Political Linguistics as a Constituent Part of Modern Political Theory

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Abstract

This article deals with the problem of new understanding of traditional political theory. The contemporary structure of this theory includes the questions concerning the subject of power used as the subject of speech. Now political linguistics can be considered as the part of modern politics. The main principles of methodology in this research are connected with the key ideas of structuralism and poststructuralism in the sphere of language. The interest in political linguistics opens the field of political communication for contemporary investigations.

Keywords: Political linguistics; subject of speech; communication; structuralism; poststructuralism

1. Introduction

Modern political theory and its methodology are interrelated with an interdisciplinary character of modern human cognition: all its components and analysis of socio-cultural and theoretical issues are closely connected.

Wide interpretation of discursive practices that structuralize various cultural resources in concealed or open manner, including political practices and practices of discourse of power as a whole, helps to make effective comparative analogues in modern socio-cultural analytics. They considerably refer to the sphere of methodology. Widely used linguistic theories play an important role in assertion of priority of methodological models in social and humanitarian studies.

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Modern European political thinking is formed as a culture of political rhetoric based on a specific function of linguistic manipulation. In other words, communicative strategy of power in its liberal manifestation is deeply rooted in the pragmatic context, and that is why it is effective, practically feasible, but, paradoxically, random. All these factors make a language dangerous, but attractive and magnificent world where special “machines of powerful intentions” and “powerful dreams” are becoming firmly established, while linguistic “content plane” is not represented in “expression plane”. Under such conditions, linguistic articulation, which is regarded as an open rhetorical and obscure semantic representation, becomes the subject of analysis of political situations.

What methodology should be used for the research? What are the preferences?

2. New methodology of political investigation: lingua-pragmatic aspect

Traditionally, power is a common life-forming principle. Its logic and formal structures turn to a subject whose thinking, speech and acts are continuation of above-individual power impulse. The idea of nature of political activity corresponds to purposeful-rational, “legitimate” way of thinking, language and social act. Recent decentration and desubordination in social and political spheres and, thus, unpredictability of any powerful institutions, change a strategy in understanding the power as it is. The picture of power has got lost in its generality and necessity so it is as accidental as any other coincidences. Political analysts and experts have to focus on “regional” representation and manifestation of power. They monitor different techniques that are responsible for the game of heterogenic powerful impulses and speeches.

2.1. Linguistics as a methodological a priori of actual social theory

In this respect general methodology of analysis proves its interdisciplinary character. It comprises various general theoretical directions that are mandatory for serious research in political science. In this paper we use the works of structuralists and poststructuralists (M. Foucault, J. Lacan, R. Barthes, J. Derrida, J. Kristeva, P. de Man, C. Ginzburg, J. Starobinski). The corpus renders new information about the language. Here these works are added with the ideas of socio- and psycholinguistics, perceptual psychology and political sociology. These scientists investigate pragmatic and linguistic aspects of political practices. The main achievement of this methodological scheme is determination of a common object of integral political interest that is the space of political discourse.

It is important to mention that classical language theory – Saussure’s opposition of “language” and “speech” – allowed powerful nature of a sign in usage of language units as a code system. Description of the integral spatial functioning of the language in the context of political communication is crucial. Sociocultural, historical, and psychological aspects in political communication understanding are not accidental. They give additional opportunities for language explication and political discourse phenomena investigation. While a language is considered as a fixed system of signs, limiting language communicative freedom, speech, as free use of signs, it preconditions the individualization of communicative strategy as a whole (political, in particular). This reflects a common tendency of European value system, liberalization in the establishment of political world and modern European standards. A large variety of social, historical, cultural, and psychological determinants turn our attention towards people as agents of verbal behavior, and in this research – towards a subject of political discourse and action.

Political theory is closely connected to philosophy of cognitive science because speech activity accumulates and transmits diverse individual’s experience. Philosophical research now has a common feature that is obviously different in terms of philosophical writings and traditional texts that are analytically and logically discursive and pragmatic. Philosophy uncovers “mirror” presupposition of mind and language.

Renunciation from generalizing metaphysical claims and actual institutionalization of individual mental lexicon form a ground for language heteronomy. It makes political sciences a shareholder on the “linguistic competence” market. It means that methodological support of technologies, used in political sphere, serves to develop dynamic criteria of interpretation of different forms of political discourse.

Lacoue-Labarthe (1997) wrote that “transcendence ends in politics”. We can suppose that transcendence ends in political communication because political science with a common tendency to humanitaristics loses privileges of semantics of “political text” with constant “meaningful” content and becomes the pragmatics of communicative –
flexible in its nature—speech act of “talking-perception” that facilitates the political “message” and is the main constituent of a methodological model of future political linguistics.

