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Discourse, knowledge, power and politics

Towards Critical Epistemic Discourse Analysis

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Towards Critical Epistemic Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Although both are fundamental terms in the humanities and social sciences, discourse and knowledge have seldom been explicitly related, and even less so in critical discourse studies. After a brief summary of what we know about these relationships in linguistics, psychology, epistemology and the social sciences, with special emphasis on the role of knowledge in the formation of mental models as a basis for discourse, I examine in more detail how a critical study of discourse and knowledge may be articulated in critical discourse studies. Thus, several areas of critical epistemic discourse analysis are identified, and then applied in a study of Tony Blair's Iraq speech on March 18, 2003, in which he sought to legitimize his decision to go to war in Iraq with George Bush. The analysis shows the various modes of how knowledge is managed and manipulated of all levels of discourse of this speech.

Keywords: Knowledge, discourse, critical discourse studies (CDS), critical epistemic discourse analysis, mental model, context model, power, political discourse, Tony Blair, Iraq.

Introduction

We acquire most of our knowledge by discourse, and without knowledge we can neither produce nor understand discourse. Despite this fundamental mutual dependence of discourse and knowledge, recognized especially in cognitive science, we have only fragmentary insight into this relationship.

In philosophy we have the prominent example of Foucault, of course, but he was not interested in either detailed discourse analysis or in the cognitive dimensions of

knowledge. Epistemology by definition deals with knowledge, but ignores discourse and only recently has been interested in the cognitive dimensions of knowledge. Cognitive psychology has extensively dealt with the role of knowledge in discourse production and comprehension, but disregarded the important social and cultural dimensions of knowledge as well as the detailed discourse analyses of the ways knowledge is displayed in text and talk. Artificial intelligence and related formal approaches have provided the early impetus to the study of knowledge in natural language processing, leading to many different approaches in the field of knowledge representation and knowledge engineering, among others. However, their interest in knowledge structures and discourse structures has often been limited to formal modeling rather than in empirically relevant theories and descriptions of the role of knowledge in discourse production and comprehension.

These are general tendencies, and there are a number of interesting exceptions, but it may be concluded that an integrated, multidisciplinary study of the discourse-knowledge interface remains on the agenda.

This conclusion is not only relevant for Discourse Studies (DS) as a whole, but specifically also for Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). From Foucault, Habermas and Bourdieu, among many others, we have learned about the relations between knowledge, discourse and power. Since CDS is primarily interested in the discursive reproduction of power and power abuse, and since knowledge is largely reproduced by discourse, it is obvious that this triple interface needs detailed analysis in the critical study of discourse. Such study however needs to go beyond philosophical reflection and integrate what we now know about knowledge and the role of knowledge in discourse processing, while at the same time examining the social and political dimensions of this relationship, largely ignored in cognitive science. In other words, this study intends to contribute to the sociocognitive approach to discourse by construing the theoretical interface needed for a coherent, multidisciplinary study of knowledge and discourse.

Besides a more general discussion of the relations between discourse, knowledge and power, I shall apply these ideas in a systematic (largely semantic) analysis of Tony Blair's speech in the British House of Commons, now five years ago, on March 18, 2003. I thus at the same time focus the issue of power and power abuse on the more

specific problem of political domination and manipulation in contemporary democracies.

A brief summary of what we know about knowledge and discourse

Before examining some of the critical issues of the relations between knowledge and discourse, let me summarize what we know about this relationship.

Language and discourse processing

Most explicit attention to the discourse-knowledge interface has been paid in cognitive science in general, and in cognitive psychology and Artificial Intelligence in particular. (among a vast amount of books, see, e.g., *Galambos, Abelson & Black, 1986; *Schank & Abelson, 1977; *Van Harmelen, Lifschitz & Porter, 2008; *Wilkes, 1997).

Since the early 1970s, many studies have shown that to produce or understand language or discourse, one not only needs a grammar (a lexicon, a syntax, etc.), but also vast amounts of ‘knowledge of the world’. This especially became obvious when writing computer programs that should automatically process text for a variety of tasks, such as question answering, summarization or translation. One major effort was thus to ‘mine’ various fields of knowledge and to devise formalisms for their representation so that computers would be able to use this knowledge when engaging in dialogue with human users, or to perform several other discursive tasks.

Despite decades of research by thousands of scholars, these approaches have been only moderately successful, on the one hand because they need a more or less adequate grammar to function in the first place, and on the other hand because the precise nature and the structures of human knowledge are still a fundamental, unresolved problem. This means that the programs or systems that do work do so for quite limited domains and tasks.

No computer program today is able to entertain an extended, natural conversation with a human language user, produce a reliable translation on any topic, write an appropriate summary of a scholarly article or a novel, or produce a news report on the basis of information from news sources, among a vast number of other everyday or

professional tasks. Apparently, language and discourse production is much more complex than originally assumed.

Yet, what we did learn from this vast research effort was that besides grammar and discourse rules, knowledge — and its mental representation and uses — is the central problem of all forms of human (and automatic) language use and discourse. This is not least the case because, by definition, knowledge is usually presupposed and taken for granted, and hence often remains implicit in discourse.

The psychology of discourse processing

The psychology of discourse comprehension has been a quite successful domain in cognitive psychology and we now have fairly detailed theories of the processes and representations involved in discourse production and comprehension (*Graesser, Gernsbacher & Goldman, 2003; *Kintsch, 1998; *Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; *Van Oostendorp & Goldman, 1999).

Again, knowledge plays an important role in these processes, but most studies in cognitive psychology largely relied on the study of knowledge in AI to implement that aspect of language use. From Chomsky and a vast number of studies in psycholinguistics we have learned the role of grammatical knowledge in the comprehension and production of language (*Traxler & Gernsbacher, 2006). But in order to produce or understand meaningful, coherent sequences of sentences, we also need vast amounts of ‘world knowledge’, especially in order to generate the inferences needed for such processing (*Graesser & Bower, 1990). Similarly, discourses are not only locally coherent, but also globally. They are organized by global topics, and again such overall organization requires detailed insight in the (hierarchical) structure of knowledge (*Van Dijk, 1980). Thus, at each moment in discourse processing, language users need to access their knowledge structures in Long Term Memory, activate relevant portions of such knowledge, generate inferences, and use these to construe coherent textual representations in real time, that is, within the few seconds we have to produce or understand a sentence. At the same time, people participating in a conversation or reading text, acquire new knowledge, which needs to be integrated into what they already know.

Natural discourse is essentially incomplete. Like an iceberg, we ‘see’ only a tiny part. Most of what makes discourse meaningful is invisible, namely as a vast web of concepts and propositions construed on the basis of our knowledge. One of the fundamental notions that have been introduced to account for this and a host of other aspects of discourse processing, has been that of a mental *model* (*Johnson-Laird, 1983; *Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; *Held, Knauff & Vosgerau, 2006).

A mental model is a subjective representation (stored in episodic or ‘autobiographical’ memory, part of LTM) of an event or situation, for instance the events a discourse is about. Understanding discourse, therefore, involves not merely construing a coherent semantic representation, as was assumed until the early 1980s, but also the construction of a mental model of the objects, people, actions, events or situation referred to. Our general, sociocultural knowledge is especially used to construct such models, and such models form the basis of the production and comprehension of text and talk. In sum, we understand a discourse if we are able to construe or update a mental model for it.

This also solves the problem of implied or otherwise implicit meanings or information in discourse: They are part of the mental model of a discourse, but not of the textual representation itself. Hence, mental models are much more detailed than the discourses that express them, simply because language users know that recipients are able to construe their own mental models of a discourse with their own knowledge.

Such a conception of discourse processing not only accounts for the fact that all language use is at the same time subjective and intersubjective, but also that recipients may understand a discourse in a different way than intended by the speakers or writers.

Besides many other fundamental functions, mental models thus essentially function as the interface between general, abstract and socially shared knowledge, on the one hand, and discourses about specific events, on the other hand. We understand discourse by construing a mental model, and we construe our personal mental model of a discourse by ‘applying’ our general socioculturally shared knowledge. And vice versa, when producing a discourse, we start with a mental model we have about an event (a personal experience, a news event) and this model will guide the way we express such specific event knowledge in text or talk.

Finally, we now also know that this is still not enough to produce appropriate text and talk. We not only need to express what we know about an event, *but need to do so appropriately in different communicative situations*. We may have a mental model of an accident, but we tell about it in a very different way when talking to friends, than when giving evidence to the police or in court. In order to be able to do this, *language users also need to build a mental model of the very communicative situation, that is, a context model*. It is this context model that controls what knowledge in our mental model of an event will be selected as relevant for the current communicative situation or genre. At the same time this context model controls all levels of discourse that variably manifest such knowledge. That is, context models control *how* we speak or write, so that our text or talk are appropriate in the present communicative situation (for detail, see *Van Dijk, 2008a, 2008b).

