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**Rhetoric in professional speechwriting business.
Several remarks on *The language work
of speechwriters* by Gwynne Mapes.
Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2025, pp. 218**

**Retoryka w biznesie profesjonalnego tworzenia przemówień.
Kilka uwag o książce *The language work
of speechwriters* autorstwa Gwynne Mapes.
Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2025, ss. 218**

Discussion on rhetoric in applied linguistics has been an ongoing process among specialists in the field. As expected, the discussed issues have been connected with studying discourses of professions directly or indirectly related to language and communication such as, among others, language teachers (e.g. Kordziński 2016; Wileczek 2023), leaders of institutions (e.g. Hartley and Bruckman 2007) or marketing specialists and politicians (e.g. Mołek-Kozakowska 2016; Barski 2018; Dolata-Zaród and Pastucha-Blin 2021; Kiereś-Łach 2023). Interestingly, the profession of speechwriters has not been of focus among applied linguists and thus the book by Gwynne Mapes attracts attention as a novel standpoint in the discussion.

The work of Gwynne Mapes entitled *The language work of speechwriters* attracts attention both since it is clearly a valuable contribution to the discussion on public rhetoric embedded in applied linguistics as well as due to the author's thorough investigation into the practicalities of the job of a speechwriter. It is exactly owing to the duality of the author's deliberations and, ultimately, conclusions on the topic that the book may be of interest to both linguists as well as professionals involved in the process of speechwriting or in the business of public relations. The book is divided into six chapters

preceded by lists of figures and tables as well as acknowledgements and followed by appendices including the researcher's interview questions and a list of transcription conventions, a glossary, a rich list of references and an index.

The first extensive chapter of the book constitutes an introduction to the discussion on the business of speechwriting and the speechwriting community in the United States and thus sets the research in context as well as provides theoretical framework for the research, description of the project itself as well as of the researcher's methodological choices. First, the author herself emphasizes that there exists a certain complexity regarding speechwriting as a profession in that the high-end language workers, as the author refers to speechwriters, need to follow a certain code of conduct as, on the one hand, they are the authors of the content they create, yet they are not the principals of their craft (Goffman 1981) and their labour or language work is thus often invisible and so is the very process of producing speeches. Mapes, however, focuses her attention exactly on the work of high-end language workers cooperating with powerful public figures in the US and, following Thurlow (2020), emphasizes that such case of speechwriting offers a compelling case study in which both the value of sociopolitical and economic impact of the words as well as the value of speechwriters as language workers are highlighted. The author also rightly expresses her surprise that even though applied linguists have paid much attention to issues such as marginalized, or, as the author puts it, invisibilized, language work, for instance in the case of online language teaching or in the language work of doctors or social workers (Curran and Jenks 2023; Locher 2017; Lillis 2017), the linguistic work of speechwriters in political speeches/rhetoric has been rather ignored. Thus, in the chapter, the author enumerates her own research questions which regard issues such as (1) the daily professional practices of speechwriters and their connection to the production format of their output; (2) how the work of speechwriters intersects with the wider political economies of professional life – both in terms of linguistic labor and the more general disciplines (e.g. politics, commerce) in which they practise and (3) how speechwriters understand the nature of language, its intersection with other semiotic modes and what is the speechwriters' understanding of their work as both linguistically and ideologically consequential. It is worth mentioning that the outline of the research questions set in points adds order to the initial steps of the research description, which is necessary due to the dual focus of the research in question mentioned above as well as the variety of qualitative research methods the author selects. It is in the following part of the chapter that the author outlines the methodological approach adopted

in the study. Mapes rightly employs qualitative research methods to answer her research questions and, in order to collect the data, the author includes both secondary and primary sources, that is, among others, memoirs and training resources, a public talk by Jon Favreau (President Obama's former speechwriter), recorded interviews with practicing speechwriters, fieldnotes from a professional speech writing course, a video-recorded meeting with several speechwriters as well as US Presidential archive materials. The author herself describes her research methods as ethnographic and discourse-centered and thus both, as Mapes describes them, situated and reflexive as well as fostering a holistic micro-to-macro approach.