As Kristeva (1981) says, the relation of the speech subject to language activity can be divided into two periods. The first period is connected with the introduction of the “real” product of well-developed linguistic practices, such as language of myth, faith, science, and politics. The second one is the projection of theoretical knowledge on socio-cultural world with its diverse, often unstable, “obscure” discursive forms. As a result, all social practices were represented as different expressions, types and means of speech behavior. Ju. Kristeva believes that making a language the specific object of knowledge and cognition means that language is not an activity “ignoring itself”, it represents the idea when “speech starts to say” (Kristeva, 1981, p. 11). Language has a right to be the subject of speaking. Consequently, traditional interpretation of intersubjectivity as intersubjective experience of subjects’ interaction is added to communication between subject-analytics and the language code in the form of a wide field of values. Kristeva (1981) thinks that this paradoxical process pursues two objectives: to divert a speaking subject from his/her speech activity and make him/her turn to understanding of the way he is speaking (why he speaks in this way and not in another one). So, nobody can consider him/herself as an independent and indissoluble entity: “end of transcendence” means crisis of author’s subjectivity, collapse of transcendental hypostasized by classic philosophy. A subject that starts to consider him/herself as a “speaking system” (Kristeva, 1981, p. 11), as structurally organized “this or that” language game is compared not only with semantic, transcendental and generally valid constituent of language sign, but also with its real, historical and changeable constituent, responsible for establishment and support of communication, building chains of the signified and filling sign lacunas and bridging the gaps within segmented and decentered social space. The fact is that this specific system can be analyzed as of great importance for classical structuralism.

2.2. Political communication as a new object of politological investigation

The next circumstance is of special meaning: a person as a language activity or language activity used as a person is regarded as demystified statement of question. Kristeva (1981) thinks it introduces science in the sphere of “human, too much human”, where religion, ideology and politics were usually interconnected. These general theoretical thoughts appeal to modern political science. “Divide and rule” is a principle that shows affinity of politics with philosophy of language. Instrumentalization in the sphere of the theory of linguistics alluding to F. de Saussure via F. Nietzsche to J. Derrida helps to consider the figure of “distinction” in indissoluble unity with figures of subordination and domination, thus, claiming the principle of power to be fundamental in culture.

If we take the notion of language activity as a basic notion of linguistics, in accordance with most theorists of the language we will define three norm-forming characteristics to which all forms and expressions of language activity correspond. They reproduce themselves in everything related to language usage. Firstly, Kristeva points out that a person talking about language activity always talks about demarcation; secondly, the person talks about signification; and, finally, the person talks about communication. So, Kristeva concludes that personal practices are the types of language activity because they perform the functions of demarcation, signification and communication (Kristeva, 1981, p. 10). Production of values of all orders, generating and exchange of discourses, for example, in the sphere of ideology and political mythology create language systems that are secondary towards natural language (these thesis are similar to early interpretatio of a myth as a paralanguage by Kristeva’s teacher R. Barthes). Regulation of communicative chain is based on such a secondary linguistic structure. Kristeva thinks that study of communicative technologies as secondary linguistic formations becomes one of the key tasks in forming the next stage of development of theory and philosophy of language in their methodological importance for socio-humanistic cognition.

A wide range of problems of communication, in close connection with “the rhetoric” as a main figure of modernist and postmodernist political cognition, allow overcoming suspiciousness and prejudice towards rhetoric. Modern political discourse, being rhetoric in its form, has become almost synonymic to conservatism principles in politics (Frank, 1994). It was rhetoric that became a key issue in accusation of seeming democracy and egalitarianism of Western political culture. So, rhetoric in the sphere of politics threatens not only general-valid criteria of political discourse, but it is also connected with radical rejection of deliberate intervention in the process.
Rhetoric as a seeming language freedom turns into figure of coquetry, being raised to the principle of thinking, it also deprives this thinking and the ability to change and develop (Frank, 1994, p. 123). Though, connection of rhetoric and communicative principles of modern political space organisation give unexpected results. It is thought that communication itself organizes political world due to common, understandable to everybody encoding, assertion of some universal language. It presupposes creation of general democratic political language. Communication, as it is understood now, corresponding to traditional semiotic models, pedals “everyday” constituent of sign representation of the reality (including its political sphere).

Genealogical principle, entrenched in modern philosophy and extrapolated on the “everyday” discourse, allows fixing a constant shift in ontics and schemes of living processes. Classic “substantialism” of fundamental experimental conditions and practical, theoretic, language activity of the subject are understood as a horizon of all personal practices, they also appear to be additional to functionalistic description of the horizon and the background of the living world. The last is taken not only from the total everyday experience but from its separate constituents, which can be isolated or localized in structures of specific practices and communication, showing isolation and heterogeneity of their speech representation. Classical Western ontology, being ontology of power, develops the strategy and technology of common, transcendental interpretation of power, and reality description, where “everyday life”, and a subject function either in generalizing perspective of universal philosophic project of the world and a human, or non-classical philosophical vision that sees in everyday life the opportunities of general-valid strategies of a language conception of the world. Natural experience of human existence under the given historical conditions gives birth to a large variety of living forms and language expressions.

3. Conclusion

Nowadays, particular power techniques and means of power articulation are characterized as disconnected. Despite of absence of life principles’ uniformity that is a guarantee to escape totalitarian tendencies of different types of political thinking it is very difficult to escape from a peculiar lingua-schizophrenic syndrome. The syndrome is represented by a crisis in political identity and identity of political science. Moreover, the crisis threatens not only mass political subjects but also experts in political science: partial perception and incomplete description of the situation are common for them too. A natural advantage of theoretical reasoning is reflectivity. Only demand for analyticity in theory and practice combined with particular political statements can help in achievement of two priority goals: 1) correct interpretation of the situation by means of proper deciphering of a political statement, and 2) sequential introduction of principles of liberalism, political pluralism and transparency that lead to the establishment of equal communication. It means that political diversity is supported by theoretical and empirical means of discourse variety and evidence of “linguistic turn” in modern theory of political science.

References