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COMPARING POLITICAL SPEECH AND GENERAL CONVERSATION WITHIN THE THEORY OF RELEVANCE

The aim of the present paper is to check whether the theory of relevance possesses sufficient explanatory power to describe political speech and to distinguish political speech from general conversation. Moreover, it is intended to differentiate between two types of rhetoric of two political parties.

The paper consists of five sections. The first section provides a brief summary of that part of the theory of relevance which is essential for the conducted analysis. The second section describes the data analysed in the present paper, whereas the third presents sample analyses of the data. Two final sections of the article deal with conclusions; the fourth section presents conclusions based on the analysis of the whole corpus, whereas the fifth section features overall conclusions as regards the explanatory power of the theory of relevance.

Theoretical preliminaries

Within the relevance framework (Sperber and Wilson (1996)) processing a stimulus starts in peripheral input system where a string of sounds is automatically decoded into a logical form. Logical form is an ordered set of concepts forming an assumption or an assumption schema.

The concepts give access to three types of entries: lexical, logical and encyclopaedic. Lexical entry provides information about the natural language counterpart of the concept. Logical entry consists of a set of deductive rules, which apply to logical forms of which that concept is a constituent. Encyclopaedic entry stores information about the extension and/or denotation of the given concept. The entries in turn give rise to two types of implications.

Analytic implications serve to understand what is said and are of no interest for the present analysis. Synthetic implications are called contextual implications and are defined in the following way:

> [...] a set of assumptions P contextually implies an assumption Q in the context C if and only if
>
> (i)   the union of P and C non-trivially implies Q,
> (ii)   P does not non-trivially imply Q,
> (iii)   C does not non-trivially imply Q.
>   (Sperber and Wilson 1996:107–108)

In the course of the inference hearer has to supply implicated premises by either retrieving them from memory or constructing them using assumption schemas. Finally, the hearer deduces implicated conclusions from explicature of an utterance and the context, which is provided by implicated premises. The deductive processes follow two basic deductive rules:

> *Modus ponendo ponens* – Input: (i) P
> (ii) if P then Q
> Output: Q
> Modus *tollendo ponens* – Input: (i) (P or Q)
> (ii) (not Q)
> Output: P
> (Sperber and Wilson 1996:87)

Sperber and Wilson (1986) propose their own account of the inference process, where deduction plays crucial role in the recovery of implicatures. No implicature can be deduced from the explicit content of the utterance alone, therefore background knowledge is indispensable. Since premises are essential part of implicature derivation it is important to show the grounds for selecting the appropriate premises for the deduction process and evaluation of the potential conclusions.

The principle of relevance presupposes that an utterance addressed to someone automatically conveys a presumption of its own relevance. Presumption of relevance comprises: presumption of adequate cognitive effect and presumption of minimally necessary processing effort.

Special effects of an utterance are specified as follows: utterance achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures.

Authors (Sperber and Wilson (1988)) point out that firstly, utterances and the thoughts they represent are not always identical to their propositional form and attitude (e.g. in loose talk and metaphor). Secondly, thoughts do not always represent states of affairs, they may represent other thoughts (e.g. in irony and interrogatives). To account for the cases the authors introduce the notion of interpretative resemblance, which is defined as follows:

In context {C} a proposition P may have contextual implications. Two propositions P and Q (and, by extension, two representations with P and Q as their propositional content) interpretatively resemble one another in a context {C} to the extent that they share their analytic and contextual implications in the context {C}. (Sperber and Wilson 1986:542)

Interpretative resemblance (Sperber and Wilson (1986)) is a comparative notion since each case can be put on a scale from no resemblance at all, (no shared implications), to full propositional identity. If two representations are identical in their propositional content and consequently share all their analytic implications, therefore they also share all their contextual implicatures in every context. Any utterance (Sperber and Wilson (1981)) which interpretatively represents a thought, and also conveys an expression of an attitude, is called an echoic utterance.

