

Book Review

Piotr Cap: *The language of fear: Communicating threat in public discourse*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. xii+91, hardback ISBN: 978-1-137-59729-8, £37.99; eBook ISBN: 978-1-137-59731-1.

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Proximization Theory (PT), as proposed by Piotr Cap, has proved its applicability with state political discourse as its prime candidate (Cap 2013). Further revealing its universal nature in legitimization discourse analysis, in his recently published book *The language of fear: Communicating threat in public discourse*, Cap tries to extend his theoretical framework to the analysis of other types of public discourse besides state political discourse. In so doing, he enhances the explanatory force of PT to cover a broader spectrum. His latest monograph also demonstrates the latest development of PT.

The Language of fear: Communicating threat in public discourse contains an introductory section and seven well-developed chapters. The introduction provides a background to the book by presenting a capsule of the theoretical and empirical aims of the book, and an overview of the chapters. In Chapter 1, by summarizing his predecessors' work to lay the authoritative foundation to his research, the author gives useful elaborations on concepts key to his research, such as coercion, legitimization, delegitimization, their relationships, and how they are represented in discourse on the nature of threat and fear from an interdisciplinary perspective. That occurs on the basis of dichotomous representation of the *self* and *other* and the success of the speaker's credibility. Chilton's (2004) Deictic Space Theory (DST), through spatial, temporal, and modal axes, as he acknowledges, can be effectively adopted to analyze bipolar opposition where threat clearly exists and potentially expands, with the discourse of US intervention in Kosovo a typical case in point. However, he goes on to point out the drawback of DST, that it fails to clearly show how the operation of threat is performed in discursive ways. In brief, DST only answers the "what" question, but not the "how," leaving a theoretical gap to fill in the remaining logically organized chapters.

In Chapter 2, developing from DST, the author anchors the PT framework to spatial, temporal, and axiological proximizations to highlight his major contributions in more quantifiable lexico-grammatical markers to model the dynamic operation, offsetting DST's drawback. Illustrations of the theory are cited from the Iraq War on Terror discourse as a demonstration of different

proximization strategies deployed to effectively capture the narrowing symbolic distance between inside-deictic-center (IDC) and outside-deictic-center (ODC) to achieve coercion and legitimization in political discourse, validating the feasibility and effectiveness of PT, further showing promise in covering wider range of spheres.

In Chapters 3 to 6, Cap establishes the manifestation of PT in four public discourses – health, environmental, technological, and (anti)-migration discourse respectively – to explore the applicability and compatibility of PT in new empirical fields. In comparison to the canonical sample-state political discourse, analyzed at conceptual, lexical, and coercion-legitimization level, these threat-based discourses can lend themselves well to the analysis of the PT framework, affirming the great explanatory force of PT in extended domains. Underlying them is the cognitive groundwork that threat from the alien group, constructed as potentially-growing and far-reaching to individuals, will solicit support of the home group for reaction legitimization. Specifically, in Chapter 3, health discourse is especially similar to political discourse in the construal of ODC impact, best achieved through spatio-temporal proximization. In addition, he preliminarily conceives of a combination of the PT framework with metaphor analysis as a demonstration of the compatibility of PT. In Chapter 4, in environmental discourse, spatio-temporal and axiological proximization strategies are deployed to respectively examine external natural phenomenal threat and internal management failure. In Chapter 5, with dominant spatial and temporal proximizations to analogize near-future vision with past fearful events such as the 9/11, Pearl Harbor, and Waterloo events, cyberspace discourse has changed into cyber-terrorist discourse, revealing language manipulation. For anti-migration discourse in Chapter 6, the spatial and axiological proximization model, combined with metaphor analysis, are mainly employed to construct the symbolic movement of fear.

However, a certain degree of variation from the standard pattern emerges, for instance: IDC and ODC entities not being clearly identified and demarcated in health discourse; a very large number of potential ODCs and more weight given to positive home values in the axiological framework in environmental discourse; and over-broadened ODC entities and no axiological element contained in cyber-terrorist discourse. Therefore, modifications are required to update the still-developing PT to be better suited to more data. Chapter 7 concludes the monograph. After achieving success in PT, Cap proposes a major challenge, specifically, the precise sources of ODC impact.

A major strength of the book is its exhaustive explanations and descriptions. For example, the exemplary analysis of the four case studies is clear, comprehensive, and convincing. Every time opening up a new issue, he provides detailed background information, relating to those even without much accumulated background knowledge. In addition, structure-wise, the chapters advance step by step. Chapter 1 establishes a socio-psychological premise and Chapter 2 lays out theoretical underpinnings, paving a way for the case studies to follow, facilitating readers' full access to his thinking patterns. The theoretical elaboration and empirical studies are closely intertwined, successfully achieving the two aims with which he guides the book. At the technical and stylistic levels, his constant tracking of abbreviations by repeating complete terms in a new chapter (e.g. "Proximization Theory" repeated in Chapter 3 with "PT" already used previously) saves readers confusion and promotes smooth linkage in chapters. The interesting read can also be attributed to the metaphors used in his descriptive language (e.g. "...to process the ongoing kaleidoscope of ontological configurations" [p. 5] "This onion structure" [p. 39] and "manufacture fear" are of high frequency).

However, while the book receives resounding praise for its convincing theoretical progression, the quantitative and corpus-based approach, which have been regarded as a highlight in Cap's theoretical contribution to PT, are not much applied in this research, thus, not giving prominence to the unique strength in PT. The data collected for research are limited to several paragraphs in each type of discourse. When it comes to the modification of PT, it remains a vague question how each of the frameworks is to be precisely revised.

On balance, barring minor issues in need of perfection, the book makes an outstanding contribution to corroborating the explanatory force and development potential of PT. As a result, it would be an excellent resource for researchers and students who are interested in critical discourse studies, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, psychology, and sociology.

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Bionote

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