Also these context models embody knowledge and its adequate management. That is, in order to speak or write appropriately, language users need to adapt what they say or write to the knowledge of the recipients. This means that somehow they must know what recipients already know, and what they do not know — but might want to know. Hence context models have a device that for each word, clause and sentence and their meanings need to strategically decide whether the recipient understands them but also whether the recipients know or do not know about the people, objects, actions, events or situations talked about. That is, language users must mutually model the models and general knowledge of the each other — an issue related to the well-known philosophical problem known as the problem of ‘Other Minds.’ (*Avramides, 2001; *Bogdan, 2000; *Givón, 2005). Current neuroscience has found that thus ‘reading’ the minds of other people, as well as various forms of empathy, is based on special ‘mirror neurons’ that are able to ‘simulate’ the minds of others (Goldman, 2006).

Fortunately, this seemingly complex *cognitive* problem of ‘mindreading’ (how can we know what others know?) can be solved by relatively simple heuristics based on the socially shared nature of knowledge: If language users belong to the same language and knowledge community, they may simply assume that their general, socioculturally shared knowledge is also known to those recipients who are other members of the same community. This assumption has also been explored under the label of *Common Ground* (see, e.g., *Clark, 1996; see also *Deemter & Kibble, 2002). This means that

they only need to worry about new general knowledge and especially about recently communicated specific knowledge, for instance from previous conversations, news reports or classes (for these epistemic strategies in discourse processing, see, e.g., *Van Dijk, 2005; 2008a).

Crucial of such knowledge management for the theory of discourse production are the following questions, among others:

- How do language users know what knowledge must or may be expressed in discourse?
- Which knowledge is already known to the recipients and hence may be presupposed?
- Which knowledge may have been forgotten by the recipients and hence may need to be recalled?
- What new knowledge is important and should hence be emphasized?
- Which new knowledge is less important and hence may be marginalized in discourse?
- How is the knowledge of a hierarchical mental model 'linearized' and distributed in discourse and its sentences?

We here have the cognitive basis of many discourse phenomena based on knowledge expression and distribution, such as presupposition and assertion, topic and comment, focus, foregrounding and backgrounding, definite and indefinite expressions, and so on (see, e.g., *Lambrecht, 1994).

We may summarize what we now know from cognitive psychology about text processing is that discourse processing is not just language processing but also knowledge processing. To produce and understand discourse as a coherent sequence of sentences, we need to construe mental models of the situations they refer to, and in order to do that we need to activate, apply and specify general knowledge. Vice versa, the new mental models construed in our understanding of discourse may be used to update our general knowledge of the world, as we daily do by watching, reading, listening to news reports in the mass media, novels or professional literature or when we participate in conversations. At the same time, such discourse processing is controlled at all levels by context models that manage the expression of knowledge in discourse, for instance by asserting, presupposing or completely leaving such knowledge implicit.

The sociology and politics of knowledge

Unfortunately, these developments in cognitive science hardly are informed about the study of knowledge in epistemology or elsewhere in the social sciences (see, among a vast number of books, e.g., Bernecker & Dretske, 2000; *Goldman, 1999; *Jovchelovitch, 2007). And yet, what knowledge is presupposed, expressed and communicated — or not — in public discourse, for instance in politics, the media or science, obviously also has social, cultural and political dimensions.

First of all, we should realize that the very definition of knowledge in traditional epistemology, namely as ‘justified true belief’, is no longer adequate, and not only for the usual technical reasons (the so-called Gettier counterexamples). Rather, knowledge of real people in real communities is defined in terms of the beliefs that are generally accepted on the basis of the knowledge standards or criteria of a community (which may of course differ, and develop historically — so that truth criteria and standards in science are different from those in everyday life or media reporting, and medieval ‘knowledge’ may be deemed mere ‘superstition’ or ‘prejudice’ today).

This means that knowledge is not just a social psychological notion of ‘shared belief’, but also defined in the sociocultural terms of epistemic communities and their specific criteria or standards — say of reliable observation, inference and of course discourses (the source of most shared knowledge). These knowledge standards are developed and issued by different experts and institutions in different societies or moments of history: priests and churches, scholars and universities, laboratories and academies, journalists and the mass media, judges and the courts, and so on. In short, we are in the midst here of a *sociology* of knowledge.

From this we may also conclude that the appropriateness of news reports, corporate press releases, scientific articles, textbooks or government reports, among a vast amount of discourse and communication genres, not only involves management of how knowledge is presupposed, expressed and distributed in text and talk, but also involves social considerations such as who the knowledge authorities are in society.

The sociology of knowledge may also want to know what social groups and organizations have what kind of knowledge in the first place, and how they manage public discourse, as well as the minds of the masses with the strategic management of such knowledge in their publications. And conversely, in sociology we may ask what social groups or communities precisely lack what kind of knowledge so as to communicate (and live) adequately.

At this point, the role of power and power abuse in the discursive management of knowledge in communication becomes relevant, and we arrive at the heart of the issues studies in Critical Discourse Studies. That is, knowledge is not a natural product that ‘grows’ on people, but it is taught and learned, it is being produced and used, sold and consumed, and in all these interactions and transactions, social roles, groups and organizations are involved: Parents, schools, mass media, politicians and media corporations, among others. In other words, who produces what knowledge for whom, and how is such knowledge discursively distributed in what is called the ‘knowledge society’? These questions at the same time address questions of legitimacy and access. Whose discourses are more or less credible? Who has active or passive access to what kind of text, talk or communication in society? Whose discourses are legitimate or not? Again, each of these questions at the same time may be reformulated in terms of the legitimacy of, and access to knowledge in society (see, e.g., *Foucault, 2002; *Goldman, 1999; *Goldblatt, 2000; *Sörlin & Vessuri, 2006; *Stehr, & Meja, 2005).

There are a vast number of fields in which such a CDS approach to discourse, communication and knowledge is relevant. For instance, how do governments (mis)manage the knowledge they have in parliamentary decision making — a question that was crucially relevant in the decision by the USA, the UK and their allies to go to war in Iraq. Similarly, what kinds of knowledge is communicated and (dis) emphasized by the mass media, and what relevant knowledge is hidden from the public? What official knowledge about society and the world children learn in their textbooks, and what is found to be less relevant, important or innocent for children to know about (Apple, 1993). What scientific research is funded, and what scientific knowledge is not supported, or even actively opposed or forbidden?

All these general critical questions are not just about something abstract or mental such as beliefs, but also about their concrete manifestations: Government declarations,

parliamentary debates, news reports in the press, textbooks and scientific articles, that is, genres of discourse and forms of interaction and communication, and of course the economy. Not surprisingly, the notion of knowledge is more popular than ever among business gurus (see, e.g., *Cheng & Hitt, 2004).

Any adequate approach to the sociology of knowledge should therefore involve a discursive and communication dimension. If we study knowledge in society, we basically study socially situated text and talk. This also allows us to reformulate the generally quite general, abstract and macro approaches of traditional sociology into the much more concrete analysis of specific forms of text and talk, and how in different social situations members of different social groups and organizations are involved in the way knowledge is being expressed (or not) and formulated in various forms of public discourse. We then at the same time have much more explicit insight into the ways knowledge is (re)produced in society, for instance as part of the reproduction of power and domination.

On knowledge and culture

Many definitions of culture tend to equate culture with knowledge. To be a competent member of a community means to have acquired its shared practical, abstract and normative knowledge (see, e.g., *Moore & Sanders, 2006; *Pauleen, 2006).

Although this may be a somewhat restricted definition of culture — one might want to add its social practices and institutions, among other things — knowledge is indeed a central dimension of culture. The discursive reproduction of knowledge is at the same time the reproduction of cultures as epistemic and linguistic communities.

Thus, if we want to study cultures as communities of knowledge, we again first of all look at their forms or text and talk, and how knowledge is expressed and especially also *presupposed*, that is, taken for granted, in such a community. There are many interesting and relevant dimensions to this body of research. First of all, it is plausible that different cultural communities organize their knowledge in different ways (in anthropology often called ‘cultural models’, that is, with a notion of ‘models’ different from the cognitive notion, see *Shore, 1996). This implies that also the personal models (in the cognitive sense of subjective representations of specific events) of cultural

members will be different. That is, they see, interpret and represent cultural events in a different way from members of other cultures. And given these different models, also the ways such models are expressed in discourse will be culturally specific, as we know for instance for storytelling and various forms of political discourse, as well as from well-known problems of intercultural communication.