In the chapter, Mapes also provides a very thorough overview of case studies in both the discussion on the theoretical framework for her research as well as in the description of the history of speechwriting and scholarly engagement. First, the author discusses language in institutional and professional contexts and focuses her attention on explaining differences among terms such as institutional, workplace, professional and organizational discourse (Drew and Heritage 1992; Holmes 2007; Kong 2014; Wee 2015). What especially attracts the attention of the reader here is that Mapes notices prevalent tendencies in the structure and functioning of the modern job market as regards language workers in different fields and observes the phenomenon of enterprise culture in which entrepreneurial qualities are promoted in that the language used by language workers is substantially consumer-oriented and such (organizational) discourse exactly is to be reproduced in order to achieve a desired strategic effect on the potential consumer in a selected sociolinguistic context. Next, the author discusses issues such as language work and wordsmiths, explains her standpoint on the definition of metadiscourse as well as on reflexivity and semiotic ideologies with reference to her research. Interestingly, the author emphasizes that while the communicative practices of speechwriters are certainly an element of broadly understood institutional discourse, speech writers themselves establish a distinct community of practice in which there is emphasis put on the uniqueness of their specialization and thus commonly acknowledged prestige of their craft. It is significant that in the discussion on the history of speechwriting and scholarly engagement Mapes refers to both US and European case studies. Here, the author indicates, among others, the issues of invisible linguistic authorship discussed by selected scholars as well as the prevalence of interview in selected qualitative research methods. One of the key conclusions from the author's deliberations is that owing to, rightly evaluated as necessary, analysis of the wordsmithery of the speechwriters understood as both their linguistic expertise as well as awareness of the

impact their output has as a commodity on the neoliberal market, the understanding of the complex processes involved in their craft is available for larger, not only scholarly, audiences.

The author continues the chapter with a thorough description of the research project in which she describes the initiative for her study on professional speechwriters which was a part of a larger research program, that is, *Elite Creativities* in which the main goal was to investigate the high-end language work of various understudied professions. Mapes also discusses her participation in a speechwriting course in Washington D.C. which serves as one of her primary sources as well as overviews the secondary sources (enumerated above) and focuses on her nineteen interviews with professional speechwriters as the main source of qualitative data, which she conducted between 2019–2021. What positively attracts attention in Mapes' process of collecting the data is the effort the author put into searching for and successfully engaging her research participants in the interviews since, as Mapes herself notices, the professional, especially political, speechwriters' community is largely unavailable. The author clearly enumerates her interview participants in Table 1.1 using their pseudonyms, yet providing a full description of the position or title they held at the time of the interview. What the author herself emphasizes with reference to the interviewees is that only three out of twenty participants (one joint interview included) did not have any experience in political and/or governmental positions and majority of the research participants were or had been political speechwriters, which adds to the uniqueness of the research data. The research method used in the study is critical discourse ethnography as the author herself emphasizes and rightly explains that the critical approach is justified in the case of her research data since even though the author prominently analyses written or spoken language, she also considers the multimodality of the context of speech production and is mindful of how materiality and/or embodiment of ideologies might impact the final outcome of the work of speechwriters or their commentary on the profession.

The consecutive chapters of the book, that is, chapters two, three, four and five serve as sets of Mapes' observations based on the analysis of both literature and research results as well as initial conclusions. In the chapters, the author first establishes and names three main themes which characterize speechwriter discourse, that is, *invisibility*, *craft* and *virtue* as well as analyses and discusses these in detail in chapters three to five. It is worth noticing that such triad of themes not only supports both the line of argumentation the author proposes and develops, but also serves as effective means to clarify the

author's thought process and coherently orders the steps of the undertaken analysis. In what follows, the chapters will be reviewed.

In Chapter 2 of the book, the author establishes the themes of the speechwriter discourse, that is, *invisibility*, *craft* and *virtue* and refers to these as parameters of professionalism. First, Mapes again refers to the applied linguists' limited interest in the speechwriting profession, yet, interestingly, emphasizes the apparently vast interest in the work of speechwriters expressed by the general public and thus used by authors of cultural texts. The author follows Wodak (2009) and refers to the examples of the work of political speechwriters being mythologized by media representations, which the scholar refers to as fictionalization of politics which has originated in the public's general dissatisfaction with politics and, resulting from it, desire for political figures to represent similar values to the highly moralized fictitious characters from films. Mapes' deliberations on the examples of cultural texts which include figures of virtuous political speechwriters constitute another element of the author's discourse which adds to the clarity of presenting her line of argumentation since, as the author notices, despite their recognizable craft and virtue, the characters stay invisible. Next, the author refers to Goffman's three interconnected concepts key to speechwriters' practices, that is, frontstage and back stage; participation framework; and production format (Goffman 1959, 1981) which lead her to the discussion on the three themes of speechwriters' practice she proposes herself. Having analyzed the interview data, Mapes 1) introduces the concept of *invisibility* as a point of professional pride to demonstrate how speechwriters embrace the erasure of their authorship 2) demonstrates the constructions of expertise which display the speechwriters' *craft* and 3) provides examples which support how *virtue* (i.e. behavior deemed especially ethical or moral in the context of speechwriting) is prevalent in the data.

