

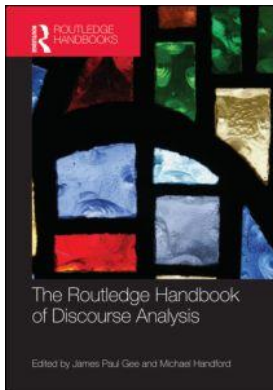
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## **The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis**

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### **Politics as usual**

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## Part VI

# Identity, culture and discourse

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# Politics as usual

## Investigating political discourse in action

Ruth Wodak

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### Introduction: discourse and/about politics

In our daily lives we are confronted with many genres of political discourse: political speeches of all kinds, televised press conferences, broadcast or televised interviews with politicians, snippets on the Internet (e.g. YouTube) or reports on political events in the press.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, slogans and advertisements confront us when we are walking down the street, leaflets from political parties or interest groups are delivered by mail and during election campaigns, we are able to listen to politicians campaigning at election rallies. Political parties have their own home pages, logos and brands; we are thus able to download relevant documents and photos as well as party programmes. If we wish to contact members of parliament, or even the president of the United States, we are able to email them or chat with them on discussion forums specifically constructed for such purposes (Wodak and Wright, 2007).

The above examples all shed light on the life and work of politicians from the outside. These are official genres, designed for the public and demonstrating the many ways in which politicians like to present themselves, stage their work and ‘perform’, and therefore how they like to be perceived by their various audiences (on ‘frontstage’, see below). These activities follow specific norms and rules, are part of the ‘field of politics’ (in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense) and are ritualized, as Murray Edelman claimed in his seminal book *The Symbolic Use of Politics* (Edelman, 1967). We rarely (if ever), though, have access to the backstage, to the politics *du couloir*, and to the many conversations and gossip in the corridors when politicians meet informally.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, research provides ample evidence that such interactions on backstage influence political decision-making in much more salient ways than (the more easily accessible) frontstage performances (Wodak, 2011).

The notion of *performance* is necessarily and inherently related to the metaphor of being in the theatre and on stage. Goffman distinguishes between *frontstage* and *backstage*; these two concepts are central for the analysis and understanding of politicians’ behaviour. Frontstage is where the performance takes place and the performers and the audience are present.

Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance. For preliminary purposes, it will be convenient to distinguish and label what seem to be the standard parts of the front.

(Goffman, 1959: 17)

Backstage is where performers are present but the audience is not, and the performers can step out of character without fear of disrupting the performance; ‘the back region is the place where the

impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course' (Goffman, 1959: 112). It is where facts suppressed in the frontstage or various kinds of informal actions may appear which are not accessible to outsiders. The backstage is completely separate from the frontstage. No members of the audience can or should appear in the back. The actors adopt many measures to ensure this; thus access is controlled by gate-keepers. It is, of course, much more difficult to perform once a member of the audience is in the backstage; politicians would not want the audience to see when she or he is practising a speech or being briefed by an advisor (see Wodak, 2009a: 7–11, 2011 for an extensive overview of Goffman's approach).

Before, however, turning to this specific aspect of 'doing politics', I would like to – at least briefly – point to salient issues that currently determine the field of language and/in politics:

- a) How broad or narrow should 'political action' (or 'political language behaviour') be defined? Do we restrict ourselves to the study of the traditional political genres (like speeches, slogans, debates), or are all everyday actions in some way 'political'?
- b) What is the role of the political elites? Who determines political issues? What is the role of grassroots movements?
- c) How do ideologies and belief systems manifest themselves in various genres of political discourse? What is the relationship between media and politics?
- d) What are the main functions of political discourses? How do power structures relate to decision-making strategies?
- e) Finally, what are the main settings where political practices take place (*doing politics*)? How do the structures of various organizations and institutions influence political discourses?

There are certainly many more and related questions, like the influence of globalizing processes or the change of political rhetoric and its functions over time (Chilton *et al.*, 2010).

In this chapter, it is, of course, impossible to answer all these questions. I will thus mainly explore one particular dimension of political discursive practices in more detail: *politics as usual* on the *backstage*. This implies investigating the daily work of politicians in their respective workplace – national and transnational political institutions. Hence, many relevant aspects of *organizational discourse studies* have to be accounted for as well. In sum, I ask the question: what do politicians actually *do*? How is the *profession* of politics organized, apart from the scarce impressions that are accessible to laypeople? The opacity of *politics as usual* has severe consequences, as Colin Hay (2007) has rightly pointed to: des-information and non-information about the work of politicians might be some of many factors leading to disillusionment and depoliticization – or to what in the European Union is labelled as 'democratic deficit' (see also Abélès, 1992; Koller and Wodak, 2008; Wodak, 2009a, b, 2010, 2011).

In the following, I will first summarize some relevant approaches to the study of discourse and politics and discuss the development of the field of 'language and politics'. Thereafter I will present my own interdisciplinary theory to 'performing politics' and illustrate it with some examples of recent ethnography in European Union institutions. Finally, the contribution and the limitations of discourse analysis to the study of language and/in politics will be discussed.

