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## A RELEVANCE-THEORETIC FRAMEWORK FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In relation to the present interest in discourse analysis this article aims to formulate a general theoretical framework for analyzing various types of discourse. The framework is based on the theory of relevance as one of the theories enabling thorough discourse analysis. The aspects of discourse taken into account range from analyzing explicatures and implicatures including a precise classification of the type of knowledge activated for the processes of metarepresentation and covert communication.

The unified framework for discourse analysis creates an ability to compare different types of discourse including comparison with everyday speech, which is the most neutral type of discourse. With such ability, different types of discourse can be compared with one another to discover more of their unique properties as well as interesting similarities.

### **1. Introduction**

The potential of the relevance theory enables a range of research into various types of discourse which could result in a greater project aiming at characterizing various types of discourse carried out within one theoretic framework. One of the clear advantages of such a project would be the possibility of comparing and contrasting different types of discourse or the same types of discourse but coming from different places or times since the descriptions of texts would be fully compatible. Such work could show general features of discourse as well as more specific characteristics and features of a particular discourse or even could serve as distinctive features of particular texts. Before such a project could be launched there needs to be a well defined set of methodological tools which applied in the same procedure to the various types of texts would produce the overall picture of the material analyzed. This paper aims at formulating a procedure together with the set of methodological tools based on the theory of relevance, giving at the same time an illustration of a political speech.

## 2. The Procedure

The procedure assumes that the type of discourse is chosen according to particular research needs and that the text is in the format of a written text. The analysis can be carried out at both the quantitative and qualitative level. Since the quantitative analysis is fairly straightforward the sections below concern the possible features of qualitative analysis. Some of the relevance theoretic terms have been specified in order for them to produce a conclusive and comprehensive discourse analysis.

## 3. Explicatures

Analyzing utterances starts with formulating **explicatures** which are the content of what is explicitly communicated, as determined by the availability principle (Recanati 1989, 1991). The principle resorts to common sense and states that decisions on what is explicitly communicated should conform to pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter. Therefore, the availability principle presupposes that what is said is available or accessible to the unsophisticated speaker or/and hearer, by their intuitions. The number of explicatures per one participant shows his/her status in the interaction; generally the greater the number of explicatures the higher the status. The length of explicature usually correlates with the complexity of the proposition expressed raising the processing effort, which, according to the principle of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1996), should give additional cognitive effects.

Another step in analysis within the explicature area is the **higher-level explicature** (Sperber and Wilson 1996) which is an explicature under which a lower-level representation is embedded. The speech act analysis involves higher-level explicatures, which indicate the type of the speech act performed. There are two general types of speech acts distinguished within the relevance framework: institutional and those containing *saying*, *telling* and *asking*. The latter correspond to related syntactic structures. For example, an imperative utterance is analysed as having the following higher-level explicature: “The speaker is telling the hearer to P”, where P is a desirable states of affairs. The type of and the number of higher-level explicatures can also show considerable difference for example, between different texts of the same type of discourse (e.g. the election programmes of two different political parties).

Formulating explicatures involve a number of pragmatic processes such as disambiguation, reference assignment, vague term specification, free enrichment and *ad hoc* concept construction. Processes of decoding are used to recover disambiguation hypotheses, which are then evaluated inferentially. **Disambiguation** concerns cases where there is lexical or structural ambiguity. Similarly, hypotheses about intended referents of **referring expressions** are not recovered by decoding only. The hearer has to consider the immediate context to check whether there is a referent, which would yield a propositional form consistent with the principle of relevance. If it is not the case, the hearer has to extend the context and repeat the procedure (Sperber and Wilson 1996).

There are cases in which reference assignment and disambiguation do not result in forming a complete semantic representation. In such cases, a semantic representation has to be enriched by inferential processes. This is usually triggered by the presence of semantically incomplete or manifestly **vague terms**. The hearer has to find the first accessible enrichment, which would give an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance. Vague term specification makes a concept more specific.

**Free enrichment**, which is unarticulated constituent construction, is a pragmatic process involved in the very determination of what is explicitly communicated. The process is not linguistically triggered but arises from the very fact of uttering a sentence in a given context and a search for its relevance in this context. Free enrichment involves introducing an unarticulated constituent and is a top-down process.

