of political disputes, to evaluate the trustworthiness of politicians, and finally to take a position in the election battles. Free of unnecessary technical jargon, the book manages to provide insightful analysis and sharp observation on the commonly seen, but significant, occurrences of political text and talk, which may intrigue postgraduate students and researchers in the fields of applied linguistics, discourse analysis, and political communication.

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