### 'Grand/symbolic politics' and 'politics in everyday life' – theoretical approaches

#### *The meanings of 'politics' – characteristics of 'grand politics'*

The approaches of Aristotle and Machiavelli can be regarded as the two primary roots for the many and diverse meanings of politics: ethics and morals, on the one hand, violence and hegemony, on the other:

Our purpose is to consider what form of political community is best of all for those who are most able to realize their ideal in life. We must therefore examine not only this but other constitutions, both such as actually exist in well-governed states, and any theoretical forms which are held in esteem, so that what is good and useful may be brought to light.

(Aristotle, 1999: Book II, Ch. 1, pp. 30–31)

The Aristotelian goal, to discover the best form of government, is thus clearly linked to definitions of ethics and morals, i.e. values for a given society: what is believed to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The definition of values always depends on the context and the political system: what might have been ‘good’ for a totalitarian state like Nazi Germany was certainly experienced as ‘bad’ for democratic systems. On the other hand, we find ‘the dark view of political power’. All politics is of necessity driven by a quest for power, but power is inherently unpredictable, irresponsible, irrational and persuasive. This view has been articulated most prominently by Michel Foucault, yet its roots can be detected in many authors, from Niccolò Machiavelli to Antonio Gramsci.

Research in the field of language and politics has expanded enormously in recent years (see Wodak and de Cillia, 2006 for an overview). Although this kind of research may seem to be quite ‘young’, rhetoric is one of the oldest academic disciplines and was already concerned with aspects of political communication in ancient times. After the Second World War, Harold Lasswell and Nathan Leites (1949) published one of the most important studies on quantitative semantics in the field of language and politics, developing approaches from communication and mass media research. In the late 1940s, research on the intricate links between language and politics began throughout Central Europe, though mainly in Germany. The novel *1984* by George Orwell (1949) was a significant point of departure for the development of the entire field. Of course, all this research was influenced by the massive use of propaganda during the Second World War and in the emerging Cold War era, in the 1950s.

Political linguistics (*Politolinguistik*) was the first attempt to create an academic discipline for the research of political discourse. Critical linguistic research began in the wake of National Socialism and was conducted primarily by Victor Klemperer (1947, 2005) and Rolf Sternberger (Sternberger *et al.*, 1957) who both paved the way for the new discipline. Both Klemperer and Sternberger sampled, categorized and described the words used during the Nazi regime: many words had acquired new meanings, other words were forbidden (borrowed words from other languages, like *cigarette*), and neologisms (new words) were created; similar language policies were adopted by former communist totalitarian regimes (Wodak and Kirsch, 1995). Controlling language in this way implies an attempt to control the (minds and thoughts of) people.

Burkhardt (1996: 79) proposed the use of ‘political language’ as the generic phrase comprising ‘all types of public, institutional and private talks on political issues, all types of texts typical of politics as well as the use of lexical and stylistic linguistic instruments characterizing talks about political contexts’. He lists four different procedures as being particularly promising methods and techniques to be used for ‘ideological reconstruction’: *lexical-semantic techniques* (analysis of catchwords and value words, of euphemisms and of ideological polysemy); *sentence and text-semantic procedures* (analysis of tropes, of semantic isotopes and of integration and exclusion strategies); *pragmatic text-linguistic techniques* (analysis of forms of address, speech acts, allusions, presuppositions, argumentation, rhetoric, quotations, genres and intertextuality); and finally *semiotic techniques* (icon, symbol and semiotic analysis).

From 1990 onwards research on *political discourse* expanded (Wilson, 1990). Research was carried out into communication within political organizations (European Union committees and decision-making processes: Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber 2007; the United Nations: Holzscheiter, 2005 the European Parliament: Wodak, 2009a, 2010, 2011), as well as on the unique

(charismatic) style of politicians (Tony Blair: Fairclough, 2000; US senators: Duranti, 2006), on political speeches (commemorative speeches: Ensink and Sauer, 2003; Herr *et al.*, 2008), on right wing political rhetoric (Wodak and Pelinka, 2002), on strategies of manipulation and persuasion (the 2003 Iraq war: Chouliaraki 2006), on interviews with politicians in the media (Clayman and Heritage, 2002), and so forth. Nowadays many refereed journals publish research from this area (e.g. *Discourse and Society*; *Journal of Language and Politics*; *Discourse and Communication*).

### *Politics on 'backstage'*

It is much more difficult to explore the 'backstage', the everyday life of politicians, than the staging of 'grand politics'. Once we enter the backstage, for example in the European Parliament (see below), we encounter the routines of political organizations that are – at first sight – non-transparent and seem as chaotic as in any organization. Hence, ethnographic research is needed, such as participant observation in organizations, in-depth and narrative interviews, shadowing of insiders, and so forth to be able to grasp the processes of political strategizing and decision-making. Focussing only on typical frontstage activities (such as political speeches, for example) does not suffice to understand and explain the complexity of 'politics'. This is why the organizational contexts (structures, rules, regulations, and constraints) have to be accounted for in detail.