Critical Epistemic Discourse Analysis

Epistemic Discourse Analysis

Against this (necessarily fragmentary) general background of discourse and knowledge studies in various disciplines, let me now make this more specific and relevant for Critical Discourse Studies. This means that we need to elaborate ideas for what may be called *Critical Epistemic Discourse Analysis*. It is crucial to emphasize that *this is not a specific method*, because (as is the case for *all* analyses in CDS) the methods depend on the goals of a research project and may be any method in discourse studies and the social sciences, such as the analysis of grammar, narrative, argumentation, conversation, style or rhetoric, among others, but also ethnography, participant observation, and so on.

Epistemic discourse analysis is meant here as the (multidisciplinary) study of the way knowledge is expressed, implied, suppressed, distributed, etc. in text and talk, for instance in presuppositions, topic-comment and focus structures, levels and details of description, and so on. Such a 'structural' discourse analysis may feature a *cognitive* component when the underlying mental representations and processes are examined or the ways knowledge representations influence the (trans)formation of mental models and general knowledge of the recipients.

A *critical* approach of course also has a *social* component when the groups, institutions, organizations and in general structures of power are related to such knowledge representations in discourse, for instance, what knowledge is emphasized or marginalized. A *cultural* analysis may in that case investigate how such social situations and structures may vary across cultures.

The critical dimension of this kind of epistemic discourse analysis is rooted in the foundations of all critical research in the social sciences: A systematic account of the

way discourse is involved in the reproduction of power abuse (domination) and its social consequences, such as poverty and inequality, as well as the struggle against such domination. Such a study presupposes an explicit ethics, ultimately rooted in universal human rights and criteria of legitimacy derived from them. Thus, discourses are the object of critical inquiry, when they contribute, directly or indirectly, to the reproduction of illegitimate domination in society, as is the case, for instance, for racist or sexist text and talk, but also for political or corporate manipulation.

While this is still very general and abstract, critical epistemic discourse analysis needs to focus, more specifically, on how knowledge is abused of to control discourse, or how the knowledge of the recipients may be manipulated in the interest of powerful groups. A concrete example constitute news reports that represent events in such a way that readers form biased mental models and infer general knowledge that is against their best interests, and in the best interests of specific power elites, for instance in politics or business (*Lee & Solomon, 1990). The same is true for the well-known case of the very selective and biased ways knowledge is represented in textbooks, generally emphasizing the Good thinks of Our own group or nation, and negatively representing the Others (*Apple, 1993).

Obviously, this kind of critical knowledge analysis is closely related to critical ideological analyses, because biased knowledge in favor of specific groups or organizations in society is by definition based on various kinds of ideologies (Van Dijk, 1998).

Methods of critical epistemic analysis

Although knowledge of participants, as part of their context models, influences virtually all levels and dimensions of discourse, it makes sense to focus such a vast study on a more limited number of discourse structures and strategies. For instance, global *topics* (semantic macropropositions) control most of the local meanings of discourse, and represent what speakers or writers deem to be the most important information of a discourse.

Thus, international news tends to focus on (topicalize) the violent and criminal nature of terrorist attacks, and seldom on the political motivations or the causes of such

attacks, and how they may be prevented by different international policies (*Hachten & Scotton, 2002). Similarly, *metaphors* are ways we organize our abstract knowledge in more experiential concepts, and such metaphorization may well mis-represent knowledge in the interest of powerful elites (*Lakoff, 1996, 2001).

We may thus summarize some of the structures and strategies that are specifically affected by the management of knowledge, and which hence may be specifically focused on in critical studies:

- **Topics:** Representing what for the writers or speakers is the most important information of discourse, discourse topics (or themes) — not to be confounded with sentence topics — organize the local meanings and overall coherence, and is best recalled by the recipients while prominently organizing their mental models and the formation of general knowledge (*Van Dijk, 1980; *Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; *Louwerse & Van Peer, 2002).
- **Local coherence.** Both referential (model-based) as well as intensional (meaning-based) coherence of sequences of propositions show how knowledge is organized, for instance by causal structures, thus providing insight into the ways authors manage the explanation of social and political events. Crucial in the formation of (preferred) mental models (*Gernsbacher & Givón, 1995; *Van Dijk, 1977).
- **Actor description.** Most discourse and much knowledge is about people, and it is therefore crucial how people are being described, in what identities, roles, relationships, memberships, organizations, occupations, gender, class, ethnicity, age, appearance, etc. This is the preferred locus of the ideological polarization between ingroup (Us) and outgroup (Them), as well as the analysis of stereotypes and prejudices (*Van Leeuwen, 1996).
- **Levels, details and precision of description.** Descriptions of actors and their actions, as well as of political and social events, may vary in many semantic ways. Quite relevant are variations of level or detail (granularity) with which knowledge is thus communicated, as well as the precision or vagueness of the descriptions. Dispreferred knowledge, for instance, will typically be left very general, little specific and vague — as is the case about racism in dominant European discourse genres (political and media discourse).
- **Implications and presuppositions.** Most shared knowledge is presupposed in discourse, and hence not asserted and even not expressed but left implicit (as parts of mental models). This means that knowledge may also be obliquely asserted (“accommodated”) as if it were generally known and shared. Similarly, obvious implications of knowledge that are inconsistent with dominant interests may be left implicit in official discourse (*Kadmon, 2001; Krahmer, 1998).
- **Definitions** and other ways (metaphor, comparisons, etc.) are special discursive moves used to introduce new knowledge in terms of old knowledge (*Sager & Rey., 2000).

- **Evidentiality.** Discourse is more credible when it is attributed to recognized experts. Hence, most forms of knowledge discourse will be replete with references and other ways such knowledge can be legitimated by arguments based on evidence provided by experts. The very mass media may be used as the reliable source of knowledge managed in everyday conversations. Knowledge is belief we can prove, for which we have evidence, and one form of evidence is supplied by reliable, credible and respected sources (*Chafe & Nichols, 1986).
- **Argumentation.** Discourse structures organized to defend points of view (argumentation structures) not only involve opinions, but also partisan representations of reality, that is, knowledge. Arguments are based on explicit and implicit premises, and these may be shared or accepted representations of ‘facts’. Besides the many forms of evidentiality (observation, reliable sources) argumentation is the central strategy of showing that beliefs are in fact knowledge (*Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992).
- **Metaphor.** Metaphors represent our embodied, experiential conceptualization of abstract and complex knowledge of the world, and the choice of such metaphors is therefore crucial for our understanding of social and political events. For instance, the immigration of many non-Europeans to Europe is typically represented in terms of waves, avalanches or invasions, and not as a boon for the economy and cultural diversity of the country (*Chilton, 1996; *Gibbs, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Musolf, 2004).
- **Modalities.** Events and knowledge about such events may be presented as modalized in several ways, for instance as certain (necessary), probable or possible — depending again on the interests of the authors. If climate change is described as certain, then policies to stop it may become unavoidable, but not when it is presented as a remote possibility or as uncertain. Knowledge grading is therefore an essential strategy in the management of knowledge in public discourse (government and media reports, etc.)(Facchinetti, Krug & Palmer, 2003).
- **Rhetorical devices.** Rhetorical devices, such as hyperboles and euphemisms, do not have their own knowledge content, but may emphasize or de-emphasize knowledge structures in discourse (*Nystrand & Duffy, 2003).
- **Grammar.** Sentence syntax may in many ways express or signal what knowledge is asserted, presupposed, recalled or how such knowledge is distributed, as in topic-comment and focus structures, cleft sentences (“It is X who...”), main and embedded clauses, active and passive constructions, nominalizations, definite and indefinite expressions, word order, and so on. The same is true for intonation, stress, volume, etc. at the phonological level. Such local forms and formats may again emphasize, de-emphasize or conceal agency and responsibility of specific social actions and events (*Lambrecht, 1994).
- **Lexicon.** The bottom line of all semantic and linguistic analysis is of course the way concepts, meanings or ideas are expressed in lexical items. Their selection may contextually depend on setting, participants and goals, but also on the knowledge and ideologies of the dominant authors and their groups. As we know, those represented as “terrorists” in ‘our’ political and

media reports may be represented as ‘martyrs’ or ‘heroes’ in the discourse of our enemies. And it makes a vast difference whether we call violence against women ‘male chauvinist’, ‘machismo’ or vaguely as ‘domestic’, thus downgrading or concealing the identity of the perpetrators (*Sinclair & Carter, 2004). In other words, also lexically, one’s knowledge may be someone else’s opinion, bias or ideology.