Data

The data used for the present analysis consist of two types: political speech corpora and a general conversation corpus, both in Polish. The corpora of political speech were recorded during the first and second day of media campaign for the local government election in Poland in 1998. It consists of programmes of two political parties; each lasts 5 minutes but they contain different number of words. Solidarity Election Action (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność), henceforth AWS, in its first programme has 530 words and in the second 479; and Union of Freedom (Unia Wolności), henceforth UW, 706 and 704 respectively. The difference in word number is due to short mute cartoons incorporated into AWS programmes.

The general conversation corpus was recorded during a social gathering of four people at the author's house on 05.09.1999. It consists of 2266 words and lasts 13 minutes. In order to increase the authenticity of the material the participants were not informed about the recording.

The two types of the data are fully comparable in length and content. All the four political programmes have a form of an interview in which at least three people take part. The context for political speech corpus contains: bills passed to start the reforms and the election, protests of communities. Most importantly, it also comprises important party actions and economic issues connected with the reform, which introduced new administrative division, (which, in turn, required the local government election). The context for general conversation includes the immediate physical context and basic characteristics of the participants.

Sample analysis

In the course of the analysis six elements were taken into account: (i) implications, (ii) special linguistic means, (iii) forms of address, (iv) style and register, (v) relations between participants and (vi) general construction.

In the sample analysis section of the article both corpora (political speech and general conversation) are analysed.

– AWS –

Abbreviations:
L – Krzysztof Luft (host, AWS)
J – Jacek Janiszewski (guest, AWS)
Word | word – longer pause

EK – encyclopaedic knowledge – what comes from the activation of the encyclopaedic entries for concepts anchored in the given utterance.

GK – general knowledge – what comes from the activation of the encyclopaedic entries for concepts not anchored in the given utterance.

LK – logical knowledge – what comes from the activation of the logical entry for concepts anchored in the given utterance.

Lex. K – lexical knowledge – what comes from the activation of the lexical entry for concepts anchored in the given utterance.

L – Panie ministrze za nami jest alfabet, w każdym alfabecie jest również litera R jak rolnictwo czy jak reformy...
L – literally, *Mister, minister behind us is alphabet, in every alphabet is also letter R as 'agriculture' or as 'reforms'...*

(i)   IMPLICATIONS
Implicated premises:
      1.   If something is alphabet, then it is basic. (GK/EK)
      2.   It is *alfabet* (an alphabet).
Implicated conclusion: It is basic.

      1.   If something is basic, then it is very important. (LK/EK)
      2.   It is basic.
Implicated conclusion: It is very important.

      1.   If something is a letter *R*, then it is a part of an alphabet. (EK)
      2.   It is a letter *R*.
Implicated conclusion: It is a part of alphabet.

1. If X is *jak* (as) Y, then X and Y have some common features. (GK)
2. X is like Y.

Implicated conclusion: X and Y have some common features.

Contextual implication: Agriculture and reforms are basic, therefore very important.

(ii)   SPECIAL LINGUISTIC MEANS

Implicated premise: If someone says that X is *jak* (as) Y, then he uses a simile. (GK)

L says that *R* is like agriculture or like reforms.

Implicated conclusion: L uses a simile.

(iii) FORMS OF ADDRESS

Implicated premise: If someone is called *panie ministrze* ("mister, minister"), then he is treated formally and his status is stressed. (Lex. K/EK)

Implicated conclusion: J is treated formally and his status is stressed.

(iv)   STYLE AND REGISTER

Implicated premise: If someone addresses a minister *panie ministrze* – vocative case form ("mister, minister"), then he uses formal style. (Lex. K/EK)

Implicated conclusion: L uses formal style.

(v)   RELATION AMONG PARTICIPANTS AND *GENERAL CONSTRUCTION*

The two parts of the analysis cannot be carried out on the sample utterance since their nature requires a complete interview for analysis.