Issues of *power*, *hegemony* and *ideology* have been reconceived as central to social and linguistic practices in all organizations, since all organizational forms can be translated into language and communication and because, as Deetz (1982: 135) concluded, talk and writing 'connect each perception to a larger orientation and system of meaning'. The distinction between structure and agency is useful, since it moves us away from a preoccupation with individual motivations and behaviours to the discursive practices through which organizational activity is performed in ritualized in ever new ways. Four prominent linguistic–discursive approaches have proven particularly influential in organizational research to date: ethno-methodology; conversation analysis (CA); sociolinguistic analysis; and (critical) discourse analysis (CDA).

Pre-eminent in this regard is *critical discourse analysis* (CDA), which integrates a range of discourse analytic approaches and methodologies with theoretical concerns by drawing on key approaches in social theory (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Arguably, CDA has gained ground because it provides researchers with the requisite ontological and methodological traction to look at the processes that render semiotic devices 'objective', and therefore provide the basis for logics to be mobilized, (re)contextualized and made manifest through hierarchy, values, symbols, strategies and discursive as well as social practices within organizations.

*Ethnomethodology*, whilst technically rooted in sociology, emphasizes the conditions that have to be satisfied for certain actions to be perceived as signifying a recognized sanction (Garfinkel *et al.*, 1981). *Conversation analysis* (CA) identifies the very detailed aspects of members' turn-taking strategies that are critical to performance and membership (Schegloff, 1987; Drew and Heritage, 1992) and deals with relatively short stretches of interaction as being revealing and representative of, the organizations' interactional principles. *Sociolinguistic analysis* has a basis in the tradition of correlating sociological parameters (e.g. age, class and gender) with variations in organizational discourse (Bernstein, 1987). *Interactional sociolinguistics* has its origins in symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1959) and is further developed in the broad domain of discourse studies, and responds to the criticism that the first approach underplays the effect of context on organizational discourse.

Studies in this domain are not only labour-intensive due to the required ethnography, but they are usually organized as case studies that are not easy to generalize from. Nevertheless, Holzscheiter's investigation into decision-making procedures about legal requirements of child protection on the UN level allows important insight into the debates of NGOs and their impact

on government officials (2005). Duranti's participant observation of a US senator's election campaign trail raised awareness about the many discursive practices and persuasive devices required to keep on track such a huge campaign and related persons (2006). Decision-making processes involving both written materials (such as minutes, statements and programs) and debates in committees lie at the core of qualitative political science research into Israeli community centres (Yanow, 1996) and of text-linguistic and discourse analytic investigations into EU committees such as the Competitiveness Advisory Group (Wodak, 2000a, b; Wodak *et al.* 2011). The interdependence of frontstage and backstage becomes truly apparent in these studies; moreover, it becomes obvious how much is decided on backstage and how negotiations and compromises are staged and enacted thereafter on frontstage.

Pragmatic-linguistic expertise becomes salient in the discourse analysis of daily (political) interactions: much knowledge is regularly *presupposed* in every interaction (Goffman, 1981; Wodak, 2009a: 45ff.). Misunderstandings occur when presuppositions or other indirect pragmatic devices either are not available or differ significantly. Sharing presupposed and inferred meanings and hence including or excluding others in strategic ways is, I believe, constitutive of political power play and of achieving one's aims in the political arena (Jäger and Maier 2009).

### *The discourse-historical approach in CDA (DHA)*

Developed in the field of *critical discourses studies*, the DHA provides a vehicle for looking at latent power dynamics and the range of potential in agents, because it integrates and triangulates knowledge about historical, intertextual sources and the background of the social and political fields within which discursive events are embedded. Moreover, the DHA distinguishes between three dimensions that constitute textual meanings and structures: the *topics* that are spoken/written about; the *discursive strategies* employed; and the *linguistic means* that are drawn upon to realize both topics and strategies (e.g. argumentative strategies, *topoi*, presuppositions – see below for an extensive discussion).

Systematic qualitative analysis in the DHA takes *four layers of context* into account: the *intertextual and interdiscursive relationships* between utterances, texts, genres and discourses; the extra-linguistic social/sociological variables; the *history and archaeology of texts and organizations*; and institutional frames of the specific *context of a situation* (the specific episodes under investigation). In this way we are able to explore how discourses, genres and texts change due to socio-political contexts, and with what effects (see Wodak, 2001).

Furthermore, two concepts are salient for analysing the *backstage* of politics: *intertextuality* refers to the linkage of all texts to other texts, both in the past and in the present. Such links can be established in different ways: through continued reference to a topic or to its main actors; through reference to the same events as the other texts; or through the reappearance of a text's main arguments in another text. The second important process is labeled *recontextualization*. By taking an argument, a topic, a genre or a discursive practice out of context and restating/realizing it in a new context, we first observe the process of de-contextualization, and then, when the respective element is implemented in a new context, of recontextualization. The element then acquires a new meaning, because, as Wittgenstein (1967) demonstrated, meanings are formed in use.

