

PROXIMIZATION AS RECEPTION

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Abstract: *The paper presents a critical overview of proximization theory (Chilton, 2004; Cap, 2006, 2013). I argue that the original model should be extended to include proximization as interpreted by the audience. The paper indicates some challenges to implementing the proximization-as-reception component, related in particular to data sampling and identification of the relevant markers. Using Web-based user-generated content is suggested as a solution in the former case; a test case study is proposed to address the second problem.*

Key words: *proximization, deixis, discourse space, public discourse, Critical Discourse Studies.*

1. Introduction

The paper presents a critical overview of *proximization* theory (Chilton, 2004; Cap e.g. 2006, 2010a, 2013, 2017), focusing on an aspect apparently absent in its original version. In particular, I discuss the relevance of analyzing proximization-marked discourse from the perspective of its actual audience. So far proximization theory has foregrounded the speaker's point of view, and the related research has generally concentrated on identifying the speaker's intentions behind specific pragmatic choices, in which case the analyst positioned her-/himself as a recipient of the text analyzed. In the respective sections of the paper I first present an outline of proximization theory (section 2), followed with arguments for my proposal of including proximization from the audience's perspective in its general framework (section 3). In section 4 I point out some challenges to its implementation in empirical research. I then suggest possible ways of solving these problematic issues (section 5) and discuss the advantages of the combined proximization-as-production and proximization-as-reception model, along with a few authentic examples illustrating the phenomena discussed (section 6). In the conclusions I outline a case study using this integrative approach which I currently prepare.

2. Proximization Theory: An Outline

Proximization theory was introduced in Critical Discourse Studies by Piotr Cap (2006; 2010a, b; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2017), with early considerations on the concept proposed by Paul Chilton (2004) in his Discourse (a.k.a. Deictic) Space Theory (see also

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Perspective-Distanciation-Proximization model proposed by Wieczorek, 2013). In general, proximization refers to a discourse strategy whereby the speaker “put[s] the discourse addressee in the center of events narrated to him/her” (Cap, 2006, p. 4). What follows is that the basic rationale for using proximization is the speaker’s assumption that the recipient might not interpret the speaker’s message in line with his/her intentions unless the recipient is given sufficient cues whereby (s)he can integrate the concepts presented with his/her cognitive framework. Put differently, proximization involves positioning the listener in or at least as close as possible to the speaker’s vantage point (*deictic centre*, Verschueren, 1999, p. 20, or *origo*, Gavins, 2007, see also below) on the actors, events and contexts represented in discourse, which constitute the speaker’s “discourse world” (or “discourse space”, see Chilton, 2004; Cap, 2013).

Proximization is represented as a three-axis model, its respective vectors referring to spatial, temporal and modal dimensions (in Chilton, 2004), or spatial, temporal and axiological (in Cap, 2006, 2013), and converging in the speaker’s deictic centre² (see Figure 1).

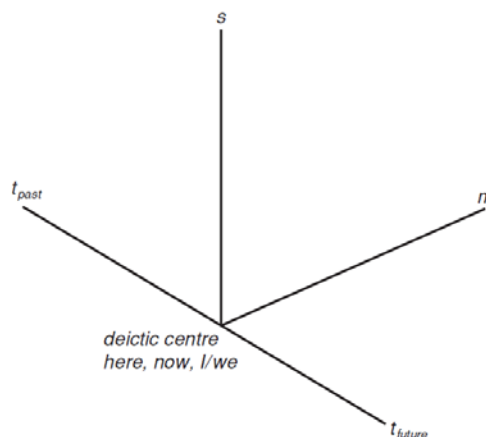


Fig. 1. *Deictic/Discourse Space model* (Chilton, 2004, p. 58)

The spatial axis (*s* in Fig. 1), deemed by Chilton (2004, p. 57) as “in some way more fundamental” than the other two, refers prototypically to the physical location of entities in the speaker’s discourse space.³ The sense of physicality is also perceived metaphorically in proximization theory, in that it also comprises social deixis, including indexicals of in- and out-group identification. By contrast, the temporal (*t* in Figure 1) axis sets the time of speaking (*now*) as the deictic centre, in relation to which past and future events are located as more proximate or more remote. Finally, the modal axis (*m* in Figure 1) aggregates two threads: that of epistemic modality and that of deontic

² In analogy to the graphic representation of dimensions of deixis as a system of geometrical coordinates Gavins (2007, p. 36) refers to the deictic centre as “zero reference point of subjectivity”.