– UW –

Abbreviations:
    A – Andrzej Potocki (host, UW)

A – A naszym specjalnym gościem dzisiaj | jest | pan Juliusz Braun, który przez wiele kadencji jako poseł przewodniczący komisji kultury dbał o to by w każdym mieście i w każdej gminie wszystkie inicjatywy które na to zasługują | znajdowały właściwe wsparcie i właściwe miejsce w lokalnej kulturze.

A – literally, *And our special guest today is | Mr. Juliusz Braun who through many terms of office as an MP | the chairman of the Culture Committee | saw to it that in every town and in every district all initiatives which deserve it, found the right support and the right place in the local culture.*

(i) IMPLICATIONS
Implicated premises:
1. If somebody is *specjalny gość* (literally, "special guest"), then he is somebody important. (EK)
2. If somebody is a *poseł* (literally, "an MP"), then he is somebody who has some privileges and enough money. (GK)
3. If one was *przewodniczący komisji kultury* (literally, "the chairman of the Culture Committee"), then he should know at least problems of culture. (GK)
4. If somebody *dbał* (literally, "saw to") something, then he worked to ensure progress of it. (EK)
5. If something is done *w każdym mieście i w każdej gminie* (literally, "in every town and in every district"), then it is done everywhere in Poland. (GK)
6. Both towns and districts cover the administrative division of Poland. (external context)
7. If somebody did something everywhere in Poland, then it is more than it was possible. (GK)
8. If somebody says he did more than it was possible, it is a hyperbole. (GK)
9. If somebody cares for *wszystkie* (literally, "all") deserving initiatives, then he cares for every cultural initiative that deserves caring for. (LK)
10. If every, then without any exception. (LK)
11. One cannot care for every cultural initiative that deserves caring for. (GK)
12. If somebody says he did more than it was possible, it is a hyperbole. (GK)
13. If somebody cares for *właściwe* (literally, "the right") support and place of something, then he cares for the right help and attention for something. (LK)

Contextual implications: we are going to talk to somebody special, somebody who has enough money and who should know the problems of culture, and somebody who greatly helped culture to develop.

(ii) SPECIAL LINGUISTIC MEANS
In the sample utterance there are two hyperbolas (*in every town and in every district* and *the right support and the right place*). The second example of hyperbole is also an instance of repetition of structure, which is used for emphasis. The expression is also an instance of loose talk or vagueness since it is highly subjective what is or is not *the right support* or *place*.

(iii) FORMS OF ADDRESS
Implicated premise: If an MP is called *pan* (literally, "mister"), then he is not treated formally. (Lex. K/EK)
Implicated conclusion: B is not treated formally.
(iv) STYLE AND REGISTER

Implicated premise: If someone says *specjalny* (literally, "special"), then he uses
consultative style. (Lex. K/EK)
Implicated conclusion: A uses consultative style.

(iv) RELATIONS AMONG PARTICIPANTS and GENERAL CONSTRUCTION
The two parts of the analysis cannot be carried out on the sample utterance since
their nature requires a complete interview for analysis.

– General Conversation –

Abbreviations:
P – Guest, woman, aged 25, in her last years of archaeology studies in Warsaw,
    engaged to B, attended primary school with D.
B – Guest, man, aged 25, graduated form Rzeszów Polytechnic, engaged with P.
T – Host, man, aged 25, graduated form Rzeszów Polytechnic, husband of D.

(1) **T – trafiliście nie pomyliliście się**
   T – literally did you get here, didn't you wonder
(2) **B – a dlaczego mielibyśmy się pomylić**
   B – why should we wonder
(3) **T – przez, przez te przez tą kostkę**
   T – because, because that, because this new pavement
(4) **P – nie, nie bo mi D mówiła że kostka jest układana**
   P – no, no because D said that the new pavement is laid
(5) **B – a wy myśleliście że my tam na koniec poszliśmy**
   B – and you thought that we went there till the end