When analysing micro-linguistic patterns of persuasive rhetoric, *topoi* and forms of argumentation in Toulmins' sense (1956) are relevant. *Topoi* are the content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules' that connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion or the central claim. They appeal to commonsense knowledge, frequently without providing any evidence for establishing the warrant. As such, they justify the transition from the premise to the conclusion: *topoi* are thus central to the analysis of seemingly convincing fallacious arguments that are widely adopted in all



political discourses (Kienpointner, 1996: 562). As I illustrate below, the concept of *topos* can be adequately employed when analysing everyday political discourse. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) also draw on Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) when providing a list of common fallacies, which includes the following frequently employed argumentative devices: *argumentum ad baculum*, i.e. ‘threatening with the stick’, thus trying to intimidate instead of using plausible arguments; *argumentum ad hominem*, which can be defined as a verbal attack on the antagonist’s personality and character instead of discussing the content of an argument; and *the fallacy of hasty generalization*, when one makes generalizations about characteristics attributed to a group without providing any substantial evidence. When presenting some aspects of ‘politics as usual’ by drawing on my ethnography of the European Parliament and members of the European Parliament’s (MEP) daily lives, I will employ the DHA and the categories listed above.

### Investigating ‘politics as usual’: an integrative and interdisciplinary approach

In studying the *performance of politicians*, while conducting a case study on MEPs’ daily work in the European Parliament (Wodak, 2009a, 2009c, 2011, for extensive discussion of the theoretical concepts), I draw on several different approaches from a range of disciplines, in addition to CDA and the DHA. Apart from interviewing many MEPs about their socialization into the EP, their motives, their daily work routines and their visions for the European Union, I was able to follow MEPs throughout their daily life, from morning to evening and tape record all instances of talk which occurred. In conceptualizing and analysing this huge range of data, I necessarily had to draw on a number of linguistic and extra-linguistic social theory approaches, which I can only briefly discuss in the following. In the next section I will present a few examples of the many challenges politicians are confronted with in their daily work and in this way I will illustrate the *backstage* of politics.

Thus I make use of symbolic interactionism and of Goffman’s concepts of *frontstage* and *backstage* (1959; see above); of Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, social fields and capitals (1991); of Lave and Wenger’s notion of ‘community of practice’ (1991); of various approaches to the construction of individual and collective identities (Wodak *et al.*, 2009 [1999]); and of Weber’s approach to legitimacy and authority (2003). These approaches conceptualize different aspects of politicians’ everyday *performances* and activities and allow analysing their socialization into the rules and conventions of the field of politics and thus the dynamics of acquiring the habitus of a politician. Individual politicians construct their *identities* in different, typical and unique ways, depending on the *communities of practice* to which they belong, the various organizational contexts in which they move, their personal biographies and their national, regional and local histories. Moreover, they possess different amounts of *symbolic capital*, as expressed in their *expert*, *organizational*, and *political knowledges*. Importantly, they are also attributed with varying degrees and forms of *legitimacy*; in the case of the European Parliament, this is largely based in legal–rational authority, although charisma certainly also plays a role, particularly in the rhetoric and persuasion used to convince other politicians, bureaucrats and the electorate.

A further aspect of my analysis examined the rules, norms, routines and constraints that structure MEPs’ daily working environment and thus shape the *social order* (Gioia, 1986) of the European Parliament. In other words, I investigated the order behind the apparent chaos of the *backstage* by drawing on organizational studies, combining my *ethnography* of MEPs daily lives with the analysis of interviews with MEPs and other written and spoken genres. In all organizations there exist power struggles for hegemony. These can be more or less explicit and express themselves, *inter alia*, in the distribution of resources (Bourdieu, 1991). In our case, the primary resources at stake are different types of knowledge, which makes the backstage of politics an ideal arena in

which to study the power–knowledge dynamic at the heart of Foucault’s concept of governmentality (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; Jäger and Maier, 2009). These knowledges manifest themselves in material and discursive practices and in forms of *knowing* that depend on context-specific agenda, necessities, interests and strategic intentions. Forms of power and knowledge and types of discourses, genres and texts are therefore dialectically linked to each other in the material, social and discursive practices that MEPs engage in. Thus critical ethnography allows documenting the daily struggles for power in which competing voices and interests come together in the negotiation, construction, implementation and eventual sedimentation of knowledge in the world of (EU) politics.

Knowledge-making struggles are operationalized through, and can only fully be understood by analysing, an extensive repertoire of linguistic and interpersonal strategies. A systematic analysis includes discursive strategies of positive self- and negative other presentation, rhetorical tropes (metaphors, metonymies, personifications), indirect pragmatic devices (insinuations, implicatures, presuppositions), sociolinguistic–discursive means (forms of address, pronouns, footing, and deixis) and argumentative strategies (*topoi*, fallacies and so forth). From the range of potentially relevant linguistic strategies, the necessarily selective analytical focus will depend on the *immediate context* (which is determined on the basis of the ‘four-level model of context’; see above). The linguistic repertoire is also, of course, inherently linked to specific genres in the field of politics, each serving important and quite specific functions in the backstage and frontstage. Thus it should be clear that an important part of being a successful politician implies acquiring effective and functionally appropriate linguistic and rhetorical knowledge, and genre competence (Scollon, 2008).