³ Similarly, Kopytowska (2015, p. 349) notes that in the case of proximization in news discourse “[t]emporal and spatial dimensions gain particular prominence” over axiological, epistemic and deontic axes.

modality. Along the former continuum the speaker classifies the truth-value of the elements and events in his/her discourse space, ranging from asserted facts located in the deictic centre to more and less probable entities located further therefrom, with negation denoting the furthestmost point of the axis. As for the latter continuum, it provides axiological coordinates whereby the speaker evaluates specific entities and events in their discourse space as more or less consistent with his/her *Weltanschauung*.

Among the rich repertoire of proximization strategies Chilton (2004, p. 56-65) distinguishes explicit linguistic items, notably indexicals (relevant to spatial, temporal, personal and social deixis) and deontic and epistemic modal verbs (relevant to its modal dimension). Equally important are implicit pragmatic constructions, often expanding over large portions of text, including entailments, presuppositions and presumptions. These in turn rely on cognitive structures, i.e. scripts, frames and schemata, to which the speaker alludes and which the recipient activates in the interpretation process (Gavins, 2007).

While proximization can be applied in different discourses and serve different communicative purposes, it is discussed by both Cap and Chilton mainly in the context of political discourse and its role in legitimization. When used for the purpose of legitimization proximization enables the politician to seek the audience's understanding of and support for potentially controversial political actions, in particular those related to geopolitically and/or culturally distant settings (see e.g. Chilton's 2004 analyses of Bill Clinton's address on U.S. military intervention in Kosovo delivered on 24th March 1999, George W. Bush's speech on the war on terror dated 7th October 2001, and Osama Bin Laden's speech of the same day, or Cap's 2006 analysis of George W. Bush's sixty-four speeches on the war-on-terror from 2003-2004 and his 2013 study of US war-on-terror speeches from 2001-2010).

When applied to analysis of legitimization in political discourse, proximization is defined in more narrow terms, with evident reference to its evaluative component: "a discursive strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs (including "distant", i.e. *adversarial*, *ideological* mind-sets) as directly, increasingly and *negatively* consequential to the speaker and her addressee" (Cap, 2013, p. 3, emphasis mine). As the above-mentioned studies on US war-on-terror rhetoric show, what makes legitimization in political discourse effective is indeed proximization strategies, which refer to the basic instinct of self-preservation: a threat 'there' is discursively reconstructed into a threat 'here' (spatial axis of proximization), a threat 'then' (past or future) into a threat 'now' (temporal axis of proximization), and a 'potential' threat into a 'real' threat (modal axis of proximization). In consequence the audience recognizes the threat as being a direct concern for its survival, and hence is likely to approve the political actions which aim to eliminate the threat.

The following examples illustrate how spatial (example 1), temporal (example 2) and modal (example 3) proximization signals are used by George W. Bush in his 7th October

2001 speech to show the significance of the threat posed by Al-Qaeda terrorists to the US citizens, and to eventually justify the US military intervention in Afghanistan⁴:

1. ***We** are joined in this operation by **our staunch friend**, Great Britain. Other **close friends**, including Canada, Australia, Germany and France, have pledged forces as the operation unfolds.*

Example (1) makes use of the rhetorically powerful inclusive *we* pronoun to construct the political and military action as an event (and responsibility) shared by the US president and citizens. Thus, the audience – willingly or otherwise – becomes the co-agent in the events described, and – in relation to the model discussed – is shifted from the discourse space's periphery to its very centre. Similarly, other countries are drawn centrewise as US *friends*. An interesting gradation is used by Bush, who locates Great Britain closer to the centre of the president's discourse space (as a "*staunch friend*") than other allies (these being described as 'merely' "*close friends*").