- **Nonverbal (‘semiotic’) structures.** Knowledge may be formulated in verbal discourse, but also in many nonverbal sign systems, that is, in different semiotic modes: pictures, graphs, film and sounds, and so on. Semiotic analysis of these nonverbal modes may especially examine how such non-verbal modes of expressions complement, emphasize, contradict or detail verbal expressions of knowledge, and how such multimedia messages are more focused on, better understood and better recalled than verbal messages (*Van Leeuwen, 2005).

Depending on the goals of research as well as on the discourse genre analyzed, we thus need to (self-) critically examine what types of structures or strategies we want to focus on and in what theoretical framework. In all these cases, it should be demonstrated where and how social knowledge of participants plays a role in the communicative situation. In the list above we see that many of the dimensions studied are semantic, or those aspects of form and formats that exhibit underlying semantic differences.

Obviously, typical knowledge discourse will use many of these features at the same time. Thus, as we all know, scholarly articles will typically combine the following discourse structures and strategies (among a vast literature, see, e.g., *Hyland, 2000; *Swales, 2004):

- Title and Abstract of most important information (topics, claims, results, etc) in first position.
- Summary of current (old) knowledge (literature review)
- Arguments why old knowledge is inadequate, etc.
- Experiments, proofs, detailed descriptions, arguments in favor of new knowledge (hypothesis, etc.).
- Recognized general procedures of proof (experiments, statistical tests, etc.) as the knowledge criteria or standards at any moment in science and scientific discourse.
- Definitions of new concepts
- Tables, graphs, statistics and nonverbal symptoms of reliability
- References to authorities (evidentiality).
- Hedges to limit responsibilities for possible errors, increasing credibility.

All of these strategies, as well as others, are geared toward the general contextual goal of expressing, proving or making new scientific knowledge plausible.

Indeed, although knowledge plays a central role in all communicative events, it has a special role in specific discourse genres, for instance because the explicit goal of such genres is to form (new) social knowledge — as represented in the Goal category of the context models of the speakers or writers. This is the case, for instance, in many forms of *public* discourse, rather than everyday conversation — in which of course knowledge may also be abused of, or recipients manipulated, but with much less social impact. Secondly, we would for obvious reasons focus on those elite groups and organizations who wield power specifically in terms of the scarce social resource of social and political knowledge, such as politicians, journalists, scientists, professors and corporate managers. These criteria suggest that — for contextual reasons of discourse adequacy — critical epistemic analysis typically focuses on the following genres and epistemic elites, among many others:

- **News and background articles** in the press and informative programs on television (because they are the main source of all non-experiential knowledge for most citizens, including of the other epistemic elites).
- **Sources of official knowledge:** Encyclopedias, dictionaries and many internet sites (Wikipedia, etc.) — as well as sources of oppositional knowledge.
- **Government declarations** (because of their expert knowledge about the social, economic, military, etc., situation of the country, as well as the specialized agencies their expert knowledge is based on)
- **Parliamentary debates** (because of the expertise of the MPs on various social issues, and possibly in opposition to government controlled knowledge, and because of the social and political consequences of policies that are assumed to be based on knowledge — as we know, for instance about the war in Iraq, see below)
- **Textbooks** (because of their ‘official’ knowledge as represented in standard curricula, and as the only source of knowledge of children and adolescents about many aspects of the social and political world)
- **Classroom dialogues** (because of the ways teachers use official textbooks and convey their own knowledge to children)
- **Various genres of scientific discourse**, such as scientific articles as well as popularization articles in the mass media based on them (because scientific knowledge has most prestige as official knowledge in most societies)
- **Various NGO discourse genres** (reports, etc.), e.g. on the environment, human rights, etc.

Analysis — Again: Tony Blair on Iraq

Let me finally provide some samples of critical epistemic analysis of fragments of one of the most consequential genres just mentioned: political discourse in parliament. The examples shall be taken from the speech of Tony Blair on March 18, 2003, seeking parliamentary legitimation for his decision to go to war in Iraq. I have repeatedly used this example before, because it exemplifies many aspects of discourse. For instance I used this example to show how context, defined as participants' mental models of communicative situations, controls discourse (Van Dijk, 2008a, 2008b), and how knowledge is (not) expressed as such in parliamentary speeches (Van Dijk, 2003).

The reason to use the example here is again is that the discourses by U.S. President George Bush, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Spanish Primer Minister José María Aznar, all legitimating the Iraq war, also in their respective parliaments, have become prime examples of manipulation (Van Dijk, 2008c). What was presented as knowledge of uncontroversial facts of Iraq's threat to world peace, for instance his alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), appeared to be wishful thinking at best, and most probably lies that would persuade reluctant parliaments and civil opinion to accept the belligerent Iraq policy of their leaders (Stothard, 2003).

For the aim of this paper, it is especially interesting to show how Tony Blair formulated his 'knowledge' about Iraq. In line with the epistemically relevant discourse categories mentioned above, I shall examine some typical examples of how beliefs are formulated and presented as reliable knowledge (for a different study of the use of knowledge Blair in another debate, see *Van Dijk, 2003).

We have seen that theoretically speaking such discourse is controlled by context models that feature, among other things, the knowledge of the speaker about a specific topic, as well as the knowledge and assumptions of the speaker about the knowledge of the recipients. This is a crucial contextual condition of all discourse, because it controls what knowledge should be asserted 'as new', what knowledge may be or should be presupposed, taken for granted and generally known, and hence left implicit, and what

(especially recent event) knowledge may be known, but might need to be recalled by the speaker, so as to re-active event models of the recipients.

These and other epistemic strategies, however, allow much personal and situational variation, and can thus be used to manipulate the minds of the recipients. For instance, beliefs may thus be signalled as presuppositions, and hence generally accepted, uncontroversial knowledge.

My analysis shall systematically examine the levels and dimensions mentioned above, but do so only from the perspective of the analysis of the role of knowledge in discourse. For many other — also cognitive — aspects of political discourse analysis, see especially Chilton, (2004).

Topics

Unlike news reports and scientific articles, parliamentary debates, as most oral discourse, does not have initial headlines (titles) or leads (abstracts) as an expression of its underlying semantic macrostructures. Yet, in this case Tony Blair begins by reading a motion that very well summarizes the main topics of his speech, so let us examine the presentation of knowledge of Iraq in that motion. This motion was finally accepted by a large majority of Labour as well as the conservative opposition, but opposed by the Liberal Democrats, as well as by Labour MPs rebelling against Blair. Hence, we may assume that what are presented as ‘facts’ in that motion was accepted by a majority as an expression of knowledge, and not as misguided beliefs or intentional lies. Here is the motion as read by Tony Blair at the beginning of his speech, and as transcribed in the official Hansard record:

- (1) That this House notes its decisions of 25th November 2002 and 26th February 2003 to endorse UN Security Council Resolution 1441; recognises that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and long range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions, pose a threat to international peace and security; notes that in the 130 days since Resolution 1441 was adopted Iraq has not co-operated actively, unconditionally and immediately with the weapons inspectors, and has rejected the final opportunity to comply and is in further material breach of its obligations under successive mandatory UN Security Council Resolutions; regrets that despite sustained diplomatic effort by Her Majesty's Government it has not proved possible to secure a second Resolution in the UN because one Permanent Member of the Security Council made plain in public its intention to use its veto whatever the circumstances; notes the opinion of the Attorney General that, Iraq having failed to comply and Iraq being at

the time of Resolution 1441 and continuing to be in material breach, the authority to use force under Resolution 678 has revived and so continues today; believes that the United Kingdom must uphold the authority of the United Nations as set out in Resolution 1441 and many Resolutions preceding it, and therefore supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction; offers wholehearted support to the men and women of Her Majesty's Armed Forces now on duty in the Middle East; in the event of military operations requires that, on an urgent basis, the United Kingdom should seek a new Security Council Resolution that would affirm Iraq's territorial integrity, ensure rapid delivery of humanitarian relief, allow for the earliest possible lifting of UN sanctions, an international reconstruction programme, and the use of all oil revenues for the benefit of the Iraqi people and endorse an appropriate post-conflict administration for Iraq, leading to a representative government which upholds human rights and the rule of law for all Iraqis; and also welcomes the imminent publication of the Quartet's roadmap as a significant step to bringing a just and lasting peace settlement between Israelis and Palestinians and for the wider Middle East region, and endorses the role of Her Majesty's Government in actively working for peace between Israel and Palestine.