Moreover, as argued at the outset, politics and the media have always, to some degree, been interdependent: boundaries are blurred between entertainment and information, between private and public domains, between politicians and celebrities, between traditional media and new media and so forth (Wodak, 2009a, c, 2010). Like never before, people are networked together, communicating opinions and consuming information on a global basis, and at unprecedented speeds. In this way politics has become increasingly innovative, and a strategic understanding of the media and its effects is now an essential aspect of being a successful politician. This kind of political participation is, of course, dependent on affordable and easy access to the Internet and on computer literacy. Paradoxically, therefore, this form of ‘e–democracy’ is a mechanism both for increasing democratic participation and for reproducing forms of social inequality and exclusion.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 37.1 (below) provides a heuristic (and thus necessarily crude) summary of the theoretical cornerstones of ‘politics as usual’ (adapted from Wodak, 2009a: 192).

### Examples from European Union institutions – one day in the life of a MEP

In what follows, I analyse two brief episodes which occurred during one day in the life of an Austrian MEP – we name him Hans – a member of the Social–Democratic Party and an expert on matters related to trade unions and social affairs, to illustrate backstage activities of politicians (see Wodak, 2009a: 120ff. for the analysis of an entire day at the EP).

Hans wore a tiny microphone attached to his jacket and a tape-recorder in his pocket. He invited us to follow him to meetings inside and outside of the European Parliament, and to sit and observe when he spent time in his tiny office cubicle, preparing, phoning or talking to his personal assistant M or to other visitors and colleagues. Moreover, he frequently commented on the encounters and explained his behaviour towards other MEPs or elaborated on the statements he had made during a committee meeting. In this way we gained access to the many latent norms, functions and rules in the various communities of practice, to coded and shared knowledges, and to the otherwise inaccessible subtext of many conversations. To take a typical example, on 20 May

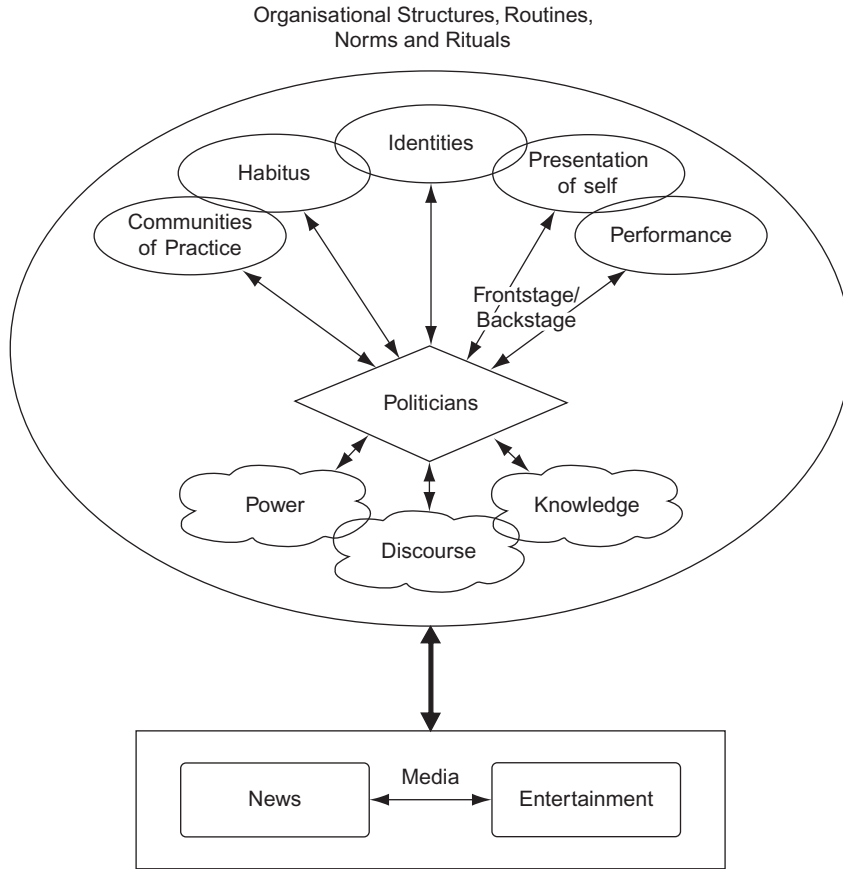


Figure 37.1 'Theoretical cornerstones of "politics as usual"'

2008, 17 different items from 6 standing committees (including the Committee on the Environment, Committee on Transport and Tourism, Committee on legal Affairs, and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs<sup>4</sup>) were discussed and put to motion in the plenary, starting at 9 am and scheduled to end at midnight. Of course, most MEPs do not primarily spend their days attending plenary debates; they only participate if their own agenda from the committees to which they belong are to be discussed. Otherwise they have their own schedules, which may periodically overlap with the official agenda or run in parallel. Below, when I present two episodes of having shadowed one MEP throughout his day, readers will encounter the many appointments and small meetings which typically 'overflow' the tight schedule that characterizes 'politics as usual' or – perhaps even more accurately – 'politics as business' or 'political business as usual'.