2. *I'm speaking to you **today** from the Treaty Room of the White House, a place where American Presidents **have worked** for peace. **We're** a peaceful nation. Yet, as we **have learned**, so suddenly and so tragically, there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror. In the face of **today's new** threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it.*

In example (2), illustrating the case of proximization along the temporal axis, the speaker builds a complex backdrop of past, present and future images. First, Bush draws a line between past and present (cf. the use of Present Perfect), referring to the audience's shared knowledge (the role of the Treaty Room in the White House). He then draws a parallel between the Room's historical function and the current context, suggesting that the peace-work is an ongoing process (which clearly includes the axiological dimension into his argument). The 9/11 attack is shown as an event of continuous relevance (again the use of Present Perfect), one which is as central to the president's and US citizens' discourse space at the day of the speech as it was a month before. By contrast, in the last sentence proximization concerns the future rather than past event: the speaker draws the potential future event (further terrorist attacks) to the centre of his and US citizens' discourse space, constructing the attacks as a threat of today's relevance.

3. *The United States of America is a **friend** to the Afghan people, and we are the **friends** of almost a billion worldwide who practice the Islamic faith. The United States of America is an **enemy** of those who aid terrorists and of the **barbaric criminals** who **profane a great religion** by committing **murder** in its name.*

⁴ See also the analyses of this speech in Cap (2006, 2013) and Chilton (2004). The full text of the speech itself is available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011007-8.html>. DOA: 11th May 2018.

Example (3) illustrates how axiological proximization works in Bush's argument. The discursive strategy applied here fits into the speaker's general aim to express his points in no uncertain terms, based on the principle "who is not with us is against us" (cf. "In this conflict, there is no neutral ground", a sentence used in the same speech). Hence the definition of friends and enemies of the USA is made on a binary construction, with the syntactic parallelism employed ("The United States of America is a friend to The United States of America is an enemy of...") The definition of the former refers to the fundamental values of any democratic society (acknowledging sovereignty of other nations, as in "Afghan people", and freedom of religion, as in "a billion worldwide who practice the Islamic faith", itself then described as "a great religion"), and thus should be likewise central to the axiological dimension of US citizens' discourse space. By contrast, the definition of enemies of the USA employs negatively connoted concepts, e.g. *criminals*, *profane*, and *murder*, which all would be distant from the centre of a citizen's discourse space.

In a recent work Cap (2017) extends the scope of analysis to other contexts in which a threat is discursively constructed as imminent to the audience. Proximization is thus shown as characteristic of the "language of threat" in general, apart from political discourse on terrorism also in e.g. media discourse on cancer, environmental discourse on climate change, public discourse on cyber-terrorism or public discourse on immigration.

A broad view of proximization, unrelated to the contextualization of threat, is proposed by Kopytowska (2015), who discusses proximization as a common strategy in mass-media discourse, where it serves the purpose of enhancing the newsworthiness of the content. Assuming that events spatially, temporally and/or modally distant from the target audience are not usually deemed significant, proximization enables the journalist to represent them as in fact relevant to the audience – possibly more than they actually are. On the other hand, as Kopytowska (2015, p. 351) notes, proximization of otherwise distant (in any deictical axis) entities and events positively correlates with the news' potential to trigger off emotional reaction in the audience. In this respect she also distinguishes "emotional proximization" in media discourse, which involves presenting the events from the perspective of individual actors rather than as involving an anonymous crowd or as depersonalized abstract phenomena.

3. Proximization as Production and Proximization as Reception

One of the limitations of proximization theory is that it focuses on discourse production, and largely neglects the reception of proximization-marked texts. Researchers explore sample texts, identifying specific pragmatic and rhetorical moves performed and proximization strategies applied by the speaker. Yet in this way the researcher remains the only interpreter of the discursive constructions, and evaluates their effectiveness on the basis of his/her cognitive and – inescapably – ideological filters.

Certainly, the analyst is often a recipient of the original text, too – but only *a* recipient. Also, s/he cannot be considered an *average* recipient because in contrast to the latter

his/her purpose of reading the text is not only informative but also meta-discursive, for which the analyst activates field-specific academic expertise that an average recipient does not have.⁵ On the other hand, a situation when the researcher is a member of the target audience may entail an ideologically biased approach to the analyzed content (Cap, 2010a, p. 23). But then again not being a member of the target audience can entail unfamiliarity with the discourse space depicted in the text analysed, and in turn can result in misunderstanding the text's content, in particular in terms of presuppositions, metaphors and other implicit meaningful elements. A systematic check-and-balance procedure may – at least to some extent – solve these methodological issues (Cap, 2010a).