The knowledge expressed in this notion, and presented to be accepted or approved (“recognized”) as such, features the following statements:

- (2) [That this House (...) recognises] that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and long range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions, pose a threat to international peace and security;
- (3) [notes] that in the 130 days since Resolution 1441 was adopted Iraq has not co-operated actively, unconditionally and immediately with the weapons inspectors, and has rejected the final opportunity to comply and is in further material breach of its obligations under successive mandatory UN Security Council Resolutions;
- (4) [regrets] that despite sustained diplomatic effort by Her Majesty's Government it has not proved possible to secure a second Resolution in the UN because one Permanent Member of the Security Council made plain in public its intention to use its veto whatever the circumstances;

The rest of the motion mentions the opinion of the Attorney General that Saddam Hussein is in breach of UN resolutions, and that hence military action against him was legitimate, as well as expressing support for the military. Quite cynically, most of the motion is not a legitimation to go to war, but about what should happen *after* the war: limit the damage to the Iraqi population, the establishment of a democratic government in Iraq as well as bring peace to the Middle East. In other words, the implied argument here is that the ‘good’ goals of the war would also legitimate de war itself.

Now let’s examine the way knowledge is expressed in this summarizing motion the MPs were invited to vote for. Thus, in (2) we see that Blair seeks endorsement for the assertion that Iraq is a threat. The verb recognize, however, is a factive verb, so that

Iraq is a threat is not presented as an opinion of Blair and others, but as a fact, as knowledge. However, that Blair asks endorsement of such a recognition also presupposes that it is not generally accepted, and hence a controversial, group-based opinion rather than generally shared historical or political knowledge. Indeed, he asks that the MPs declare his belief to be defined (recognized) as knowledge.

The same sentence has another presupposition, namely the definite expression “Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction”, which implies that Iraq indeed *has* WMD, and that hence this part of the motion expresses uncontroversial knowledge. It is this knowledge of a specific, concrete event that has been the basis of the official political legitimation to go to war in Iraq — and not the goals stated at the end of the motion, namely to bring peace and democracy to Iraq and the rest of the Middle East. It was later found that Iraq did not have any WMDs.

Example (3) also starts with a factive verb (*to note*) whose complement therefore is also presented as knowledge, namely about Iraq’s (i) failure to have cooperated with the weapons inspectors, (ii) refusal to comply and hence (iii) its being in breach of UN resolutions. Note though that the first of these factive statements features appraisal adjectives (Martin & White, 2005), that express subjective evaluations: *actively*, *unconditionally* and *immediately*, which makes the statement in fact a statement of opinion. And indeed, Iraq did cooperate with the weapons inspectors (if not, Blair would not have needed the qualifying adverbs), and since it had no WMD it actually had already complied with U.N. resolutions — only it was not believed by the USA, the UK and other countries to have done so. Hence since Iraq already had complied, also the statement of fact that it had “rejected” to comply is merely an opinion, as is the final statement about its being in breach of U.N. resolutions.

Finally fragment (4) also begins with the well-known factive verb *regret*, namely about the activities of the UK government and the decision of an unnamed member of the Security Council (France) to veto any resolution. Again, the example not only formulates the general presuppositions of ‘facts’ just mentioned, but also the one, triggered by factive adverb *despite*, about the efforts of the UK government, also an obvious example of positive self-presentation.

The summary of the whole debate (lasting a whole day) in this motion defines as knowledge on the one hand the alleged facts of the negative actions and attitudes of the

enemy Iraq (Saddam Hussein), as well as of the opponent (France), and on the other hand the positive actions of the UK government, also positively portrayed at the end of the motion, formulated as the ultimate goals of the war. The ideological polarization between Us (the UK, Blair) as good, and Them (Iraq, France) as bad, is obvious in this presentation of Blair's beliefs as knowledge of the facts. Obviously, alternative definitions of the situation, such as the USA (with help of the UK) wanting to control the Middle East by establishing a 'democratic' client state, or to control a major oil producer, among other probable facts, may have been 'knowledge' of others, but not the knowledge presented here (see, e.g., Chomsky, 2004). In other words, we see that in the real life of international politics knowledge may be relative, and that one of the strategies of persuasion and manipulation is to define beliefs as knowledge of facts. We see that the formulations used to signal such 'knowledge' are factive verbs such as "recognize", "note" and "regret", definite expressions (Iraq's WMD) as well as factive prepositions ("despite").

Local coherence

A discourse is locally coherent, first of all, if its sequences of propositions denote events or actions related in a mental model (of the speaker, recipient or both), for instance if the events are causally related, as in the following examples from Tony Blair's speech:

- (5) Saddam had used the weapons against Iran and against his own people, causing thousands of deaths.

Besides such referential coherence, discourse may be locally coherent if its propositions are functionally related among each other, for instance when one proposition is a generalization, specification, example, contrast, etc. of a previous or next proposition. See, for instance the following sequence, repeated several times by Blair, in which the second sentence expresses a proposition that gives a specification of the proposition of the first sentence, by attributing a property to the declaration just mentioned:

- (6) Then a further "full and final declaration" was made. That, too, turned out to be false.

Note thought that whereas the first proposition may exhibit shared and certified knowledge, the latter proposition, with the qualification of the declaration, is possibly an expression of opinion. That is, relations between propositions in a mental model are not necessarily based on generally accepted knowledge, but may also be established, between facts and mere beliefs (Blair's opinions) — which may of course mean that Blair actually believes what he says. Also, the use of quotation marks around "full and final declaration" means that Blair takes distance to this description, and hence also expresses an opinion, namely that the declaration was not "full" at all. We see that some properties of discourse are designed to challenge or deny what has been presented as knowledge by others.

Since discourse is by definition incomplete because speakers/writers need not express the propositions recipients can infer themselves, much of these coherent relations need to be established with (implicit) propositions, that is, propositions in the participants' mental models of an event talked or written about.

Since mental models are themselves based on general sociocultural knowledge, usually shared by speaker and recipient within the same language and knowledge communities, an analysis of local coherence structures may reveal the mental model Tony Blair has, for instance about Iraq, as well as what he presumes to be general knowledge. So let us examine some of the propositional relations in this speech that require such an inferential bridge to be coherent. Consider the following paragraph at the beginning of his speech:

- (7) (a) The country and the Parliament reflect each other. (b) This is a debate that, as time has gone on, has become less bitter but no less grave. (c) So why does it matter so much? (d) Because the outcome of this issue will now determine more than the fate of the Iraqi regime and more than the future of the Iraqi people (e) who have been brutalised by Saddam for so long, (f) important though those issues are. (g) It will determine the way in which Britain and the world confront the central security threat of the 21st century, the development of the United Nations, the relationship between Europe and the United States, the relations within the European Union and the way in which the United States engages with the rest of the world. (h) So it could hardly be more important. (i) It will determine the pattern of international politics for the next generation.

There are several links between (sometimes complex) propositions here that would need rather extensive bridging inferences to construe coherence in a mental model. Thus, for (7,a) and (7,b) to be coherent, the recipients need to know that there is

not only a 'local' debate in parliament, but also a bitter 'global' debate in the country and in the world at large, and that the division in the House therefore reflects the division in the country as well as internationally. To establish this relationship, what is needed is the context model of the current debate, as well as the old context models of previous debates in the country and the world. Next, one would need general knowledge about politics and democracy to be able to make explicit the relations between the opinions used inside and outside of parliament. Then, recipients need specific historical-political knowledge to know who Saddam is, and what his relation to Iraq and the Iraqi regime is — since he has not been mentioned before in the speech. Even more significant is the coherence construed by Tony Blair, when he says he claims that the issue (of Iraq) will determine various major aspects of international politics. The crucial definite description is:

(8) the central security threat of the 21st century

This description was also used in the motion ("The House (...) recognises that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and long range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions, pose a threat to international peace and security), and hence the current expression may be assumed to co-refer with it. Yet, Blair says much more here and in the rest of this apocalyptic paragraph, namely that the alleged security threat is "central... of the 21st century". In other words, the relations between the issue of Iraq and major issues of international politics are established in Tony Blair's model of the current situation, and in terms of the seriousness expressed in the series of hyperboles of his speech ("why does it matter so much", "so it could hardly be more important", "central ... in the 21st century," "determine... for the next generation, etc.). To make such coherence relations explicit, one would need a rather complex chain of inferences between on the one hand defying U.N. resolutions and on the other hand the assertion about a major security threat. Note also that to understand the rest of sentence (7, g) one needs to have a rather detailed mental model of the current international situation, such as the debates in the U.N., the actions of the USA and the EU (especially France), and so on. We also see that what Blair presents as his model of the situation, and hence of what he defines as the facts, for others may at most

be a political opinion, and that Iraq is no threat to world peace at all, and certainly not a *casus belli*.

Actor description: Knowledge or Opinion?