(i) *IMPLICATED PREMISES TO INDIVIDUAL UTTERANCES:*

Implicated premises to utterance (1):
1. If the host asks whether the guests got to the host's house without problems,
   then the guests are in the host's house for the first time. (GK)
2. The guests are NOT in the host's house for the first time. (context)
3. If the host asks about problems, then there must be some other factors that
   made getting to the host's house difficult.
Implicated conclusion:
There are some other factors that made getting to the host's house difficult.
Implicated premises:
1. If the old pavement is replaced with the new one, it is a new element of
   environment, which could make getting to the host's house difficult. (GK)

2. If T is sane, then he does not believe that new pavement can make getting to his house difficult. (GK)

3. T is sane.

Implicated conclusion: T does not believe that new pavement can make getting to his house difficult.

Implicated premises:

1. If T does not believe that new pavement can make getting to his house difficult, then he must be asking about something else. (GK)

2. T does not believe that new pavement can make getting to his house difficult.

Implicated conclusion: T must be asking about something else.

Implicated premises:

1. If somebody gets something new, he wants it to be noticed. (GK)

2. T got a new pavement.

Implicated conclusion: T wants the new pavement to be noticed.

Implicated premises to utterance (2):

1. If B is not commenting on the new pavement, then he has not derived the contextual implication from T's previous utterance. (GK)

2. B is not commenting on the new pavement.

Implicated conclusion: B has not derived the implicature from T's previous utterance.

Implicated premises to utterance (3):

1. If the hearer has not derived the contextual implication, then the speaker should make it possible for the hearer to derive it. (GK)

2. B has not derived the implicature from T's previous utterance.

Implicated conclusion: T makes it possible for B to derive the contextual implication.

Implicated premises to utterance (4):

1. If somebody has been informed about something new, then he is not surprised to find it later. (GK)

2. P and B have been informed that the pavement is being changed.

Implicated conclusion: P and B are not surprised to find that the pavement is being changed.

1. If something is known, it is not verbally noticed. (GK)

2. P and B knew about the new pavement.

Implicated conclusion: P and B do not verbally notice the new pavement.

Implicated premises to utterance (5):

1. If X echoes Y's thought dissociating himself from the opinion echoed, then Y is using irony. (GK)

2. B echoes T's thought about B and P's getting lost dissociating himself from the opinion echoed.

<u>Implicated conclusion</u>: B uses irony.

(ii) *SPECIAL LINGUISTIC MEANS*
In the general conversation sample analysis there is an instance of indirect speech (*did you get here, didn't you wonder*), irony (*and you thought that we went there till the end)*, ellipsis (*till the end*) and repetition (*because, because that, because this*).

(iii) *FORMS OF ADDRESS*
In the sample analysis the form *you* is used.

(iv) *STYLE AND REGISTER*
<u>Implicated premise</u>: If someone says *trafiliście* (literally, "get here"), then he uses colloquial style. (Lex. K/EK)
<u>Implicated conclusion</u>: T uses colloquial style.

(v) *RELATIONS AMONG PARTICIPANTS and GENERAL CONSTRUCTION*
The two parts of the analysis cannot be carried out on the sample utterance since their nature requires a complete text for analysis.

Conclusion

The conclusions follow from the analyses of the full corpora and have the same elements as the sample analysis, i.e. (i) implications, (ii) special linguistic means, (iii) forms of address, (iv) style and register, (v) relations between participants and (vi) general construction. They constitute the basis for comparison of political speech with general conversation as well as the comparison of the two types of rhetoric of the two political parties represented by their campaign programmes.

(i) CONTEXTUAL IMPLICATIONS
The implications are more difficult to draw in the first programme of AWS than in the second one, however, they require a lot of knowledge of external context in both cases.

Implications required less effort in the programmes of UW since topics of local culture and investing are close to everyone. Everyday speech was used for most of the programme.

Interpreting general conversation required drawing more complex implicatures but not difficult provided that the correct contextual information was supplied. Contextual information needed consists of immediate context, information about participants and general knowledge.