The following exchange shows this:

1. A: Are you hungry?  
B: I've had a very large breakfast.

(Recanati 2000:12)

In B's answer, there is no constituent, which corresponds to time specification. The conclusion that the breakfast was eaten on the day of the utterance is not linguistically controlled and results from free enrichment. The process is triggered by the fact that the sentence is meant as an answer to A's question about B's present state of hunger.

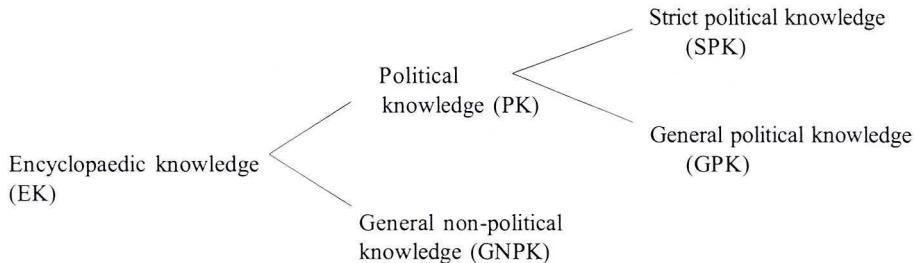
The processes involved in explicature derivation can be made specific for the discourse analysis so that the analysis is amenable and conclusive. **Reference assignment**, which does not require free enrichment (i.e. adding new concepts), is regarded as reference assignment, and when it does require free enrichment it counts as free enrichment, since the process is more costly, i.e. effort consuming.

**Ad hoc concept construction** (Sperber and Wilson 1998) involves concepts constructed from lexically encoded concepts that are present in the logical form, which undergoes a process of pragmatic adjustment. The adjustment bridges the gap between a particular concept encoded by a lexical item and the concept, which is inferentially communicated. The process may involve narrowing, loosening or a combination of the two or, alternatively, the denotation of the lexical item may overlap in some respects with the denotation of the concept communicated (Carston 2002).

The analysis (Rut-Kluz 2005) shows that a mechanical application of the tools as they come from the relevance theory alone provides a general (though at times fragmentary) description of political speech. The pragmatic processes (i.e. reference assignment, disambiguation, vague term specification, free enrichment and *ad hoc* concept construction) delivering explicatures of utterances are specified so that it is possible to conclude which utterances are more effort consuming. Recovering explicatures for a given utterance means going through a number of pragmatic processes. Each of the processes concerns a number of concepts that need to be activated. In the qualitative analysis, the aspect that needs to be closely attended to is the character of the concepts that is the type of **encyclopaedic knowledge** they are rooted in. In order to distinguish between various discourse types it is essential to be able to identify various categories of encyclopaedic knowledge the concepts are rooted in. Further classification, within one type of encyclopaedic knowledge, can be based on the estimated cogni-

tive effort that the hearer needs to take to retrieve the concept. Subsequently, the detailed classification of encyclopaedic knowledge is able to relate the type of concepts used by the participants to the amount of effort they consume, which finally influences the relevance of the whole utterance.

The encyclopaedic knowledge that is activated in the course of recovering explicatures for the political programmes interpretation can be as follows;



Encyclopaedic knowledge can range from strict political knowledge on the one hand and general non-political knowledge on the other. Encyclopaedic knowledge is divided into political and general non-political knowledge; political knowledge has been also further divided into strict political knowledge and general political knowledge. Strict political knowledge includes (particular) past political situations and their recent developments, general political knowledge labels general knowledge, naturally containing, as its part, political information, which is then activated. General political knowledge primarily includes the knowledge about the general political situation together with the knowledge about the way a political system works. Finally, general non-political knowledge is general knowledge with no political information activated.

#### 4. Implicatures

Most of the explicatures can be interpreted further as implicating some information. Information implicated is determined by the Availability Principle and the Scope Principle (Recanati 1989, 1991), the latter requires that an implicature should not fall within the scope of logical operators. Therefore if a pragmatically determined aspect of an utterance does fall within the scope of logical operators (such as negation and conditional), then it is part of what is explicitly communicated rather than of what is implicated.

Also Carston's Functional Independence principle (Carston 1995: 467; weak version) is used. It says that an implicature should not entail the proposition expressed in the explicature as the proposition expressed by an utterance and its implicatures play independent roles in the hearer's inferential processing<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is aware of the ongoing discussion over the explicature/implicature distinction. However, it is not within the scope of the present paper to engage in the argument since the terms will be used in their form presented by Sperber and Wilson (1986/95).

