



Legitimation in Political Discourse: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective on the Modern US War Rhetoric Second Edition

Piotr Cap

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How did the G. W. Bush administration manage to persuade Americans to go to war in Iraq in March 2003? How was this intervention, and the global campaign named as 'war-on-terror,' legitimised linguistically? This book shows that the best legitimisation effects in political discourse are accomplished through the use of 'proximization' a cognitive-rhetorical strategy that draws on the speaker's ability to present events as directly and increasingly affecting the addressee, usually in a negative or threatening way. There are three aspects of proximization: spatial, temporal and axiological. The spatial aspect involves the construal of events in the discourse as physically endangering the addressee. The temporal aspect involves presenting the events as increasingly momentous and historic and hence of central significance to both the addressee and the speaker. The axiological aspect consists in a growing clash between the system of values adhered to by the speaker and the addressee, and the values characterizing a third party whose actions, ideologically negative, are made 'proximate' and thus threatening. Although the tripartite model of proximization proposed in the book is complex at the level of its linguistic realisation, the working assumption is intriguingly basic: addressees of political discourse are more likely to legitimise pre-emptive actions aimed at neutralizing the proximate 'threat' if they construe the threat as personally consequential. The book shows how language of the war-on-terror, and especially the rhetoric of the Iraq war, respond to this precondition. This second revised edition features an extended preface and a new closing chapter.

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