

Persuasion and suggestion as priorities in psycholinguistic survey of political discourse

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Abstract

Nowadays the ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue provides a rich soil for linguistic cultivation. There can be no mistaking in the fact that linguistic phenomena can't be studied from a purely linguistic perspective while doing discourse analysis.

The present paper dwells on the psychological inside of political discourse trying to reveal psycholinguistic phenomena, namely persuasion and suggestion, interwoven in political text and talk. The research aims to prove that the speech strategy of manipulative argumentation implemented in political discourse rests on persuasion and suggestion in deeply fundamental ways.

Persuasion appeals mainly to human logic; manipulation reportedly affects human subconsciousness. The present research reveals that persuasion is hardwired to argumentation, whereas suggestion underlies manipulation. However in the mainstream of political discourse these two powerful means of impact are inextricably intertwined constituting the psycholinguistic basis of the speech strategy of manipulative argumentation implemented in political discourse.

Key words: persuasion, suggestion, manipulative argumentation, political discourse

Introduction

The demarcation line between speech impact means and devices has not yet been drawn. It is abundantly clear that scholars have not achieved a consensus on the matter under consideration. Nevertheless an attempt of systemization has been made by Sternin who distinguishes between:

1. proof as a narration of arguments in line with the laws of Logic;
2. persuasion as the formation of a belief that the truth is verified, under logical or emotional pressure;
3. convincing as an impetus to renounce one's viewpoint by adopting someone else's;

4. suggestion as a way of inoculating ideas bypassing critical evaluation of the addressee;
5. imposture conveyed as a must-do against the addressee's will (Sternin, 2001, p. 252).

Of the above-cited ones, the two basic speech impact means implemented in political text and talk are persuasion and suggestion. Since psychological impact is carried out in two simultaneous directions, namely on human consciousness and subconsciousness, scholars distinguish between rational and emotional impact. The addresser's appeal to the listener's psychology, his/her consciousness and emotions underlies the rhetorical organization of discourse, up to the selection of language means (Shelestyuk, 2006, p. 153-164).

The psychological categories of persuasion and suggestion have penetrated into Linguistics through the study of speech impact.

Persuasion is interpreted as speech organization and transmission so as to appeal to the addressee's consciousness and critical thinking. Persuasion does not equal to argumentation and is not replaced by it since it relies on rational justification as well as on the system of arguments. Neither should persuasion be equated to the classical techniques and imagery of rhetoric. Also, it does not coincide with separate directive or imperative speech acts. The mechanisms of persuasion are systemized and are based on rational and emotional impact principles (Chernyavskaya, 2006, p. 46).

Thus the research makes it abundantly clear that persuasion appeals to human reason and rational ways of thinking regulating the addressee's actions in line with the addresser's hidden motives.

Summing up the issues of persuasive communication A.Golodnov proposes the following assumptions:

1. persuasive communication is a special type of psycholinguistic relationship between the interlocutors in which consciousness is the impact target;
2. persuasive communication is carried out through persuasion and attraction aiming at the change in the addressee's behaviour;
3. persuasion is carried out by means of certain text types and is a practice-based mode of human cooperation (ibid.)

If persuasion is humanistic and tolerant, since it gives room for addressee's critical evaluation and further conscious action, suggestion is comparatively anti-human as it implies inconspicuous reconstruction of human subconsciousness. Scholars call special attention to the hidden, inconspicuous nature of suggestion, the latter implying "absence of critical evaluation" on the part of the addressee (ibid.).

Suggestion is the impact on human psychology which has to do with digressing awareness. The addressee is in a subordinate communicative position of which s/he is utterly unaware.

Suggestive linguistics is the domain of scholarly research which brings together divergent interpretations of suggestion. Zvegintsev (1968, p. 138) formulates the main propositions of "impact" linguistics as follows:

1. language as a whole can be regarded as a suggestive system (a system endowed by the power of suggestion); in other words- all the language components have the potential of suggestion;
2. suggestive linguistics is interdisciplinary and borders on Linguistics and Psychology. This is the reason for taking into account the addressee's physiological reaction;
3. speech impact is embedded in text. Texts can be both verbal and nonverbal (gestures, mimicry, etc.), i.e. text can be regarded as a sign system which encompasses "a bunch of languages";
4. suggestive linguistics is of a dynamic nature; it studies impact processes;
5. each impact component is of a double nature;
6. it is appropriate to analyze speech impact from the point of view of the communication theory.

One of the main preconditions for realizing suggestion is the psychological 'cultivation' of the addressee's consciousness: "When we have a ready-made opinion which is forced with good or ill intentions, logically or hypnotically, we are speaking of suggestion in its broad sense. Naturally speech suggestion is not to be taken as inoculation of utterly alien elements into the addressee's consciousness; on the contrary, it implies primary 'cultivation' in order not to introduce irrelevant information to human brain" (Demjankov, 1989, p. 13 – 40).