**Implicated premises** are contextual assumptions intended by the speaker. They are supplied by the hearer, who either retrieves them from memory or constructs them using assumption schema. They stand equally well on new or old information. In the former case, they come from perception (including linguistic decoding); in the latter, they come from encyclopaedic entries or from deduction. Before entering the deductive device, they are assigned a confirmation value. They surface as implicatures in an interpretation consistent with the Principle of Relevance.

For the purpose of discourse analysis, the following three types of implicated premises are specified: general context premises, immediate context premises and situational context premises. The **general context premises** are constructed with the use of the content coming from the activation of the encyclopaedic entries in long-term memory. Such entries include all types of knowledge and personal experience. The **immediate context premises** are rooted in the context coming from previously said utterances. Finally, the **situational context premises** are based on the assumptions constructed with the use of the content coming from what happens during the conversation that is the mutual cognitive environment. **Implicated conclusions** are deducible from the premises (entering the deductive device) and the context. Implicated conclusions following from the application of an analytical rule and inherit the strength of the premise. In the case of the application of a synthetic rule, they inherit the strength of the weakest premise used in the deduction process. Implicated conclusions become implicatures when they are intended by the speaker to be derived by the hearer (Sperber and Wilson 1986).

For the discourse analysis, the continuum of implicatures can be divided into three parts dealing with strong implicatures, middle implicatures and weak implicatures. **Strong implicatures** are always speaker intended, if a given utterance gains its relevance by virtue of the strong implicature. **Middle implicatures** are partially speaker intended but there is some responsibility on the hearer for recovering them. The relevance of an utterance giving rise to them hinges less on the implicatures as it comes partially from the explicature and partially from the implicature. Finally, in the case of **weak implicatures**, the relevance is obtained with hardly any help from implicatures and here the hearer bears sole responsibility for their recovery (even though they are treated by the hearer as intended by the speaker). **Inferences** (cf. Thomas 1995) are also derived but they are not communicative as they are not intended by the speaker and constitute the sole responsibility of the hearer.

## 5. Metarepresentation

**Metarepresentation** is lower-order representation (i.e. public representation: an utterance, mental representation: a thought and abstract representation; a sentence or a proposition) embedded in the higher-order representation (i.e. an utterance or a thought). (Wilson 1969)

**Verbal irony** is a metarepresentative utterance resembling interpretively another utterance or a thought by means of echoing it. The speaker dissociates herself from the opinion echoed.

**Metalinguistic negation** (Carston 1994) is a negative utterance, which has in the scope of its negation operator a representation used echoically.

**Reported Speech** is an interpretive utterance, which represents another utterance. (Sperber and Wilson 1996)

## 6. Other devices

Discourse includes various stylistic devices, which in relevance-theoretic analysis are interpreted in the form of implications. **Non literal talk** (or loose talk, Sperber and Wilson 1986) is a broad term; nearly all utterances are non-literal to some degree as every utterance interpretively resembles the thought that the speaker wants to communicate. Interpretive resemblance is the extent to which two propositions share their analytic and contextual implications in a given context. Literal talk is a special, extreme case of interpretive resemblance consisting in the identity of analytic and contextual implications of two utterances or a thought and an utterance expressing this thought.

In order to comprehend the tropes; **metaphor**, **metonymy**, **synecdoche** the hearer has to determine the level of interpretive resemblance between the utterance and the thought of the speaker. The speaker, on the other hand, assumes that the hearer can get to the intended contextual effects and disregards the unintended ones. The utterances containing tropes gain relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures. The wider the range, the weaker the implicatures and the greater the hearer's responsibility for their arising.

**Simile** is a traditional approach and is accepted here i.e. simile is understood and is overtly marked by such language means as *like*, *such as*, *as*.

The interpretation of an utterance with a **repetition** naturally involves the extra processing effort induced by processing the repeated material, which is rewarded by extra contextual effects, which maybe one of the following three; strengthening the explicature and/or evoking strong implicatures or evoking a wide array of weak implicatures.

**Poetic effects** are achieved by a wide array of weak implicatures which do not add new assumptions to the mutual environment but which create common impressions rather than common knowledge.

