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THE POWER OF LANGUAGE IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Elena-Cristina Berariu, Assist. Prof., PhD, "Dimitrie Cantemir" University of Tîrgu Mureș and Andreea Peterlicean, Assist. Prof., PhD, Sapientia University of Tîrgu Mureș

Abstract: People construct structures out of words that are not only aimed to make sense but also to serve more specific purposes. They choose from the multitude of available structures those that will determine a specific interpretation to ensure the achievement of their objective. People have come to master these choices and, consciously or not, they manipulate their interpretation so as to convey additional meanings. They thus empower language not only reflecting but also influencing the social context in which it is produced.

Keywords: linguistic choice, manipulation, military discourse

1. Introduction

Linguists have long been interested in the structure of words (morphology) and sentences (syntax) and even their function, considering that people construct structures out of words that are not only aimed to make sense but also to serve more specific purposes: people speak in order to exchange information, to ask for help, to persuade, to promise, to apologize, etc. according to their purpose in a certain social context (Austin 1962, Searle 2000).

Discourse analysts have drawn attention to yet another very important aspect of language: linguistic choices for the purpose of conveying alternative meanings, a different view of how the world is organized, of social ideologies or cultural beliefs. Fairclough (1995) believes that discourse *constitutes* the social. People use language to convey meanings for a certain purpose in a certain social context but at the same time they place themselves in the social organization according to their ideologies and power. Thus, language is invested with social, political and cultural beliefs (Fairclough, 1989).

Other researchers, such as Adam Jaworsky and Nikolas Coupland (1999) share this idea of language reflecting and shaping social order also acknowledging that language is closely connected to politics and culture. How is that possible? When people talk or write, they bring their inner world into being, they express their knowledge and experience of the world and even shape the world around them. Discourse is, therefore, invested with social, political and cultural beliefs; it is the expression of both language and culture and all the ideology associated with culture. Thus, the study of discourse may focus on a conversation or a text (the micro level), but at the same time it provides a broader perspective (the macro level) on the social, political and cultural functions of discourse within groups, society and culture (van Dijk, 2000). Discourse analysts have drawn attention to a very important aspect of language that allows it to be manipulative: linguistic choices.

Within a language, there are possible choices at various levels (graphic, syntactic, semantic) that may seem arbitrary, but they are not. We can express the same idea using different structures (passive or active voice) or use synonyms for a certain word without

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changing its basic meaning. But we do this for different purposes as we use language in different contexts, otherwise the alternative structures would disappear from the language as they would be considered redundant or obsolete. Therefore, there cannot be truly synonymous words or truly synonymous surface structures and if these alternative structures exist, if the grammatical set of conventions allows their existence, it obviously means that they serve different functions (Johnstone, 2002). Moreover, according to Johnstone the ways of talking and writing can indicate a way of thinking, which can, in its turn, be manipulated by the choices about grammar, style or wording. It follows that any linguistic choice will determine a linguistic interpretation which will reveal a way of thinking, a view of the world. She groups the choices a discourse producer needs to make as follows:

- choices related to the representation of actions, actors and events
- choices about the representation of knowledge status
- choices about naming and wording
- choices about incorporating and representing other voices

The purpose of this paper is to show how the linguistic theories mentioned, applicable to any type of discourse, can be used in the analysis of political discourse as well. For this purpose, we decided to analyze Donald Trump's victory speech as it appeared on the New York Times website, compiled by Federal News Services on November 9th, 2016.

We will eventually demonstrate how powerful and manipulative language can be if the appropriate linguistic choices are made and how much it reflects the social context in which it is produced.

2. Case study

Unlike most Romanian political discourses, which tend to be rather long and sophisticated, Donald Trump's victory speech stands out in its apparent simplicity but it is very catchy and stimulating, entertaining even. A close analysis of the linguistic techniques used in his speech will show how deeply rooted they are in the social context in which they occur and also how manipulative language can be.

Trump's victory speech seems to be quite informal from beginning to end, set on breaking rules rather than following them. For instance, instead of the usual greeting of the audience, Trump starts by thanking the audience and then apologizes for being late, justifying himself by stating the obvious: 'complicated business; complicated'. He uses short, elliptical sentences that instantly draw him close to the audience and makes him one of them. Campaigning is complicated even for those who are part of it, he leads them to believe. Although apparently simple, Trump's victory speech holds an amazing number of linguistic manipulative techniques that are possibly not very obvious to everyone.

A very clear example of structure choice for the purpose of emphasizing an item and thus influencing interpretation is the use of passive/active voice and the semantic role in the **representation of actions, actors and events** (Johnstone, 2002).

In both English and Romanian it is possible to make distinctions between who does an action and who suffers the effect of an action by means of passive or active voice. Such a representation of action or events has to do with semantic roles, clearly mapped onto grammatical structures. Thus the role of agent in an active sentence is mapped onto the position of sentence subject while the role of the patient – the one who suffers the action – is mapped onto the position of grammatical object. Placing less emphasis on one semantic role or another via grammatical choice is a way of changing focus on one item or another

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according to speaker's opinion on the matter, thus influencing reader's/listener's interpretation: 'These are spectacular people, sometimes underappreciated unfortunately, but we appreciate them.' It is a beautiful combination of semantic role, ellipsis of the verb *to be*, and antimetabole (repetition of words in successive clauses, but in reverse grammatical order, Leech, 1972) to emphasize on the importance of the people working in the Secret Services and not on the beneficiary of the action. A similar reversed structure is so craftily constructed that it actually manages to emphasize equally both semantic roles:' The forgotten men and women will be forgotten no longer'.

