Ioan-Alexandru GRĂDINARU
"Al. I. Cuza" University of Iași (Romania)

Discourse, Meaning and Epistemic Burdens:
The Sociocognitive Paradigm

Abstract: Teun Van Dijk is one of the most prominent scholars in the field of discursiveness and also one of the boldest writers. A serious proof for the latter is the fact that Van Dijk continuously revises his work in the midst of an incessant desire to make it even more complex than before. Van Dijk's prolific career as an author has been characterized by the fruitful idea of designing research devices for the study of discourse and society that keep the pace with the newest discoveries in cognitive science and social psychology. Van Dijk's message to this particular scientific community was that if we want to know more about the connections between discourse, ideology, communication tools, knowledge and society, then we have to do a sustained refinement of our intellectual means. This comes down to both correcting our errors (such as the behaviourist fallacy) and being open to multidisciplinary study. In fact, his latest book (published in 2014, focusing on the relationship between discourse and knowledge) constitutes a strong assertion in this respect: Van Dijk recommends, from the very beginning of his work, a multidisciplinary approach to knowledge, making reference to more than ten research domains. My paper has, as its starting point, Van Dijk's remark concerning the "vast amount of 'knowledge of the world'" that people are supposed to possess when they are in a discursive situation. Using the example of a news report, Van Dijk shows how much information (and knowledge) is needed for a proper understanding of it, on the one hand, and how much more of that is needed in order to deconstruct it, on the other hand. Yet the reality of discursive interactions is nothing but a horizon of infinite combinations: people talk even if they don't know anything about the subject, sometimes they get it right using their intuition, without knowing the details, sometimes the people in-the-know remain silent, while the fools open their mouths. How should we understand the problem of epistemic burden within this frame? How much of this burden affects the context of understanding? And, finally, how can the sociocognitive approach help us get a clearer idea about the knowledge factor in the discursive acts?

Keywords: discourse, epistemic burdens, meaning, sociocognitive approach, knowledge