It should also be noted that none of the case studies in Chilton (2004) or Cap (2006, 2013) involves a methodological triangulation to juxtapose the researcher's self-reflection as a member of the audience, or his/her predictions about the *possible* effect of proximization strategies used in the text analysed on its actual audience, with the target audience's *actual* reception of the text.⁶

Interestingly, the limitation seems to be recognized by the authors of proximization theory. For instance, Chilton (2004, p. 50, emphasis mine) makes a caveat that "[t]he examination of the political text and talk that are included in this book will in large part be an examination of *possible* mental representations stimulated by such text and talk". In the concluding part to his monograph he observes that "at the level of sub-textual analysis, 'observers' (i.e., people reflecting more than casually on texts and talk) cannot exclude themselves from their observations (i.e., interpretations), these being selective and potentially influenced by their 'position' and interests" (Chilton, 2004, p. 205). In a similar vein Cap (2006, p. viii) notes that "the analyst's interpretation of events occurring in the geopolitical background, often fragmentary or culturally overdetermined in its own right, might not yield a fully objective account of the speaker's language choices used to communicate these events to the addressee".

4. Proximization as Reception: Challenges to Empirical Research

Feasibility of an empirical analysis on the audience's cognitive processing of proximization faces at least two major problems for research design: (1) collecting the relevant material and (2) eliciting the relevant data therefrom.

As for the first problem, the choice of the relevant sampling method should take into account that public discourse – by definition – reaches a sizeable and diversified audience, not only nationally but also globally, as is the case of worldwide mediatized presidential addresses analyzed by Chilton (2004) or Cap (e.g. 2006; 2010a, b; 2013).

⁵ Chilton (2004, p. 154) is, however, right to note that "ordinary language users are also analysts and vice versa".

⁶ Needless to say, a full methodological triangulation would involve all these components plus the data elicited directly from the speaker on his/her actual intentions behind the use of proximization strategies in a given text. Once the production phase data and reception phase data are set against each other they can be subject to a comparative analysis. To my knowledge no such study has been carried out so far; it may certainly bring a complete picture on proximization as a discursive process, and hence is much encouraged.

Also, the time-lapse between the broadcast/publication of the original text and the sampling of the data from respondents should be minimal so that the discourse space represented by the speaker is not altered in the respondent's cognitive system by later events that may have happened after the text's delivery but before data sampling. It can, for instance, be assumed that a reception-analysis of proximization in George W. Bush's address on war on terror of 7th October 2001 (analysed in Cap, 2006) would have brought different results from respondents when performed before and after Osama Bin Laden's killing in 2nd May 2011, or after subsequent terrorist attacks that occurred in Europe and the USA ever since. Finally, eliciting the data from respondents requires a careful consideration of methodology, balancing advantages and disadvantages of laboratory, field and natural environments.

As for the second problem, namely that of identifying the relevant discourse signals of reception of proximization strategies used in the original text, a suitable framework of analysis still needs to be developed. The question remains to what extent it can be based on the inventories of proximization strategies drawn from the speaker's perspective (as have been listed e.g. in Chilton, 2004, p. 56-65), rather than on the feedback material elicited from the target audience, with methods yet to be developed.

5. Proximization as Reception: Possible Solutions

In my opinion a solution to the first problem stated in section 4 – collecting the relevant material for analyzing proximization as reception – involves using Web-based user-generated content related to the text analysed.⁷ This is understood as, firstly, readers' comments directly following the original media text (provided that the text appears in the medium's website and the public comments functionality is available). Secondly, it includes follow-up content retrievable from diverse social media, including Facebook posts or hash tagged Twitter entries. Furthermore, a related search in the blogosphere may provide more topic-related material, including bloggers' own posts and their readers' comments. Using Web-based user-generated content generally overcomes the three above-mentioned issues: (1) respondents' sample volume and diversity, at least to the extent to which respondents' profiles are disclosed; (2) minimal time-lapse, as can be expected from nonstop updated news content in online media, which in turn prompts immediate commentaries before the given text is relegated to the archive; (3) easy access to relatively large data sample produced in non-artificial conditions, thus combining the advantages traditionally related with laboratory (sample volume) and natural (authenticity) experiments. Of course, the solution is not flawless, one of its limitations being that it provides data only from the Web-connected part of the audience of the original text.