All the concepts involving stylistic devices can be interpreted from the point of view of types of encyclopaedic knowledge showing what kind of information is conveyed by means of the devices. Such a methodological tool brings interesting contrasts between different texts of the same type of discourse (e.g. texts of different political parties).

## 7. Principle of relevance

Relevance is mainly understood as the relevance of an individual utterance in a given context. However, we can talk about two types of relevance; the immediate relevance

and overall/global relevance. **Immediate relevance** is the relevance of an individual utterance to the hearer consisting in the cognitive effects following from the utterance. **Overall / Global Relevance** (Kitis 1999) is the relevance to the hearer of a longer text or discourse. The general cognitive effects following from interpreting a large discourse unit. **Truthfulness** of verbal communication is not based on the expectation of truthfulness but on the expectation of relevance. However, an utterance is relevant if it is true. (Wilson and Sperber 2000)

## 8. Covert communication

**Covert communication** (Tanaka 1994) arises when the speaker uses some cognitive or rhetorical devices in order to influence the hearer without making it mutually manifest that he is doing so. In the case of a political speech used in an election campaign it is for example stating the number of the voting list of a given party without overtly saying “vote for us”. It is possible that if asked, the party would say that they were just informing the electorate of the number of their voting list and would deny it was a form of encouragement to vote for their candidate.

## 9. Sample analysis

The sample qualitative analysis aims only at presenting the very technicalities of the process. It was conducted on material coming from the 1998 Polish government election campaign broadcast on television. The programmes have the format of a friendly conversation between the hosts of the programme and the invited guest – a politician of a given political party.

In order to make the analysis amenable the particular processes contributing to explicature construction are applied to utterances only when they are definitely needed for recovering their explicatures.

### Abbreviations

(S) – A strong implicature	[gk] – premise coming from general knowledge
(M) – A middle implicature	[ic] – premise coming from immediate context
(W) – A weak implicature	[sc] – premise coming from situational context

### Akcia Wyborcza Solidarność (Solidarity Election Action)

**Jacek Janiszewski:** “Diagnozujemy sytuację, to znaczy widać wyraźnie że zwolnienie z ceł w latach 95–96 spowodowało | dużą ilość importu, między innymi zboża ale i innych produktów rolniczych do Polski | które zdestabilizowały rynek rolny w Polsce do tego padło bardzo wiele firm które | były tym zaskoczone a podejmowały od kilku lat skup.”

Jacek Janiszewski: We are diagnosing the situation, that is it is easily visible that duty exemption in the years 95–96 caused | a greater importation of, amongst other things

crops but also other agricultural products to Poland | which destabilized the agricultural market in Poland and what is more a lot of businesses have failed who were | surprised by this and had been purchasing the crops for several years.

### *1. Explicature*

The ministry civil servants examined the agricultural situation and it showed that duty exemption for the businesses concerned in the years 95-96 caused greater imports, of crops and other agricultural products to Poland than in previous years. This had the effect of destabilizing the market, which was unfavourable for the agricultural market in Poland. What is more a lot of businesses which were purchasing the crops were forced into bankruptcy because the management of the businesses was surprised by the destabilization of the agricultural market in Poland.

#### 1.1. *Ad hoc concepts*

***zwolnienie z cel*** (duty exemption) – the duty exemption for the businesses concerned

***bardzo wiele firm które były, tym zaskoczone*** (a lot of businesses which were, surprised by that) – management of the businesses was surprised

#### 1.2. Free Enrichment

***Dużq*** (great) – greater than in previous years

#### 1.3. Reference assignment

***To*** (This) – the destabilization of the agricultural market in Poland

#### 1.4. Disambiguation

#### 1.5. Vague term specification

***Zdestabilizowały*** (destabilising) – which was unfavourable for

***Padło*** (have failed) – bankrupted

### *2. Implicature*

#### 2.1. Implicated premises

– Duty exemption introduced by a previous government caused a greater import of crops, and it was wrong to do so [ic]

#### 2.2. Implicated conclusions

The previous government took up a wrong agricultural policy (S)

### *3. Other Devices*

#### 3.1. Non-Literal talk

##### 3.1.1. Loose talk

3.1.2. Metaphor: ***padło bardzo wiele firm*** (lot of businesses have failed)

– lot of businesses were forced into bankruptcy

***Diagnozujemy sytuację*** (we are diagnosing the situation) – The ministry civil servants examined the agricultural situation