In Chapter 3, Mapes includes an intriguing discussion on the theme of *invisibility* in the work of speechwriters together with the concepts of materiality and erasure in that the author focuses on tracking the life of a political speech, as she calls it, from the very assignment to delivery. The author again employs a triad of concepts in the theoretical framework for her deliberations and describes 1) language materiality, that is, how there is an interrelation between language and political economy; 2) text trajectories – the processes which support the evolution of a text and 3) entextualization, that is, the de- and recontextualization of language (Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012; Lillis 2008; Bauman and Briggs 1990). The author analyses three case studies whose results indicate speechwriters' full erasure throughout the process of forming their deliverables. Finally, Mapes' main conclusion

here is that in order to succeed as wordsmiths and claim their status, speechwriters need to discursively enact the new worker-self driven by the economic demands (Urciuoli 2008).

In Chapter 4 of the book, the theme of speechwriters' *craft* is explained together with the concepts of creativity and distinction. As Mapes emphasizes, speechwriters' open claims to craftsmanship and creativity appear in their metadiscursive accounts and thus what is revealed is their inherent positioning as elite or high-end language workers. The author also discusses the discrepancy between ordinary language work or creative play and exceptional creativity displayed in the speechwriters' discourse (Swann and Deumert 2018). Next, having analyzed the data in the memoirs and interviews, the author thoroughly investigates the speechwriters' microlinguistic choices which display their claims to artistry as well as the emphasis they put on persuasion as creative practice. An interesting element of the chapter is the author's conclusion regarding the demonstration of how the enterprise of creativity in speechwriters' practices is a key strategy for achieving and maintaining status as well as how they consider themselves commodified bundles of skills in the neoliberal economy (Holborow 2018).

Chapter 5 constitutes Mapes' discussion on *virtue* together with the concepts of transgression and value following observations from the analysis of the gathered data. In the chapter, Mapes again manages to not only provide a coherent line of argumentation in an attempt to explain the initially abstract concept of *virtue* regarding the mindset and deliverables of speechwriters, but she also engages the reader by starting the chapter with coining the trope *virtuous outlaw(s)* to refer to the identity of the speechwriter community. The author justifies the use of the term in that the very observation stems from research data found in interviews in which the speechwriters referred to themselves and their community as, for instance, *being vaguely outlaws, pirates* or having a *lone wolf mentality* to mean 1) that they establish their professional status as independent and distinctively skilled and 2) that they share an ingroup valuing of, among others, their invisibility, unconventional training, behind-the-scenes control or even transgressive collusion.

What is additionally interesting is that Mapes makes another observation on how the mindset of *virtuous outlaw(s)* is learned, usually on-the-job as the author emphasizes, and contributes to the ideological stance the speechwriters share regarding their linguistic skill being moralized and deemed superior. The author concludes that the processes leading to the shared mentality described function as a source for affective binding and status production. The issues discussed in the chapter also regard affect studies, notions of emotional labour as well as professional/personal identity

as it emerges in workplace discourse (Comer 2022; Ahmed 2004; Hochschild 2012; Holmes 2007).

Chapter 6 of the book provides a discussion on the conclusions from the study. Mapes clearly dissects the general message from the study by means of identifying and illuminating three main problems for applied linguists included which regard issues such as, for instance, political economy and the marketplace, folk linguistics or community-centered collaboration. As regards speechwriting, the author discusses the phenomenon of paradoxical struggle for legitimacy since, on the one hand, the practitioners strive for their work to be acknowledged and valued and, on the other, it is only by functioning within their field that they accumulate status and capital (Bourdieu 2005). Finally, one of Mapes' thoughts which stays with the reader is that speechwriters both avow and disavow not only the ownership of their deliverables, but also their power or prestige, which adds to the complexity of their language work in the neoliberal economy.

The book is definitely a novel voice in the discussion on rhetoric in applied linguistics. The qualitative analysis of the speechwriters' community in the US indicates the complexity of the business of speechwriters in the neoliberal economy as well as of the understanding of their identity as high-end language workers and their positioning on the market. What constitutes an ultimately practical addition to the content is the sections with suggestions for further reading the author included after every chapter. Finally, the clarity and coherence which characterize Mapes' discourse add to the positive effect the book has on the reader.

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