*Episode 1: Starting the day*

At 8 am, MEPs usually start their official day. Hans meets M in his small office (a cubicle with a desk, computer, a few book shelves, telephone, *in toto* about 8–10 square meters) for a quick briefing and organization of upcoming events. M has prepared all the relevant documents for the day and organized them neatly into specific folders. Hans mainly poses quick questions; the

dialogue takes on a staccato form; quick, often elliptic, and abrupt – thus rapid question and answer sequences conveying urgency and pressure. If we regard the whole day as an entire genre or activity, then this *orientation* in the morning would serve as introduction and overall structuring device and frame for all upcoming events:

## Text 1

- H: hey social security systems are included  
 M: I have already contacted (xxx)  
 H: We haven't received any answer yet (huh)?  
 M: no obviously I'm glad I sent that off  
 H: on Friday?  
 M: no no I sent it off last week - no Sunday I sent it  
 H: Sunday  
 M: yes  
 H: they're coming  
 M: Sunday the 14th of November  
 H: in fact they're coming again with the social security systems we would have needed that for today  
 M: no we don't have that

Text 1 offers an insight into the sort of rapid-fire exchange, relying on shared language and organizational knowledge, which is typical of an MEP and his/her personal assistant, impatiently chasing up on the whereabouts of some document or letter urgently needed for a committee meeting. In this exchange, both M and Hans have obviously forgotten on which day Hans' letter was actually sent off, and the inferred argument consists of the following sequence:

If the letter had already been sent off the previous week, then it is reasonable to expect that they should have had a response by now. If, however, the letter hadn't been sent until Sunday or Monday, then they can't really expect an answer yet. Hans' questions also imply an indirect accusation: that M might have sent the letter too late. In any case, it seems obvious that the response to this letter is crucial for a meeting on insurance and social security systems, for which Hans is now preparing. Hans emphasizes quite clearly that he needed this response to his letter, which – by analysing the various existential and counterfactual presuppositions – we can infer must have contained some salient information. Already in this brief sequence, we thus encounter the reliance on shared organizational knowledge and the overall responsibility of the personal assistant, who has to take the blame if something doesn't go according to plan.

In Text 2, the quick dialogue continues with a frame-shift: the search for the document ends because – as M reveals – he has found the relevant document. Hence, Hans and M start discussing and preparing the statement for the committee later on that day, and switch to a dense strategy debate about the wording of the statement: what to change, to amend, to include or delete, and so forth. At the same time, we encounter another frame and change of footing: the collegial, friendly relationship where Hans asks M to give him a cigarette (6). M complies but in a humorous way (7), with a joke. This brief interlude eases the tension by re/producing the good interpersonal relationship and by shifting, in line 10, to a discussion of content after the frantic search for the missing document.

## Text 2

1. H: that (would be) bad
2. uh
3. M: I have (xxxx) our paper there
4. H: oh you have (xxxx) our paper there too?

5. M: yes
6. H: (c'mon gimme one)
7. M: alright fine (because it's you)
8. H: do you have a (xxxxx)
9. M: no (a German)
10. H: what does a sixteen mean
11. M: for the ÖGB
12. H: okay
13. M: also, in the mean time I'm supposed to put his ethical work with your
14. H: yes
15. M: next to your hundredth
16. H: social clause on the WTO last paragraph
17. M: WTO social clause is in there?
18. H: yes (xxx social clause xxxxxxxx)
19. M: where where in here?
20. H: of course last paragraph
21. M: which last paragraph?
22. H: WTO social clause (xxxx) that belongs
23. M: where where?
24. H: yes
25. M: no not there in that paper there
26. H: in that (xx) paper
27. H: yes
28. M: in that one there?
29. H: yes
30. linguistic confusion
31. M: WTO social clause
32. H: yes there there WTO social clause
33. (can you remember)
34. M: yes oh yes yes yes yes yes yes
35. H: that's currently the established discussion
36. M: sub subsume
37. H: yes yes nobody understands it like this
38. if we don't add the social clause
39. ah, and the other part is naturally an awful exaggeration
40. M: a terrible one, as usual
41. H: but seriously
42. we can't do something like that I think we can't do that
43. this is really in width
44. it's like this so that I
45. (xxxxxxx give me)
46. M: hehehe
47. H: (I've) noted that there
48. but that's always the same
49. H: there's nothing useful there

This hectic and elliptical discussion continues for more than 20 minutes. Hans and M read through the draft statement together and stop at various points while questioning specific formulations that

Hans eventually labels ‘linguistic confusions’ and that could be interpreted as typical organizational ambiguities (30, 38, 42). The two of them support and acknowledge each other’s suggestions and comments through brief interjections and supportive comments (backchannels), or laughter (34, 47). The quick turn-taking illustrates the shared routines of their community of practice, and they do not interrupt each other but automatically sense when transition-relevant points occur, or when support is needed to reassure the other. The interaction also builds solidarity between the two, notably through jokes, allusions to shared experiences, elliptical comments and more generally through evaluative language. On the one hand, the document is defined as ‘useless’ (49), the ongoing discussion about social benefits and the WTO are believed to be totally ‘exaggerated’ (39), or even ‘terrible’ (40). The meta-comments and assessments oscillate between evaluating the committee, the ongoing debates themselves and particular parts, sentences or even words in the draft document. In line 32, Hans briefly checks if M still remembers the genesis of the discussion; after M asserts (33) that he indeed does share the same memories, their rapid exchange continues with highly truncated utterances, which presuppose much expert knowledge (existential presuppositions).