***import produktów rolnicznych do Polski | które zdestabilizowały rynek*** (import of agriculture products to

Poland | which destabilised the market) – which had unfavourable influence on the market

Metonymy: ***firm które były, tym zaskoczone*** (businesses were surprised) – the management was surprised

- 3.1.3. Similes
- 3.1.4. Repetition
- 3.1.5. Poetic effects

### Unia Wolności (Union of Freedom)

**Juliusz Braun (B):** To właściwie jest temat który dotyczy raczej telewizji niż kultury bo tak naprawdę to tam więcej ciekawych rzeczy w kulturze się dzieje tylko, no kamera tam nie dociera | i to i to jest inny temat.

Juliusz Braun: This is actually a subject concerning television rather than culture because in fact | the smaller the city, the smaller the place the more interesting things are happening culture-wise the problem is, that the camera doesn't reach it | and this and this is a different topic.

#### 1. Explicature

B – the fact that local culture is not presented on TV is actually a subject concerning television rather than culture because in fact | the smaller the city, the smaller the place the more interesting, in the opinion of B, things are happening culture-wise the problem is, that the events are not broadcast on TV | and the fact that the local culture is not presented on TV is a different topic.

- 1.1. *Ad hoc* concepts
- 1.2. Free Enrichment  
***kamera tam nie dociera*** (camera doesn't reach it) – the events are not broadcast on TV
- 1.3. Reference assignment ***więcej*** more interesting  
***To*** (This) – the fact that the local culture is not presented on TV
- 1.4. Disambiguation
- 1.5. Vague term specification  
***więcej ciekawych*** (more interesting) – interesting in the opinion of B

#### 2. Implicature

- 2.1. Implicated premises  
– If something interesting is happening it should be shared among as many people as possible [ic]
- 2.2. Implicated conclusions

According to B local culture should be shared among as many people as possible (M)

### 3. Other Devices

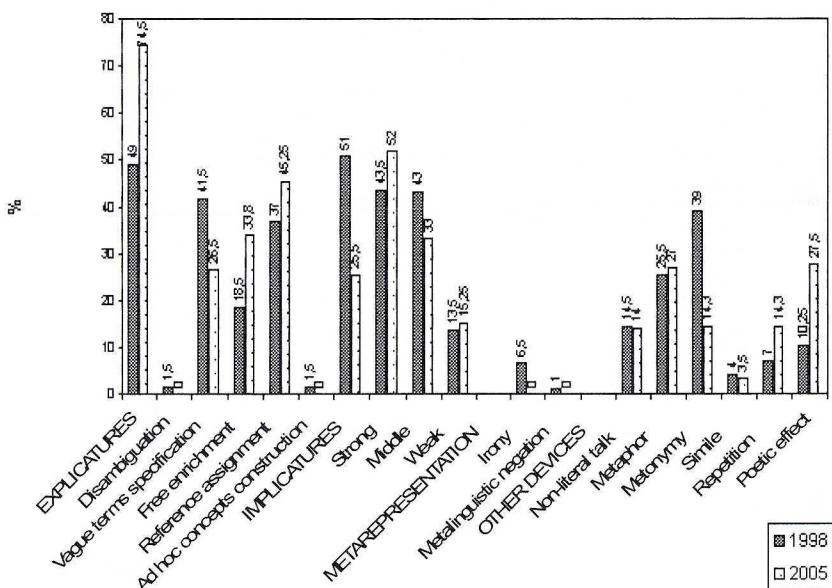
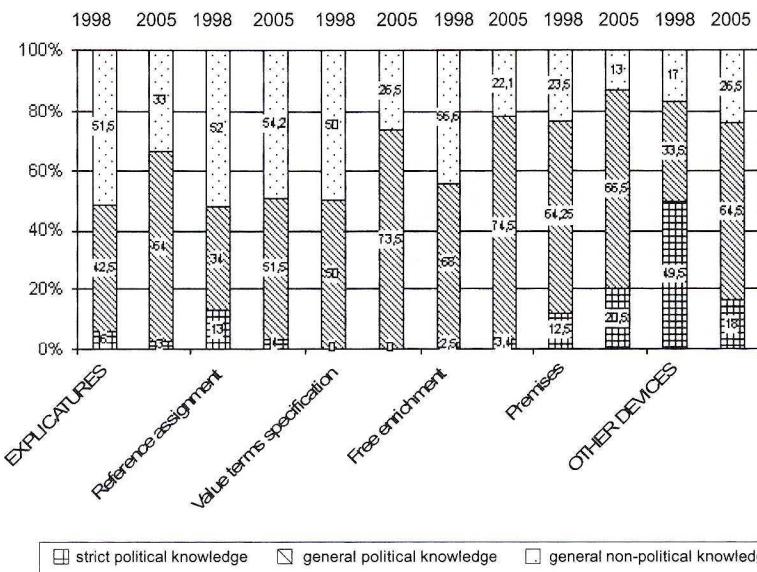
- 3.1. Non-Literal talk
  - 3.1.1. Loose talk
  - 3.1.2. Metaphor
    - Metonymy: *kamera tam nie dociera* (camera doesn't reach it) – the broadcasting on TV
  - 3.1.3. Similes
  - 3.1.4. Repetition
    - im mniejsze miasto, im mniejsza miejscowości* (the smaller the city, the smaller the place)
  - 3.1.5. Poetic effects

