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## Worldview and Social Practice

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## Summary

“Worldview and Social Practice: A discourse-space approach to political text analysis” explores variation in worldviews of Dutch political parties. In Western democracies, such as The Netherlands, political discourse has been, and still is, going through fundamental changes that are parallel to the experience of ‘our’ society, the economy and the way we communicate. That also applies to politics that should strive towards reasonable stability. Analysis for party positioning requires new approaches to account for the change from ideological politics to pragmatic politics so as to inform the public better. Therefore this thesis is about the development of a fundamental approach to elucidate the structure of parties’ worldviews on which future projections are made and attitudes and intentions are built. The focus is on the spatial analogy between thought, language and intentions for action. Space and time are the basic coordinating elements of cognition that function to give a sense of reality that warrants attitudes and actions. For example, the declaration “Holland is full” triggers a deontic evaluation as to whether that is good or bad and for whom? From an egocentric point of view, a negative evaluation makes it possible to warrant spatial anti-immigration measures by implicature. Moreover, if migration is pictured as a ‘tsunami’ this gives a time dimension of urgency. For these reasons, the research focuses on variables in the core of political argumentation, namely, space, time and attitude (STA).

The thesis is about political intentionality and how intentions unfold from worldviews. Research questions include: what constitutes political worldviews and how do they vary structurally? What can variations in the STA structure of worldviews tell us about political positions? I argue that social practice – as we find in politics – is directed by worldview constructions and that coordinate systems are a distinguishing feature of political motivation. The spatial approach intends to complement linguistic and content-based political text analyses.

Presentations of worldviews are considered rhetorical by nature because they are shaped on cultural patterns of thought. The building blocks are space and time, which have no intrinsic meaning but that function as a directive in their social context. STA analysis relies on “the primacy of spatial cognition” and cultural variation in coordinate systems: intrinsic, relative and/or absolute (Levinson 2003). The three types characterise narrative, worldview and text- and discourse-world cohesion. They also affect the way people view and experience their environment and give meaning to it prior to setting goals and taking action (Searle 2010). In that sense, a discourse has an inherent intentionality in that it gives direction to intentions and the possibility and desirability of actions (Duranti 2015).

With this approach, discourse-space analysis has made a contribution to the transdisciplinary research project “From Text to Political Positions: From sentiments and opinions to party positions” (henceforth T2PP).<sup>1</sup> It provided a third dimension to

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<sup>1</sup> The research project “From Text to Political Positions: From sentiments and opinions to party positioning” was funded by the VU Centre for Advanced Media Research Amsterdam (CAMeRA), that later

content and linguistic analysis (Van Elfrinkhof and Maks) that connected them. We analysed Dutch election manifestos on the relationship between words and content in order to include the dynamics of fundamental changes in public communication and ideological shifts in the Netherlands (Van Elfrinkhof et al. 2014).<sup>2</sup> Voters might benefit from a meta-approach because it can enhance public information platforms, as developed by *Kieskompas* and *Stemwijzer*, by tailoring them to changes in context and needs. While parties and the media compete fiercely to reach the electorate and viewers, there is an increase in the percentage of floating voters. They can no longer rely on familiar ideological differences. This epistemic vacuum that makes it hard to reason about what is wanted or needed or why parties should be trusted. Attention to variation in the coordinates of words, content and intentions fosters a dynamic, evaluative heuristic prior to the pragmatics of setting goals and actions.

The STA method was inspired by text- and discourse-world theory (Chilton 2014; Werth 1999) to account for the affordances of a discourse-space approach to worldview analysis. Apart from the types of human cognition mentioned above (Levinson 2003), socio-pragmatic theory of “directions-of-fit” was explored to distinguish types of egocentric, allocentric and neutral perspectivisation that characterise the dynamics of building up to intentionality (Searle 2010). Moreover, the evolutionary analogy between spatial cognition in thought and language warrants the communicative function of language use to evaluate and establish common sense for cooperation, because cooperation is a survival strategy (Tomasello 2009). Applying these diverse, but analogy-based, theories makes a contribution to developments in Critical Discourse Studies and its cognitive turn towards discourse-space analysis.