Both persuasion and suggestion have a conduct-regulating function which linguistically corresponds to achieving the perlocutive effect.

Summing up central issues of persuasion and suggestion, we can state that:

1. persuasion as well as suggestion are embodied in text and can therefore be revealed through text analysis;
2. the demarcation line between persuasion and suggestion lies in the intention of appealing to human reason, as in the former case, or bypassing it, as in the latter case; via suggestion the political leader verbally hypnotizes the audience;
3. there is no unsurmountable border between persuasion and suggestion. Being oriented asunder pragmatically, persuasion and suggestion complement each other in real communicative process.

The present paper regards persuasion and suggestion as *pragmemes* [8], the latter being interpreted as pragmatic subsystems of linguistic competence which are meant for both rational and emotional impact realization and addressee's conduct manipulation. Among the pragmemes we find emotionality, evaluation and aesthetics (Avetisyan, 2015).

The present research reveals that persuasion is hardwired to argumentation, whereas suggestion underlies manipulation. It must be stated that in linguistic literature we find sufficient evidence that both argumentation and manipulation are speech strategies (ibid.). We depart from the assumption that manipulative argumentation be viewed as a 'hybrid' speech strategy, with persuasion and manipulation for its psycholinguistic basis (ibid.). Political text and talk provide the researcher rather rich pragmatic and psycholinguistic material for analysis (Chilton, 2004, p. 226).

Relevant to the present paper is the interpretation of speech strategy put forward by S. Gorin: "Speech strategy is the overall communicative intention, the speech mechanism of introducing change to the addressee's mind, the correction of his/her vision of the world" (Gorin, 1994, p. 37).

Thus, as a psycholinguistic means of impact persuasion is the 'backbone' of argumentation strategy, suggestion having the same function within the strategy of argumentation. As it has already been stated, the latter act in the deep structure (Chomsky, 1965) of political discourse and are inextricably interwoven.

Persuasion and suggestion in action

To illustrate persuasion and suggestion in action, the present research discusses examples in which narration of arguments is of a manipulative character:

94 years ago one of the great atrocities of the 20th century began. Each year, we pause to remember the 1,5million Armenians who were subsequently massacred or marched to their death in the final days of Ottoman Empire. The Meds Yeghern must live on in our memories, just as it lives on in the hearts of the Armenian people (Obama, "Obama on Armenian Remembrance Day", April 24, 2009).

The episode of argumentation is influential *per se* due to the information embedded in it. The opening of the very first sentence "one of the great atrocities" makes negative evaluation conspicuous. Negative connotation of "atrocious" is enhanced by the epithet "great" arousing curiosity towards the continuation. The unmistakably derogative passive construction of "were massacred", coupled with its euphemized variant "were marched to their death", semantically echo each other. The third sentence is the "peak" of argumentation taking into consideration the diplomatic mission of the speech. By admitting the facts and labeling the event as

“Meds Yeghern” Obama de facto acknowledges Genocide. But the argumentation is manipulative and he thus avoids admitting it de jure.

There can be no mistaking persuasion that underlies the cited facts, more precisely-the arguments. Manipulation consists in the replacement of the word “Genocide”, which would lead to international recognition, by the term “Meds Yeghern” by analogy with the Jewish holocaust, leaving the Armenian lobbyists and the Armenian community in the dark.

More traces of persuasion and suggestion as the psycholinguistic underpinnings of political text and talk, come under the linguistic microscope in the following:

The truth is, on issue after issue that would make a difference in your lives – on health care and education and the economy – Senator McCain has been anything but independent. He said that our economy has made “great progress” under this President. He said that the fundamentals of the economy are strong. And when one of his chief advisors – the man who wrote his economic plan – was talking about the anxiety Americans are feeling, he said that we were just suffering from a “mental recession”, and that we’ve become, and I quote, “a nation of whiners” (Obama, “The American Promise”, Denver Colorado, August 28, 2008).

In the communicative process some of the transmitted information is naturally lost because of fatigue, uncertainty, flagging interest, etc. On that political orators build the techniques of deception and distortion of facts. Thus, relying on the mistrust to G.W. Bush and his policies John McCain’s name is anchored to the latter. The main trick lies in the quotations (“mental recession”, “nation of whiners”) which apart from being insulting in their contents, are more importantly anonymous. Instead, the author is represented as “one of his (McCain’s) chief advisors, the man who wrote his economic plan”, this is of the utmost importance for it subconsciously evokes the false impression that the responsibility for these words lies on J. McCain focusing the listener’s attention on his person only.

In the mainstream of information this keeps our attention on McCain’s person and policies making him the guilty party. The false impression of unanimity is the result of association. According to D. Carnegie there are three natural laws of memorizing impression, repetition and association which is a productive way of supplying the missing information with the required bias (Carnegie, 1998, 2).

Conclusion

Studying the deployment of persuasion and suggestion in political text and talk, we infer that these psycholinguistic tools perform a sound impact function giving the orator room for manipulation of facts, beliefs and opinions.

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