Finally, this part of the day comes to an end: the first appointment is scheduled for 9.15 am. M also informs Hans of a photo appointment at 12.45 pm, which becomes a prominent feature of this particular day because it has to be rescheduled several times, requiring the afternoon’s schedule to be repeatedly renegotiated. This final intimate exchange, involving the banter over the cigarette, is interpersonal talk that serves primarily as a transition and frame shift from the formal discussion of the draft document, onto the ‘time and organizational talk’ that they launch into while walking to their first official appointment.

### *Episode 2: Statement by Hans in the Committee for Social Affairs*

Hans rushes down the stairs and arrives just on time for his presentation to the Committee of Employment and Social Affairs. On the way, M hands him the documents they have just discussed. Hans now has to deliver his statement, which he just finished preparing half an hour ago and which he practised with M. Thus one can experience yet another frame shift, namely to Hans’ official performance and identity construction as the politically experienced social democratic Austrian MEP in this committee.

At this point I would like to emphasize that both Hans’ statement and his role in the committee illustrate clearly that MEPs actually ‘*do politics*’ during their day in very involved and engaged ways, drawing on their political, organizational and expert knowledges. Although many routines in such a large organization are necessarily bureaucratic, the essence remains political, albeit it shows in employing strategies and tactics to convince other MEPs of seemingly small aspects of larger issues. This fact relates well to the discussion about MEPs’ legal-rational authority. Their day is, of course, mostly filled with organizational and ritualized events; however, parts of their day are dedicated to a substantial political agenda: to formulating their positions, to working on resolutions and promoting their ideological agenda, to formulating a common understanding with party colleagues and so forth. Hence the profession of MEPs (or, more generally, of politicians) integrates ‘real’ political work and is not merely confined to public performances or media interviews on frontstage – even though these are also important constitutive symbolic elements in the construction and representation of politics in action (see Edelman, 1967).

In what follows I analyse the beginning of Hans’ statement, which manifests his official and public rhetoric as well as his ideological and political position on the EU enlargement proposed for 2004. In this case, the larger socio-political context relates to the debates on the costs and benefits of the proposed EU enlargement, the so-called ‘big bang’ 2004, where ten countries joined the EU. The Employment and Social Affairs Committee has to prepare a resolution and is currently

discussing a document, proposed by a group of political scientists and other experts, on the possible implications and consequences of enlargement. This resolution will be put forward to the commission if it is approved in the plenary session of the parliament. Hans is particularly concerned that the enlargement countries are not helped enough when creating and protecting their social institutions. Furthermore, Hans rejects the ‘myth’ that enlargement can take place at no additional cost to the union (*topoi* of burden and costs prevail). Hans quite openly criticizes the policy strategies of the commission and the member states as being unprofessional and inadequate and as failing to take into account the particular circumstances faced by Eastern European countries. Hans speaks German as German is one of the three official working languages adopted for the committee’s internal use. German is translated, for other members of the committee, into English and French; this necessarily implies that MEPs who have a different native language might be discriminated against when having to speak in a foreign language.

Text 3: Introduction, justification and critique of status quo, explicit declaration of intent  
 Given the statements’ function in presenting a MEP’s position on a strategic policy issue, the committee meeting statement is an inherently argumentative and persuasive genre, although one that has thus far not been systematically analysed.

uhm I am very thankful for this working paper of the (xxx) science directorate  
 we probably could have used that much earlier, for example when we began the  
 Eastern enlargement discussions on a parliamentary level....  
 in reality we would have had better management at the European level  
 then we could have like at the time of the single market  
 when we began with the single market concept [and] thoroughly discussed what the possibilities  
 [and] chances are then we could have xxx very very differently in terms of Eastern enlargement

At the beginning of this short statement Hans presupposes that everybody knows and has read the document he is referring to; he also presupposes that every committee member is well informed about the problems related to enlargement and about the many debates and decisions which have already taken place. He employs the discursive strategy of painting an ‘unreal scenario’ in the function of rhetorical contrast – ‘what would have happened if’ – in order to highlight how much better it would have been had the debate on management of the enlargement issue begun much earlier. He also refers intertextually to past debates on the ‘single market’, where he claims that better procedures had been used. By drawing on this as a *shared* past experience (‘when *we* began with ... and thoroughly discussed’) as a model of how things should have been done in relation to enlargement (*topos* of history), he is assuming not only that this event is shared knowledge but also that everybody agrees with his evaluation of it. The macro-argumentative strategy consists of a justification for missed opportunities and (in Hans’ view) obviously wrong decisions and policies. He shifts the blame onto the commission (a typical fallacy), which serves to unite the committee members and also relieves them of responsibility. In this way the introduction sets the ground for more detailed criticism and for some constructive proposals, which cannot be presented due to issues of space (see Wodak, 2009a: 126ff, 2011).