As far as is concerned the second problem identified in section 4 – eliciting the

⁷ Web-based user-generated content has recently attracted researchers' attention in political discourse analysis, see e.g. papers in Kaal, Maks and van Elfrinkhof (2014), especially Boyd (2014), Gryc and Moilanen (2014) or Dahlberg and Sahlgren (2014); Fenton (2011); Hart and Cap (2014); Johnson and Milani (2010); Wodak (2009). See also Fetzer's (2013, p. 13-14) concept of Web 2.0 users as actors in "doing politics from below".

relevant discourse signals of reception of proximization strategies used in the original text – at this early stage I am far from outlining an *a priori* framework for analysis. Instead, I suggest that a test case study is carried out, which would take the available inventories of proximization strategies drawn from the perspective of the speaker (e.g. Chilton, 2004, p. 56-65) as point of reference. In the second stage of analysis a sample of the follow-up texts (i.e. related Web-based user-generated content) should be scanned for intertextual references to the speaker's proximization signals. The third stage of the analysis should in turn focus on eliciting proximization signals from the commentators' texts other than those used in the original text, but still representing one of the functional categories of proximization strategies included in one of the inventories available in proximization theory literature. Finally, the fourth, and critical, stage of analysis is in order to verify if these original inventories are sufficient to cover also the proximization strategies in the content produced by the audience of the original text.

6. Proximization as Production and Proximization as Reception: Advantages of the Integrative Approach

Integrating the perspectives of the speaker and the audience in proximization theory is first and foremost conformant with the fundamental model of discourse as text, interaction and context (Fairclough, [1989] 2001). Secondly, the integrative model of proximization represents discourse phenomena both dynamically and in their multi-dimensional complexity, in which respect the model also conforms with the general tenets of Discourse Studies (cf. van Dijk, 1998). Finally, integrating the production and reception perspectives has been advocated in methodologies of research on specific discourse, e.g. political (Fetzer and Lauerbach, 2007, p. 21; Fetzer, 2013).

The integrative model of proximization can be applied at different levels, depending on research design. Firstly, at the most general level, the model can be used to verify how effectively the discourse space constructed by the speaker is conveyed, which analysis would involve defining the speaker's deictic centre and then locating the specific entities and events referred to on the spatial, temporal and modal axes of deixis. The following analysis of the reception of this discourse space by the audience would in turn reveal to what extent the speaker's discourse space has been reproduced, in what aspects it has been contested, and which elements and events have been re-positioned on respective axes of deixis. Eventually, a holistic approach may be applied to juxtapose the original speaker's discourse space with the one(s) constructed in the audience's discourse.

A smaller-scale analysis based on the integrative model of proximization can focus on the (re-)interpretation of specific entities and events in the audience's discourse. As has been suggested above, the audience may more readily adopt certain elements of the speaker's discourse space as proximate to their own deictic centre as well but not necessarily others. Such selective acceptance may concern entire deictical dimensions of proximization, or only specific entities within a given axis.

An example of the former is the speech of President of France Jacques Chirac of 7th October 2001 (<http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/017000222.html>; DOA: 11th

May 2018). It shortly followed the above-cited speech by George W. Bush (see examples 1-3), and in the given context can be analyzed as a case of proximization-as-reception text. In fact, referring to Bush's speech on launching the military operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Chirac assumes the discourse space constructed by the American statesman. In particular, Chirac presents the threat of terrorist attacks as relevant to French citizens as much as it is to Americans and other nations:

4. ***Nous devons savoir que ces attaques terroristes nous concernent tous. Toutes les démocraties sont menacées.***

[**We must know** that these terrorist attacks affect **us all**. All democracies are threatened]

Like George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac makes use of the inclusive *we* to extend his discourse space to the general audience. In addition, the shared character of the awareness of threat is emphasized in the epistemic predicate of obligation: *nous devons savoir* [we must know].