The boundaries between knowledge and opinion are nowhere as fuzzy as in the description of actors. Part of our mental models of events and action, these descriptions combine shared common sense knowledge with ideologically based appraisals. This is of course especially the case for the characterization of our enemies and in the debates about Iraq the classical case is, of course, Saddam Hussein (see, e. g., Martín Rojo, 1995). Interestingly, here as elsewhere, also in U.S. discourses about him, he is referred to with his first name only, signalling familiarity, but not of loved friends and family members, but as the favorite person to hate — while at the same time denying him the respect one would normally give a president. There is not a single description in terms of his functions, but only in terms of his actions, obviously all negative:

- (9)
- (a) Iraqi people who have been brutalised by Saddam
 - (b) Saddam had used the weapons against Iran and against his own people, causing thousands of deaths
 - (c) He had had plans to use them against allied forces
 - (d) Iraq had weaponised the programme—something that Saddam had always strenuously denied
 - (e) Their final report is a withering indictment of Saddam's lies, deception and obstruction
 - (f) Saddam refused to allow those inspectors even to enter Iraq
 - (g) what is the claim of Saddam today
 - (h) We are asked now seriously to accept that in the last few years—contrary to all history, contrary to all intelligence—Saddam decided unilaterally to destroy those weapons. I say that such a claim is palpably absurd
 - (i) Saddam is playing the same old games in the same old way.

The only occurrences where Saddam Hussein is not represented in such a negative way is when he is the object of negotiations, pressures and threats by the U.N. or western countries. The accusations against S. H., summarized by Blair, may well count as expressions of generally accepted, political knowledge, such as the use of WMD against people in Iraq and against Iran. But the use of verbs such as “brutalised” again are expressions of appraisals, as is the case for the nominalizations “lies”, “deception”, and “obstruction.” The theoretical question is then whether these are descriptions of

generally recognized historical facts, and hence knowledge (at least of one epistemic community) or more or less generally accepted evaluations, and hence personal opinions or broadly shared political attitudes.

Again we see that the definition of what exactly constitutes knowledge is as difficult as it is fuzzy. If knowledge presupposes generally shared and certified beliefs, then obviously the description of S.H. is formulated in terms of opinions, because although many people in the world would agree with what Blair asserts, we may assume that at least some of his cronies would not. But if the assessment of negative actions can be generally shared, except by those who commit them (as well as their associates), then it would be legitimate to speak of historical facts, as is also the case of the Holocaust or the attack on the Twin Towers, and hence knowledge.

We also see that the discursive description of the facts always is a construction, a *version* of reality (see, e.g., Potter, 1996), especially if others would describe the ‘same’ facts in other terms. In other words, also for the description of facts and knowledge we cannot escape the discursive necessity to select specific words to do so, and these words may again be interpreted differently, depending on the mental models of the speakers and the recipients.

The converse is also true. Whereas Tony Blair minces no words when describing S.H. and his actions, and hence expresses his own negative mental model about him, the use of euphemisms to describe the same acts (e.g., “Saddam Hussein did not treat his people very well”) might also be characterized as an opinion, namely as inappropriate words to characterize genocide, and hence an intolerable mitigation of horrible crimes against humanity.

It all depends on the (socially and institutionally) established criteria of truth, such as those of science, academies or the courts. Thus, I may call someone a thief who plagiarizes my work, and then express an opinion, but as soon as the same person has been condemned as a thief by a court of law then we deal with ‘facts’ and hence with knowledge. Hence, what distinguishes knowledge from (mere) belief is based on criteria or standards, such as proof, on the one hand, and institutions or organizations (the courts, the United Nations, etc.), on the other hand.

Level, detail and precision of description

Unfortunately little studied in discourse semantics, the variation of levels and details of description of events is one of the ways speakers may manage the expression of knowledge in text and talk. We may describe events in very general terms, or do so by describing lower level aspects of the events. And at each level we may mention a few or many aspects of the events, and we may use vague or quite precise words to do so. Generally speaking, the discursive function of specific, detailed and precise description is to emphasize the importance of that aspect of an event. Thus, Blair might simply say that S.H. was developing WMDs, but also, as he does, provide a rather detailed description of the kinds and quantities of nerve gas produced by Iraq:

- (10) When the inspectors left in 1998, they left unaccounted for 10,000 litres of anthrax; a far-reaching VX nerve agent programme; up to 6,500 chemical munitions; at least 80 tonnes of mustard gas, and possibly more than 10 times that amount; unquantifiable amounts of sarin, botulinum toxin and a host of other biological poisons (...).

On the other hand, the political outcomes of the debate, and in general of the Iraq crisis, are represented in terms of very general, very abstract international events:

- (11) So why does it matter so much? Because the outcome of this issue will now determine more than the fate of the Iraqi regime and more than the future of the Iraqi people who have been brutalised by Saddam for so long, important though those issues are. It will determine the way in which Britain and the world confront the central security threat of the 21st century, the development of the United Nations, the relationship between Europe and the United States, the relations within the European Union and the way in which the United States engages with the rest of the world. So it could hardly be more important. It will determine the pattern of international politics for the next generation.

We see that very abstract and general descriptions of the situation are no less important – at least in this case — for drawing (preliminary) policy conclusions of the debate, whereas providing details is important for argumentation, namely as plausibility of proof.

Similarly, descriptions may be very general and vague, as in the following sentence:

- (12) However, if Saddam failed to meet those tests to judge compliance, action would follow.

This is typically the case for the description of negative properties or conduct of the ingroup, as in this case, where the vague term “action” is used instead of “military action” or “war”.

Implications, implicatures and presuppositions

One of the most important properties of discourse is what is *not* said, but remains implicit, as is the case for implications, implicatures and presuppositions. This is not the place to review the extensive (largely formal) literature on both topics, and I shall simply (simplistically) define these notions in terms of mental models, namely as those propositions in semantic and pragmatic mental models (of speakers or recipients or both) that are not explicitly asserted in the discourse.

Although the usual case is that the semantic and pragmatic mental models of participants overlap and hence there is Common Ground, we may have Speaker-intended and/or Recipient-interpreted implications (implicatures and presuppositions). Whereas implications and implicatures of Q may become part of mental models of recipients *after* the assertion of Q, presuppositions are implications of Q that also must be part of the participants’ mental model(s) *before* the utterance of Q, as one of the conditions of its appropriateness.

The difference between (semantic) implications and (pragmatic) implicatures is defined in terms of the kind of mental models involved, that is semantic mental models of the events talked about, or pragmatic context models of the current communicative situation itself. Let’s examine some of these implications in the speech of Tony Blair.

(13) Again, I say that I do not disrespect the views in opposition to mine.

This one sentence has several presuppositions, implications and implicatures. First of all, it presupposes:

(13a) What I am saying now, I have said before (signalled or ‘triggered’ by “again”)

(13b) There are views in opposition to mine (signalled by the definite article “the”)

(13c) At least some people think I do disrespect views in opposition to mine (because of the negation).

(13d) I have views (because of the possessive “mine”)

Note though that this is the beginning of his speech, so the presupposed propositions are not satisfied by the preceding discourse, but by previous discourses the MPs are supposed to know (that is, old context models). The implied propositions are, e.g.,

13(d) I respect the views in oppositon to mine (because of the double negation)

13(e) I respect the opinions in opposition to mine (because of the meaning of the conceptual metaphor “view”)

Most interesting, however, are the pragmatic implicatures of the sentence, which is a form of positive self-presentation, namely as a person who accepts criticism. In the particular communicative situation of a parliamentary debate like this one, and uttered by the Prime Minister, such a positive self-presentation implicates much more than it says, namely (i) that Tony Blair is a democratic and hence a good politician — namely one who respects the opposition, and (ii) because of the double negation and its implications, that he now says so because many people so think that he often does not respect the opposition, and therefore denies that here. In fact the latter *political implicature* (Van, Dijk, 2005) would be a pragmatic presupposition as well.

Of course, there are a vast amount of implications, implicatures and presuppositions in this speech. Interesting for our discussion is that they are all based on various kinds of knowledge — namely either generally shared sociocultural knowledge of the world (e.g. about troops, Iraq, etc.), or general political knowledge (what is a democracy, etc.), or previous context models (what has been said or debated before) or the current semantic and pragmatic mental models of Blair and the MPs. Here are a few more examples:

(14) (...) to stand British troops down now and turn back

(14a) Political implicature: To do so is unpatriotic and cowardly.

(15) or to hold firm to the course that we have set

(15a) Political implicature: To do so is positive and consequent

(16) the main parties internally divided, people who agree on everything else

—[Hon. Members: "The main parties?"]

Ah, yes, of course. The Liberal Democrats—unified, as ever, in opportunism and error.