### Politics as usual: perspectives and limitations

Common sense presupposes that politicians are very well organized, in spite of the many urgent and important events they must deal with, which have an impact on all our lives. We all have cognitive models (*event models, experience models, context models*: van Dijk, 2008), which quickly and automatically update, perceive, comprehend and store such events. From this we might assume that politicians also routinely access their own set of cognitive models for ‘doing politics’ in order

to respond rapidly, in a rational and quite predictable way, to the various events they encounter.<sup>5</sup> However, this is in fact not the case: the everyday life of politicians is as much filled with accident, coincidence and unpredictability as it is filled with well-planned, strategic and rational action. Chaotic situations are a necessary feature of ‘politics as usual’; experienced politicians simply know how to cope with them better – thus there is ‘*order in the disorder*’ (Wodak, 1996, 2009a), established *inter alia* through routines, norms and rituals. Politicians have acquired strategies and tactics to pursue their agenda more or less successfully. The ‘success’ depends on their position in the field, on their power relations and, most importantly, on what I label *knowledge management*: much of what we perceive as disorder depends on inclusion in shared knowledge or exclusion from shared knowledge.

Shadowing one MEP, Hans, through his entire day provides some important answers to the questions posed above which, again, could be generalized to other political realms. Hans employs both strategic and tactical knowledge when trying to convince various audiences of his political agenda. These discursive strategies and tactics also structure his day, which might otherwise seem totally chaotic from the outside, or very ritualized and bureaucratic – oriented, for example, solely towards the drafting and redrafting of documents. Hans knows the ‘rules of the game’, he oscillates between a range of communities of practice in very well planned and strategic ways, he employs a wide range of genres suited to the immediate context in order to push his agenda, and thus possesses a whole repertoire of genres and modes which he applies in functionally adequate ways (see also Scollon, 2008: 128–137 for the range of multimodal modes employed in bureaucracies and political institutions).

In Hans’ case, different genres are used to convince members of various committees, other MEPs of various political parties, visitors and diverse audiences outside of the institution and ‘at home’ of his mission: in this particular case, to enable EU enlargement in a rational way; to be honest about the likely costs, however politically unpopular, and to support the social agenda and the trade unions in the accession countries. Hans’ entire day (and, of course, many following months) is dedicated to this mission, which he pursues in statements, written resolutions, conversations at lunch, lectures, and in the politics *du couloir* – as well as ‘at home’ (in his local community), when trying to convince his electorate and national political party. In this way Hans is an example of what I call a *small-scale policy entrepreneur*, one of many MEPs, all of whom are striving to push their various and very diverse agendas, with varying degrees of success.

In sum: *This, I argue, is how politics works; that is, how politicians work*. Hans, as a small-scale policy entrepreneur, does political work; however – as citizens are excluded from the backstage and the many communities of practice where Hans implements his strategies and pushes his agenda – these activities and practices remain invisible. Of course, this is not only the case for one MEP; this is generally true for the field of politics as a whole. To challenge the *democratic deficit*, at the very least, information about daily political work would need to be made more publicly accessible to a certain degree.

## Further reading

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 Wodak, R. (2009) *The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual* Basingstoke: Palgrave (second revised edition, 2011).



## Notes

- 1 E.g. Chilton, 2004; Reisigl, 2008a, b; Wodak, 2009a, b, 2010, 2011; Okulska and Cap, 2010.
- 2 E.g. Duranti, 2006; Wodak, 2009a.
- 3 At this point, I must introduce a *caveat*: integrated interdisciplinary frameworks (and the related research) bring a number of risks alongside the value they add. On the one hand, interdisciplinarity opens up new perspectives and allows for novel ideas and innovative approaches; on the other hand, one risks accusations of superficiality if viewed from narrow disciplinary perspectives. It is obvious that critical problem-oriented research in the social sciences is obliged to transcend disciplinary boundaries, because social phenomena themselves are highly complex and certainly cannot be explained by one discipline (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). For this reason, I have consulted extensively with experts in the relevant neighbouring fields, in order to bridge some of the inevitable knowledge gaps encountered by all interdisciplinary researchers.
- 4 See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+AGENDA+20080521+SIT+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN> (downloaded 1 May 2008).
- 5 Van Dijk (2008: 84) defines *experience* (or *event*) *models* as ‘a construction of what is relevant in the ongoing situation for the (inter) actions of the participants’. Moreover, van Dijk (p. 74) stresses that context is not something primarily ‘objective’; he maintains that ‘[s]ettings, participant roles or aims of communicative events are not relevant *as such*, but are *defined* as such by the participants themselves’. This is, of course, also relevant where actors, agency, their perceptions and expectations, i.e. their socialization into a *habitus* become salient.

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