Apart from discursively constructing the threat of attacks as spatially and temporally proximate, Jacques Chirac's speech follows that of George W. Bush by adopting a similar axiology to legitimize the military intervention:

5. ***Le peuple afghan, qui a tant souffert depuis 20 ans, qui est aujourd'hui victime d'un régime barbare, n'est pas en cause, bien sûr. Et tout doit être fait pour répondre au drame humanitaire qu'il connaît. Tout sera fait pour l'aider et pour favoriser à l'avenir le développement de l'Afghanistan. Les opérations militaires se feront sur une longue période. Elles viseront à punir les coupables et à détruire en Afghanistan les infrastructures des réseaux terroristes et leurs soutiens.***

[**The Afghan people**, who have suffered so much for 20 years, who are now **victims of a barbaric regime**, are not involved, of course. And everything must be done to respond to the **humanitarian tragedy** they know. Everything will be done to help them and to support the development of Afghanistan in the future. Military operations will take place over a long period. They aim to **punish the guilty** and **destroy** in Afghanistan the infrastructure of **terrorist networks** and their **support**.]

Interestingly, as can be noted when comparing examples (3) and (5), not only does Chirac adopt Bush's axiology to construct a discourse space legitimizing the military action, but he even uses the same lexical constructions. Just as the USA was depicted as "a friend to the Afghan people", so Chirac refers to *le peuple afghan* 'the Afghan people'. In both discourses the speakers thus refer to the values central to democracy, in particular the moral right to protect the oppressed (*victime* 'victim'), all the more so when sovereignty of a state is threatened by an authoritarian regime. Similarly, the two

leaders focus on other values central to the axiological aspect of their (and their citizens') discourse spaces, namely respect for citizens' rights (freedom of religion in Bush's speech) and providing humanitarian aid to the nations in need (*répondre au drame humanitaire* 'respond to the humanitarian tragedy' in Chirac's speech). On the other end of the axiological continuum the two leaders locate Al-Qaeda terrorists, referring to them in negatively connoted terms; again some concepts used first by Bush are then expressed by Chirac (cf. 'barbaric criminals' and *régime barbare* 'barbaric regime'). The universally acknowledged moral principle of punishment inflicted on guilty is then mentioned by the French president (*punir les coupables* 'punish the guilty'). All in all, Chirac's speech evidently reproduces the discourse space originally presented in George W. Bush's speech delivered earlier on the same day. Also, using similar discourse strategies both presidents construct the discourse space as shared by their citizens, presenting the threat of terrorist attacks as spatially and temporally proximate, as highly probable in the two countries (epistemic proximity), and drawing on axiologies rooted in democratic societies (deontic proximity).

An example which illustrates how only certain elements of the original speaker's discourse space are accepted as proximate to the audience's discourse space is another speech by a European statesman following the address to the American nation by George W. Bush of 7th October 2001. The case in point is Tony Blair's speech to UK citizens on the war on terror

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/1585238.stm; DOA: 15th January 2018), of which a relevant excerpt is cited below in (6):

6. *I also want to say very directly to the British people why this matters so much to Britain.*

First, let us not forget that the attacks of 11 September represented the worst terrorist outrage against British citizens in our history.

*The murder of British citizens, whether it happened overseas or not, is an attack upon Britain. But even if no British citizen had died, **we would be right to act.***

[...]

***We know** the al-Qaeda network threatens Europe, including Britain, and indeed any nation throughout the world that does not share their fanatical views.*

So we have a direct interest in acting in our self-defence to protect British lives. It was an attack on lives and livelihoods.

[...]

I should say there is at present no specific credible threat to the United Kingdom that we know of and that we have in place tried and tested contingency plans which are the best possible response to any further attempts at terror.

As can be seen in example (6), Blair follows Bush in that he acknowledges the gravity of

9/11 terrorist attacks. He mentions British citizens among its casualties and agrees with the necessity of a military action. In this respect Blair refers to the moral and legal duty of the state to protect its citizens, and to the like duties of the UK as a US ally (“even if no British citizen had died, we would be right to act”). Thus Blair, like Chirac, adopts Bush’s discourse space in its axiological aspect, assuming that punishing the guilty of the 9/11 attack is a moral obligation of their states. At the surface level, Blair, in a similar way to Bush and Chirac, makes use of the inclusive *we* to explain and justify the government’s decisions so that they are in turn accepted by the audience as conformant with their discourse space.