[*Interruption.*]

Example (16), which I have discussed at some length in Van Dijk (2006 and 2008a) is a very interesting example, for various reasons. First of all, the definite description “the main parties” presupposes that Blair speaks of *all* main parties in the House, a presupposition that is challenged by an interruption. Such an interruption, correcting a false presupposition may be heard as criticism by normal conversational rules, and in this specific political context also as a form of opposition. Hence Blair reacts to this (i) by seemingly admitting his error and correcting the false presupposition (by admitting that one main party, namely the Liberal Democrats, is not internally divided), (ii) but at the same time qualifies the Liberal Democrats in very negative terms, again with a seemingly positive attribute (“unified”), but combined with two negative ones “opportunism” and “error”, a qualification that conversationally may be heard as “doing irony”. The use of “unified” here does not presuppose the previous predicate of the main parties (“internally divided”) but it certainly is in semantic contrast to that expression and in that sense it ‘presupposes’ it semantically. The expression “as ever” presupposes that this is not the first time that the Liberal Democrats are unified (or are in opportunism and error – depending on the intonation of the sentence as pronounced). But again, the interesting political implicature of the negative qualification is that Blair is attacking the Liberal Democrats for their opposition to the Iraq war. See also:

(17) It will determine the way in which Britain and the world confront the central security threat of the 21st century

Sentence (17) presupposes that the MPs know and/or agree what “the” security threat of the 21st century is. Obviously, they all interpret this expression as referring to Iraq and the WMDs as represented in Blair’s mental model of the Iraq crisis. But neither Blair nor the MPs believe that all MPs agree on this description. Hence the importance to interpret presuppositions, especially in ideological debates, relative to the mental models of the participants. At the same time, we may assume that Blair prefers that all PMs agree with him on the reference, and such a use of definite descriptions may hence be seen as persuasive, if not as manipulative (as all may agree that after 3 years of 21st century it is rather strange to talk about *the* central security threat of the whole century — unless he means ‘the 21st century so far’).

Consider finally the use of the factive verb *admitted* in the following sentence:

- (18) Finally, in March 1992, Iraq admitted that it had previously undeclared weapons of mass destruction, but it said that it had destroyed them.

This verb, denoting a speech act, presupposes that Iraq had WMDs (indeed, also the negation “did not admit that...” implies that Iraq had WMDs), but again pragmatically this is so relative to Blair’s mental model of the crisis: Iraq most certainly would not qualify its own declaration as an “admission”. Indeed, the verb “to admit” also implies that the one who admits has done something wrong. The second clause would imply (in Saddam Hussein’s mental model as presented in the context of international negotiations) that there are no longer WMD in Iraq. Since however Blair in the rest of his speech keeps talking about WMDs, this presupposes (i) that in his mental model of the situation they are still there, which politically implicates that Iraq is lying — as he explicitly asserts several times in the rest of his speech.

We see that even with a few examples, this kind of political speech is a complex web of semantic and pragmatic implications, implicatures and presuppositions. Much of the time it is not just what it said (claimed, accused, etc) explicitly, but within the specific communicative situation of a parliamentary debate, what is contextually presupposed and implicated, such as attacking the opposition, or accusing a nation (or its presidents) or lying, while at the same time positively presenting oneself as a strong, democratic leader, actively challenging “the central threat of the 21st century. Spelling out all the implicit propositions of this speech, as they are understood by the MPs, would take many more space than the speech itself.

Evidentiality

Speakers are more credible when they are able to attribute their knowledge or opinions to reliable sources, especially if at least some of the recipients may doubt whether they are well grounded. Hence, in many types of discourse, and also in parliamentary debates, speakers will use evidentials to show their credibility or the legitimacy of their opinions. Blair does so continuously, especially as part of his justification for the grounds to go to war — arguably a political decision that needs most solid argumentation in a democratic state today. See the following examples:

- (19) So the issue was identified by the United Nations at that time as one for urgent remedy.
- (20) The inspectors probed (...).Again the inspectors probed.
- (21) Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamal, defected to Jordan. He disclosed a far more extensive biological weapons programme and, for the first time, said that Iraq had weaponised the programme—something that Saddam had always strenuously denied.
- (22) Their final report is a withering indictment of Saddam's lies, deception and obstruction, with large quantities of weapons of mass destruction unaccounted for.
- (23) Resolution 1441 is very clear. It lays down a final opportunity for Saddam to disarm.
- (24) (...) this much is accepted by all members of the UN Security Council: the 8 December declaration is false.

The major international organization that could legitimate Blair's policy is of course the U.N. So, throughout his speech, the main source of his knowledge and his claims is therefore the U.N. and its inspectors and Security Council. This is especially important because Bush and Blair finally were unable to get the support of the U.N. for their action, due to the opposition of permanent Security Council member France. In other words the war would be officially illegitimate by international standards and law. It is therefore crucial that the assessment of the situation in Iraq, as presented by Blair is not an expression of his personal mental model of the crisis, but an official one, as defined by U.N. inspectors and Resolutions. Relevant for this paper is, again, the management of knowledge — namely how sometimes the basis of the speech are personal mental models (e.g. when identifying “the major threat of the 21st century”) but as a legitimate conclusion from facts as established by international consensus, and hence as “official knowledge.”

Interestingly, however, when necessary, Blair may use a much more unreliable source, namely SH's son in law. However, since he is the only one who most likely has direct inside knowledge, his declarations are taken as vitally important evidence of the truth. His credibility is guaranteed because he had fled his own country, and thus had shown his opposition to SH (by the implicature ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ and hence can be trusted). The use of the factive verb “disclose” suggest that what is being disclosed is presupposed by the speaker to be true, and the explicit mention by Blair of an inconsistency with SH's earlier declaration (“denied”) in the following clause confirms such an interpretation.

The study of the evidentials in Blair's speech especially shows what kind of criteria or standards of knowledge are needed in what context. In a parliamentary debate about a war virtually no source would do to provide evidence other than the officials of the U.N. or other international agencies. Knowledge, truth and legitimation for action

are closely related here, and we again need a detailed epistemic analysis of text and talk to show how participants manage their knowledge and context models in political discourse and interaction.

Metaphor

Conceptual metaphors are semantic means to understand, represent and experience the world, and hence both our knowledge and opinions. Representing S.H. as a butcher, say, is a very classical way of conceptualizing dictators, because they kill people, and treat them like animals. At the same time, a butcher is closer to most people's common experiences than a dictator; one can even 'visualize' a butcher. But also for the representation of more complex issues, such as the political situation in the Middle East or threats to world peace, as defined by Blair, speakers may routinely have access to metaphor so as to explain complex facts or to defend otherwise complex opinions and attitudes.

Given this potential of metaphors, especially in persuasion, it is remarkable that at least in his opening speech, Blair hardly uses metaphors. Here are a few examples, but they are not that interesting for further analysis:

- (25) That is the democracy that is our right, but that others struggle for in vain.
- (26) to stand British troops down now and turn back, or to hold firm to the course that we have set
- (27) This is a debate that, as time has gone on, has become less bitter but no less grave.
- (28) Iraq's WMD ambitions were far more extensive than had hitherto been thought.
- (29) He disclosed a far more extensive biological weapons programme
- (30) Kamal also revealed Iraq's crash programme to produce a nuclear weapon in the 1990s
- (31) "full and final declaration" was made
- (32) Their final report is a withering indictment of Saddam's lies, deception and obstruction
- (33) What is perfectly clear is that Saddam is playing the same old games in the same old way.

So, in these examples we see that a Blair represents his policy as a *course* (26), that the debate can be represented in terms of a more or less pleasant taste, and hence as *bitter* (example 27), the usual personification of a country, when Iraq is said to have *ambitions* (28), that the unknown or secret is seen as hidden, covered or closed, and hence may need to be *disclosed* or *revealed* (29 and 30), that discourse may be more or less complete, and hence *full* (in 31). Discourse may also destroy, as is the case for a *withering* indictment (32). And finally, a more common metaphor, where people and

their actions are represented as *players* and a *game* (as in 33). There is little relevant here for our discussion on the role of knowledge in discourse, other than to observe that a feature one would predict in this kind of speech, namely the use of many metaphors, hardly occur in this speech.