(ii) SPECIAL LINGUISTIC MEANS

Most frequent linguistic means in the programme of AWS were: special collocations, repetition and metaphors. The special collocations used are characteristic of the language of news. However, metaphors are not numerous and all are dead metaphors.

In the programme of UW the linguistic means are diverse serving several functions. Repetitions stress the most important elements of an utterance and clarify it. A few cases of hyperbole serve to stress the most important ideas. The choice of collocations and metaphors is characteristic of everyday speech. In the second programme there is also a case of irony and pun.

In general conversation corpus most frequent are irony and repetition, there are also ellipsis, puns, a few hyperbolas, rarely metaphors and instances of mixture of forms in one expression.

(iii) FORMS OF ADDRESS

Although in the programme of AWS forms of address are formal or very formal, the guests are addressed *panowie* (literally, "misters"). There are no cases of a host addressing the other host in both programmes.

In the programme of UW different address forms are used. At the beginning the formal status is retained but as the programme proceeds it changes to less formal. The hosts address each other very informally.

In the corpus of general conversation *you* form is used since there is no status or formal situation to be indicated. There is also a case of using name to address the hearer.

(iv) STYLE AND REGISTER

The first programme of AWS is more formal due to the style used by the guest; the second programme is less formal. The collocations used in both programmes are schematic, frozen and characteristic of the news.

The programme of UW presents a mixture of consultative and formal style. Generally, the beginning of the programme is formal, then it changes into consultative one. The collocations are schematic and mostly frozen, there are cases of new collocations and the use of pun, irony and new metaphors.

In the corpus of general conversation colloquial style is used, rarely changing to consultative.

(v) RELATION AMONG PARTICIPANTS

Relations among participants are analysed on the basis of the forms of address used in the programmes. In the programme of AWS the two hosts do not address each other, so the relation between them cannot be determined. In the first programme the relation between them and the guest is formal, in the second one it is less formal due to the young age of the guests.

The relation between the hosts is very close in the programme of UW. Only at the beginning the relation between them and the guests is formal, then it changes into consultative during the programmes.

The relation among participants of general conversation corpus is very close.

(vi) GENERAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROGRAMMES

AWS starts their programme with an introduction of the topic and the introduction of the guest. There are only two questions asked, the first by Krzysztof Luft, and the second by Damian Łuszczyszyn, therefore the guest has the longest talking time and the talking times of the hosts are almost equal. In the second programme of AWS, there is no topic, the guests are introduced, and two questions are asked, both by Krzysztof Luft. The interview is interrupted twice by a short slogan encouraging to vote for young candidates and once by a cartoon. The programme is finished with a song.

UW starts with a slogan and a song, then in the studio hosts introduce each other, and finally Andrzej Potocki introduces the guest. The question-answer sequences are rather short (7 and 5 in both programmes respectively), hosts take turns in asking questions. The longest talking time is the one of the guest, next is Andrzej Potocki and the shortest talking time belongs to Małgorzata Potocka. The second programme has a similar construction, however, it is finished with two short films followed by the slogan.

There is no unified topic in the corpus of general conversation as well as turn taking is not restricted. Questions are rarely used. There is a case of two parallel conversations. The exchanges are mostly short (except for descriptions), full of pauses or laughs.

Overall conclusions

On the basis of the thorough analysis it is legitimate to state that the theory of relevance is sufficient enough to show differences between political speech and general conversation as well as to differentiate between styles of the two political parties. The theory of relevance also possesses sufficient explanatory power to display differences between two political speech rhetoric, which is evident in register and forms of address used; the latter ones reflect the attitude of the speakers to the hearers.

The differences between political speech and general conversation are mostly due to the situation and purpose of the conversations; e.g. the restricted form of the political programmes resulted in fixed question-answer sequences or only one topic discussed.

Nevertheless, there are differences between political speech and general conversation, which arise mostly due to the different language style/register used; e.g. the frequency of linguistic means or the complexity of implicatures.

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