Also, as in Bush’s and then Chirac’s speeches, epistemic modality is involved when Blair speaks about the high probability of al-Qaeda attacks in Europe, for which purpose he uses the rhetorically powerful combination of the inclusive subject pronoun *we* and the epistemically strong verb of cognition *know*. In this way the knowledge of potential attacks is constructed as shared by himself and an unidentified plurality, which can range from his advisors alone to UK citizens in general.

All in all, it can be claimed that in Blair’s speech the threat is also not only real (epistemic modality) but also spatially and temporally proximate (“al-Qaeda network threatens Europe, including Britain”), which makes it similar to the two above-discussed speeches.

However, in the later part of his speech Blair makes a caveat that is absent in Bush’s and Chirac’s speeches. The British Prime Minister shifts the imminence of the threat of a terrorist attack away from the ‘here and now’ centre of his (and British citizens’) discourse space, declaring that “there is at present no specific credible threat to the United Kingdom that we know of”. As a result, his speech does not fully reproduce the discourse space originally constructed by George W. Bush and quite faithfully adopted in Jacques Chirac’s speech.

It should be noted that the integrative model of proximization including Web-based user-created content recognizes the fact that in the age of digital technologies public discourse has much changed, becoming more democratic and accessible than ever before. In consequence once clearly separated roles of public speaker and general audience are now performed alternately by “co-creative participants” (Lister et al., 2009, p. 204, cited in Boyd, 2014, p. 251), who both receive and (re)produce texts, discourses and genres, using different modes of communication, not only separate but also in multi-modal combinations. Consequently, the generally unidirectional mode of communication in public discourse – most notably in mass-media and political contexts – has been replaced with a complex bi- and multi-directional communication framework. Also, political speeches, newspaper articles, or TV news coverage, are now subject to critical evaluation in the Web, triggering off comments, blog posts, social media entries, or memes, and forwarded to further networks of recipients with personal opinions attached. Correspondingly, politicians and journalists become audiences of these follow-up materials, consulting them for feedback to their future texts and actions.

7. Conclusion

Proximization theory is generally considered to be an important approach in Critical Discourse Studies, listed among such well-established models as Critical linguistics, Discourse-historical approach, Socio-cognitive approach, Cognitive linguistics approach, or Corpus linguistics approach (Cap, 2014). Its applicability has also been confirmed in a number of studies, firstly in the field of political discourse (including but not limited to analyzes of legitimization) and then in other contexts, of which media discourse has been perhaps given most attention (Kopytowska, 2015). On the other hand, the present paper has drawn attention to one still unexplored area in the proximization theory, namely reception of proximization signals by the audience. It has been proposed that Web-based user-created content (e.g. comments accompanying media texts, Facebook posts, Twitter messages) can be a source of valuable data in this respect.

A case study (Kowalski, forthcoming) is being prepared to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of this solution in particular, and the relevance of integrative model of proximization in general. Specifically, the case study analyzes how Polish media discourse uses proximization strategies in the coverage of Romanian protests of winter 2017, and how Romanian media discourse uses proximization strategies in the coverage of Polish protests of winter 2016/2017. In either case the media materials are supplemented with Web-base user-created content to investigate the ways proximization strategies are interpreted by the respective audiences. Preliminary results show that proximization in the texts analysed involves (1) using universal semantic categories to classify local political actors and institutions, and (2) drawing historical analogies between pre-1989 communist era and post-communist regime after 1989 as shared by the two countries. All in all, proximization has triggered off vivid reaction in both Polish and Romanian audiences, visible in the sheer number of follow-up comments on the media materials in question. Both categorization and analogies are accommodated by the two audiences, and then recontextualized to express critical opinions about the current state of affairs in their home countries. Also, categorization and analogies from the original media texts are recontextualized in what I call “hybrid discourse worlds”, created by the media audiences, i.e. cognitive socio-political universes populated by Polish and Romanian political actors, furnished with cultural symbols and topoi, and referring to historical events, ethnic stereotypes and biases.

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