Modalities

Whereas truth is traditionally seen in epistemology as ‘absolute’ truth to be associated with knowledge — and not with belief — we may of course have various ways to assert the strength of our beliefs. Thus, we may hold that Blair *possibly*, *probably* or *surely* would end up going to war in Iraq, given his relationship with Bush and the USA. Similarly, in his speech he can be more or less sure about WMD in Iraq. For a study of knowledge in discourse, and especially in political speeches, it is therefore relevant to examine the (alethic) modality of its propositions. The traditional (formal) semantics of these modalities is rather straightforward (where I shall use ‘situation’ instead of the usual ‘possible world’, meaning ‘a situation one can imagine’):

- p is possible = p is true in at least one situation
- p is probable = p is true in most situations
- p is necessary = p is true in all situations

Now, how does Blair characterize the political situation — and his own beliefs about them? Let us first see what Blair’s general conclusion is of the evidence he (says he) has:

- (34) We are asked now seriously to accept that in the last few years—contrary to all history, contrary to all intelligence—Saddam decided unilaterally to destroy those weapons. I say that such a claim is palpably absurd.

To qualify a claim as “palpably absurd” implies that one cannot imagine it to be true, and hence (for all the speaker knows) necessarily false. However, when we examine the few lines of evidence he cites as arguments for such a strong conclusion (which eventually turned out as false), we see that the evidence is much less strong, and

in general barely goes beyond stating *possibilities* — the weakest modality (modal expressions are rendered in bold):

- (35) In November 1996, Jordan intercepted prohibited components for missiles that **could** be used for weapons of mass destruction
- (36) "Documentation available to UNMOVIC suggests that Iraq at least had had far reaching **plans** to weaponise VX".
- (37) "Mustard constituted an important part . . . of Iraq's CW arsenal . . . 550 mustard filled shells and up to 450 mustard filled aerial bombs unaccounted for . . . **additional uncertainty**"
- (38) On biological weapons, the inspectors' report states: "Based on unaccounted for growth media, Iraq's potential production of anthrax **could have been** in the range of about 15,000 to 25,000 litres . . .
- (39) Based on all the available evidence, the **strong presumption is that** about 10,000 litres of anthrax was not destroyed and **may** still exist."

In other words, the evidence *may* show that Iraq *may* have had plans for WMD before, but that no actual WMDs had been found so far. In that sense, Blair has been known to exaggerate the truth of the evidence he had.

Modalities also may be deontic, and be formulated in terms of what is permitted, obliged or forbidden. Political discourse is often moral discourse, and hence we may expect opinions on what is right and what is wrong. This and many other debates on Iraq are fundamentally about that — namely whether it is right (permitted) to oust a dictator, and to do so without permission from the U.N.

In his factual account of the WMDs Iraq has, there is little morality, and the only obvious passage dealing with this is at the beginning of the speech:

- (40) At the outset, I say that it is **right** that the House debate this issue and pass judgment. That is the democracy that is **our right**, but that others struggle for in vain. Again, I say that I do **not disrespect** the views in opposition to mine. This is a **tough** choice indeed, but it is also a **stark** one: to stand British troops down now and turn back, or to hold firm to the course that we have set. I believe passionately that **we must hold firm** to that course.

In other words, as soon as one *knows* that there are WMDs and international security is at risk, such a strong belief is related to equally strong feelings of moral obligation, such as expressed in the expressions *right* and *must*. Doubts obviously do not translate into clear action, and we see that beliefs and knowledge and their 'quality' are also related to what may, must or should (not) be done.

Argumentation

Among the many other discourse structures associated with knowledge we finally should briefly deal with argumentation. Political speeches feature opinions, standpoints that need to be defended as right, as we have seen, and on the basis of facts that must be true, also on the basis of arguments. The first thing Blair does is read a motion, in which — nearly hidden in all the preliminaries and premises (Iraq being a threat to world peace, etc.) as well as the following promises (of what good the UK will do in and for a liberated Iraq) the crucial statement is:

- (41) (...) and therefore supports the decision of Her Majesty's Government that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (...)

Seeking such support from parliament obviously needs arguments, and hence this conclusion (initiated and signalled by *therefore*) must be based on solid arguments, some of which are mentioned in the very motion, briefly rendered and summarized here as follows:

- (42) EARLIER RESOLUTIONS. (That this House notes its) decisions of 25th November 2002 and 26th February 2003 to endorse UN Security Council Resolution 1441;
- (43) WMDs ARE THREAT (recognises that) Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and long range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions, pose a threat to international peace and security;
- (44) IRAQ DOES NOT COOPERATE. (notes that) in the 130 days since Resolution 1441 was adopted Iraq has not co-operated actively, unconditionally and immediately with the weapons inspectors, and has rejected the final opportunity to comply and is in further material breach of its obligations under successive mandatory UN Security Council Resolutions;
- (45) NO U.N. RESOLUTION POSSIBLE (regrets that) despite sustained diplomatic effort by Her Majesty's Government it has not proved possible to secure a second Resolution in the UN because one Permanent Member of the Security Council made plain in public its intention to use its veto whatever the circumstances;
- (46) ATTORNEY GENERAL SAYS: USING FORCE IS LEGAL (notes) the opinion of the Attorney General that, Iraq having failed to comply and Iraq being at the time of Resolution 1441 and continuing to be in material breach, the authority to use force under Resolution 678 has revived and so continues today;
- (47) UK MUST UPHOLD AUTHORITY OF U.N. (believes that) the United Kingdom must uphold the authority of the United Nations as set out in Resolution 1441 and many Resolutions preceding it,

The premises are of variable nature. One is directly related to taking military action in response to an immediate 'material' (military) fact and *casus belli*: Iraq is a threat to international security. Secondly, there is a premise that rules out a non-violent alternative: negotiation — with the argument that Iraq (S.H.) does not want to negotiate. Third, normally the U.N. would have to take the decision for armed intervention, but in (45) it is said that due to one country this is impossible. Also this premise is meant as a

rejection of a probable counter-argument against intervention. The other premises are all legalistic: Other decisions of parliament (e.g. about resolution 1441), the opinion of the Attorney General, and the duty of the UK to uphold the authority of the U.N.

Of course, other may deem these premises to be so many fallacies, and even if they were true the conclusions (that the UK must or may intervene militarily) does not follow. So, probable counterarguments would be:

- a. Parliament never authorized armed intervention in Iraq
- b. Resolution 1441 does not imply automatic use of force
- c. Most crucially: No WMDs have been found
- d. The Attorney General of the UK is not competent to judge about international law.
- e. The UK need not uphold the authority of the U.N. by going to war.
- f. That the U.N. cannot make a decision (to use force against Iraq) does not allow the U.K. to make that decision instead.

So, Blair's argument — and hence the motion — can hardly be said to be valid, simply because all or most of the premises are false, or at least not demonstrably true. The rest of the speech details these arguments and especially arguments (43) and (44), namely that Iraq is a threat because of its WMDs, and because it does not want to negotiate and ignores international resolutions and other pressures — as we have seen. Hence, we get a step by step account of when and how Iraq denied the international suspicions, and refused to cooperate as sub-arguments of the main argument of NON-COOPERATION. Similarly, the THREAT argument is supported with many detailed arguments about the kind of weapons Iraq is supposed to have — and we have seen that this argument has not been proven, but at most is a strong suspicion.

We mention argumentation here because knowledge is not something that is immediately given, but a belief that must be sustained on the basis of criteria or standards, such as perception, reliable evidence or inference. Thus, if the House of Commons authorizes Blair to go to war, then it must be on the basis of the knowledge that what is being said about Iraq, international security, etc. is correct, and the motion is well-grounded. All this happens with argumentation — and for Blair the conclusion from the premises, thus, is that the conclusion (about intervention) is correct. Of course, facts as such do not allow deontic conclusions (what one must or may do), but since one of the premises is a deontic statement, namely an obligation (that the UK must uphold

the authority of the U.N.) is taken by Blair as sufficient reason to draw the deontic conclusion of a permission: Going to war in Iraq, against Saddam Hussein, is *right* and *legitimate*.

And so British Parliament decided after a day long debate.

Concluding remark

Although both are fundamental terms in the humanities and social sciences, discourse and knowledge have seldom been explicitly related, and even less so in critical discourse studies. After a brief summary of what we know about these relationships in linguistics, psychology, epistemology and the social sciences, with special emphasis on the role of knowledge in the formation of mental models as a basis for discourse, I examine in more detail how a critical study of discourse and knowledge may be articulated in critical discourse studies. Thus, several areas of critical epistemic discourse analysis are identified, and then applied in a study of Tony Blair's Iraq speech on March 18, 2003, in which he sought to legitimize his decision to go to war in Iraq with George Bush. The analysis shows the various modes of how knowledge is managed and manipulated of all levels of discourse of this speech. One of the conclusions of this analysis is that the distinction between knowledge and belief (opinion, etc.) is really very fuzzy, and that especially also in politics, what are 'facts' and hence 'knowledge' is for one person, may be mere belief for others. Hence, parliamentary debates, especially about controversial topics, typically exhibit struggle over the definition of reality, and hence of knowledge.

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