Applying the relevance-theoretic methodology together with detailed classification of encyclopaedic knowledge and a few other modifications (types of implicatures and premises) enables us to trace the evolution of political campaign programmes broadcast on television. Table 1 and Table 2 show the results coming from analysis of political speech material coming from the local government elections in 1998 and parliamentary elections in 2005 in Poland. In each of the election campaigns texts of two leading parties were analysed and the results were merged into one result to enable comparison between the two election campaigns.

## 10. Conclusions

It would appear that there are several changes that can be observed in the political discourse. One concerns the content of the utterances, which is manifested by the type of encyclopaedic knowledge activated for concepts involved in explicature construction. Here we can see a move away from the concepts rooted in the strict political knowledge towards ones rooted in general knowledge. This may indicate that the political discourse is becoming more general and does not descend deeply into the political problems of the country. This may be related to the fact that the concepts involving general knowledge are easier to retrieve for the hearers so the effort is lower, which in effect raises the relevance level of the messages conveyed. For implicature construction, concepts rooted in the strict political knowledge are more dominant, which seems to suggest that more of the political meaning is now implicated.

There is also a substantial change in the proportion of explicatures to implicatures that can be observed over the years. In the material from 1998, the proportion was almost equal with a slightly greater number of implicatures; in the material of 2005, the number of explicatures is almost three times the number of implicatures. Now, less is implicated, the majority of meaning is rendered explicitly. One of the reasons for this may be that the programmes of 2005 are carefully edited and they seem no longer to include discourse of people speaking spontaneously but the utterances seem in some cases, to be learnt by heart. Therefore, outside the interview format there seems to be little space for implicatures in political speech.

**Table 1: Quantitative analysis****Table 2: Qualitative analysis**

The results of the analysis point to three main changes, which can be observed in the political speech material analysed. First, the content is less effort consuming which is seen in the reduced deductive effort of shorter less complex explicatures and less political knowledge required. The second change concerns the methods used by the parties to fight the other parties. Politicians use more of the strong implicatures, more of the rhetorical devices like repetition, poetic effect and the new method of using the mane of the party in different forms in the discourse. Finally, the discussion seems to be more to the point, which means that the politicians use less vague terms and less non-political matters are mentioned.

The reasons that motivate the changes in political speech seem to be twofold. On the one hand, the politicians try to squeeze as much as possible of the content they want to convey. But on the other hand, the form is made to suit an average viewer who may not be necessarily motivated to watch the whole programme. Therefore, the programmes are given a form that would hold the attention of the viewers, and stop them from changing the channel.

As far as the Theory of Relevance is concerned it can be concluded that its methodology provided an analysis of change of political discourse of the specific kind found in the election campaign programmes broadcast on television. It has to be noticed though, that some of the tools have been modified in order to better perform the task and produce more conclusive results. The adjustments helpful in grasping the change of the political discourse include the type of knowledge activated for concepts involved in explicature and implicature construction and in interpretation of special effects. It seems however, that the adjustments of the type of knowledge activated taken a little further would result in an even more precise picture of the changes in the political discourse.

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