

Chapter 80

The Changing State of the South African Nation: Political Proximity to Business from a Rhetorical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The colonization of discourses (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002) is a wide-spread phenomenon of globalization and naturally affects politics. The power of business-speak over politics and the media seems to be steadily increasing. Most vulnerable to that development, which the author calls businification, seem to be countries in transition that have to assert themselves rhetorically on a global scale while keeping traditional voters content at home. In an application of critical discourse analysis, the chapter seeks to trace this businification by comparing three presidential state-of-the-nation-addresses (SoNA) of three South African presidents after one year in office (1995, 2000, and 2010). Through contextualizing these texts with their media reception from a corpus of 15 newspaper articles reporting on the speeches, the outer influences on the core text become transparent. The findings suggest a parallelism between a growing professionalism in politics and the businification of political rhetoric whose development cannot be viewed as exclusively negative.

INTRODUCTION

During this year of action, let us work together to make local government everybody's business. (Zuma, 2010)¹

In his 2010 state-of-the-nation address (SoNA), South African President Jacob Zuma emphasized

the need for public involvement in decision-making. Implicitly, however, by employing business as a metaphor, Zuma revealed what he long had ingrained in his way of thinking, namely: comprehending government as a business enterprise that can be quantified, measured and optimized; and acting and speaking accordingly.

World-wide, from Great Britain to China, neo-liberal business principles of commodification² sprawl into all spheres of society from

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education, arts, religion, to media and politics. In South Africa, pressures of globalization made the young democracy grow up fast and conform to Western expectations (Adam, Van Zyl Slabbert, & Moodley, 1998, p. 2, p.140). South African post-apartheid presidents have to fulfill the schizophrenic task of appeasing the international (business) world, while at the same time giving hope to social upliftment back home.

The tendency to assess things according to their market value promotes a generally accepted naturalization of business principles within society via language and media frames (e.g., efficiency, branding, profit-, market-, and target-orientation) which—termed “professionalization”—grow into non-profit oriented spheres of life (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002, p.24); this development can be termed *businification*. The growing power that business principles gain within politics triggers feelings of uneasiness (Adam et al., 1998, p. 140). How far though, does this “colonization” (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002, p.17) really stretch?

Politicians’ attitudes towards business are not only displayed in what presidents speak about, but also in how they speak about certain issues. The language itself contains a measure of business proximity through the use of typical terminology (Hundt, 1995; Thomas, 1997), and rhetorical gestures borrowed from business communication.

Based on the observation that presidential rhetoric moves South Africa from a people-centered democracy to an investor-oriented society, this chapter aims at examining traces of business discourse manifested in political and consequently media discourse. The rhetoric analysis (i.e., the focus on an intentional persuasive use of language) of three SoNA’s, each held at the opening of parliament after one year in presidential office, by Nelson Mandela (1995), Thabo Mbeki (2000) and Jacob Zuma (2010)³ makes this assumption visible. They marked a reflection on past governing actions, and provided an outlook on future plans. Beyond that, the opening of parliament

evolved into an emotional media event of pompous proportions comparable to royal weddings on a national level, as Tim Cohen remarked (1995, February 17).

A linguistically-oriented review of 15 exemplary newspaper articles reporting on the SoNA’s, will show, how the speeches have been transmitted to the public. Linguistic analysis implies looking beyond content at discourse specific lexemes, semantic implications, framing patterns and genre specific text structure. Language is the common feature among the fields of politics, business, and the media. They are interdependent, because they impact on each other while at the same retaining their “own particular form of institutionalization” (Fairclough, 2002, p. 182).

The contemporary definition of politics as “the business of government” (www.etymonline.com) emphasizes the ever-changing morphology of views as well as the managerial and administrative aspects of government⁴. Politics is only tangible via language and creates reality through speaking (Peters, 2005, p. 754). SoNA fulfills three political functions: they declare the institutional framework for the political order (*polity*), identify action fields and strategies to tackle problem areas of society (*policy*), and lastly, enact and perform the speech to bring the party branding forward (*politics*) (Reisigl, 2008, pp. 244ff.). In this context, it will only be referred to as *politics* subsuming the two other dimensions. Politics regulates the economy⁵ while business sustains it. The commercial aspect of *business* (e.g., “pertaining to trade” or “done for the sake of financial profit”) only exists since the 18th century (www.etymonline.com; July 2010). Beyond that, *businification* furthermore refers to the continuous formalization of government. In postmodern society, business and politics seem to merge in certain aspects rather than further differentiate. Politics overlap with business in “managing” and “striving towards power” (see Schubert & Klein, 2001) and other features and processes, but the decisive difference remains

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