The STA method is very suitable for political-narrative analysis for sequentiality and location that are inherently spatial and temporal. A good story gains effect from its familiar causal direction in time and space. The persuasive nature of political discourse lies in its sequentiality from worldview of the known here and now to an imaginary better world in the unknown future. According to Heywood (2007), the narrative determines the legitimacy of political intentions and actions, towards a more ideal future. The narrative direction also contributes predictive aspect to verbal, linguistic and content analysis, as we saw in the “Holland is full” example.

Dutch election manifestos formed a reliable corpus for this project. This provides in a reasonably stable genre for comparative and longitudinal studies. Fundamental shifts in the epistemic and deontic grounding of political rationales can be exposed and reveal how the battle over voters has changed. Moreover, it can reveal how parties try to adapt to internal, national, or external change. STA analysis was applied to ten parties in two election years, around the financial crisis of 2008 (2006, 2010) to show how the epistemic premise of political worldviews varies and shifts and to provide evidence of variation in worldview constructions. It is primarily a qualitative study complemented by a corpus-assisted quantitative method to support party positioning on political dimensions. STA analysis can contribute to recalibrating political dimensions. Examples are discussed of variation in secular and religious worldviews and their effects on policies on immigration and security. Suggestions are made as to how to interpret STA results in their context and how findings can inform party positioning.

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became part of The Network Institute. The project involved collaboration with the voting advice application *Kieskompas* to find ways to better position parties.

<sup>2</sup> Annotation of manifesto texts for sentiment, content and discourse-space analysis was facilitated by sponsorship from The Network Institute and *Kieskompas*' coding experts (Van Elfrinkhof et al. 2014).

Chapter 2 motivates the Critical Discourse approach taken. It also discusses academic integrity of the exploratory nature of the thesis and my motivation, with a critical view on affordances and restrictions of taking an eclectic approach. It also provides a philosophical and pragmatic argument for focussing on the relationship between language use and making the social world. A Glossary was added because the eclectic approach unleashes ambiguity in some core concepts. Chapter 3 explains the concept of Worldview and the coordinating and communicative affordances of the generic principle of spatial cognition. It makes it possible to identify diversity in reasoning strategies. A literature review puts the project in a political context and accounts for the selection of methods for STA text analysis.

Chapter 4 discusses the spatial characteristics of discourse and the causal relation between worldviews as deictic social realities and political intentions. Chapter 5 positions Dutch politics in a historical context, starting from the Second World War to account for the relevance of the data selection. Social change prior to the Second World War are discussed, particularly the Industrial Revolution and the impact of technological innovation on society, that mark the onset of a fundamental epistemic shift from the natural episteme of external space and time to a social episteme of context-dependent space and time. This fundamental shift has affected the normalisation of the human sense of agency and the malleability of society that appears normal and echoes in the discourses of contemporary politics, the economy and our general experience of life.

Chapters 6-8 describe the development, testing and implementation of the STA model. In Chapter 6, pilot studies exemplify how the model and the codebook were tailored to the data so as to make the procedure transparent and reproducible in other domains. Chapter 7 specifies the terms of identifying Dutch space, time and timespace referents as annotation units. Final results visualise the differences and shifts in layers and scope of attention fields (Appendix 7.2, folding sheet). Chapter 8 discusses and exemplifies the results of the analysis and their possible contribution to comparative politics. Suggestions are made as to how results might complement the hybrid methods developed for voting advice application, such as *Kieskompas*. Finally, Chapter 9 gives a critical reflection on STA analysis and suggestions for further developments. Awareness of the premise of spatial cognition in social interaction offers a novel perspective on space and time indicators of unity and diversity in worldview perception and adaptability that could contribute to other domains of social practice.