The use of intransitive verbs is usually a way of saying that things are taken for granted. Thus, Hilary '*fought* very hard', '*has worked* very long and very hard', which everyone knows to be true but it also implies that Trump has not only done the same but even more to have won the battle.

Some verbs are part of unexpected associations to nouns that would not generally be encountered in such structures for the simple reason that they are inanimate. E.g. 'It's time for America to bind the wounds of division'. However, such personifications do not occur as often as one might expect, Trump obviously prefers to address the audience directly and refer to himself, the leading party and all the Americans by using the pronoun 'we', thus getting closer to the audience and winning their trust.

Another way of manipulating the representation of events, actions or actors is by means of nominalization, which means the choice to use in the role of grammatical subject noun words that can also be other parts of speech such as verbs or adjectives, thus emphasizing either on the event or on the agent: 'Working together, we will begin the urgent task of [...]'. However, such structures appear less frequently than in other discourses that we have previously analysed, such as the military discourse (Berariu, Pop, Crisan, 2011)

Johnstone (2002) also mentions the **choices about representation of knowledge status**, which refers to the relationship of the speakers towards the claims they make. It is achieved through the choice of verbs, numerals, deictic expressions and adjectives.

The use of the verb 'be' in present tense simple means that the claim is universally and incontrovertibly true, which is further supported by repetition as in: '*It's time* for America to bind the wounds of division […] *It's time* for us to come together […] *It's time* I pledge […]'. Other verbs in present tense simple have similar effects as in '[...] hard working men and women who *love* their country and *want* a better, brighter future ' and so will verbs used in future aspects, which are very generously used and full of promises: 'We are going to fix our inner cities and build our highways', 'we will double our growth' or 'It's going to be'. A stronger effect on the audience in terms of promises to be kept is the use of the powerful future tense within a parallel, repetitive structure: 'Americans [...] expect the government to serve the people, and serve the people it will'.

The use of verbs such as know, suspect, claim or think or believe shows the speaker's degree of confidence about the truth of the claim: e.g. 'I know it', 'I know', 'You know', 'That's right'. Certainty can be enhanced or diminished by adverbials depending on the speaker's attitude towards what is being said. 'We are going to get to work *immediately* for the American people.' It also shows awareness on the part of the speaker related to the audience needs: e.g. '[...] *hopefully* you will be so proud of your president', '[...] *hopefully* you will say that that was something that you *really* were very proud to do [...]'. The speaker seems to be gradually more humble in front of the audience, without losing credibility or strength. He gives thanks to all his supporters, starting with his family then turning to his 'small stuff', which is 'not so small' after all. He speaks greatly of them, praises them, talks

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directly to them, asking where they, urging them to come up on stage next to him. He is thus winning the audience over, as he shows respect, love and appreciation for all those who have been by his side.

Modal verbs appear frequently to enhance the power of verbs: e.g. 'We must reclaim our country's destiny.', 'we have to do a great job' or 'I can tell you'. The strongest claims, however, are expressed through imperatives in the form of incentives: e.g. 'Let me tell you', 'I want to tell you', 'Look at all the people' or 'I'll tell you'. The same effect, or even a better effect upon the audience is the use of interrogatives: 'How did you possibly guess?'

Deictic expressions can also express the speaker's knowledge status towards the claims they make. The use of pronouns is relevant in this respect as they can show familiarity: 'That Rudy never changes!' or identification with the audience when 'I' frequently becomes 'we', 'us' or 'our': '*we* are going to rebuild', 'She congratulated *us* - it's about *us*- on *our* victory'. It can also show acknowledgement of each particular component of a whole: 'every single American', 'everyone'. When using the feminine or masculine forms of the personal pronoun, it will only be to emphasize its accompanying gender characteristics that will be further invested in 'every': 'Every single American will have the opportunity to realize his or her fullest potential.'

The use of numerals is thought to bring credibility to what one says. It is similar to the use of passive structures in an attempt to indirectly suggest trust in quality: 'We have over 200 generals and admirals that have endorsed our campaign. […]We have 22 congressional Medals of Honor recipients.'

The degree of the emotional implication of the speakers towards the claims they make is shown by the choice of grading adjectives, starting from 'great', 'special', 'really special' to strong, non-gradable adjectives such as 'fantastic', 'amazing',' spectacular', 'unbelievable', 'tremendous' ,'incredible' which abound in the text. The use of adverbials to strengthen adjectives is also very frequent: 'tremendously talented people', 'highly respected'. There is no shortage of comparatives or superlatives either: 'better and brighter future', 'as smart as you get' 'my greatest honours', 'the hardest-working guy' or 'the best and brightest'. The best line comes in the form of an apparently very simple sentence, but of great impact: 'America will no longer settle for anything less than the best.' Although no clear comparison is made, the audience is led to believe that America once did 'settle' for something which was not 'the best'.

Further, there is the **choice about naming and wording**, which can also make a claim about the world. It is in this area that manipulation is most obvious as it is expressed directly and needs less effort to interpret. The speaker identifies with the audience by adopting informal, colloquial English, starting from the simple 'folks' (the audience), 'guy' (the chairman of the RNC) or 'political stuff' (political action) to the 'incredible people' when referring to his supporters. There are everyday expressions such as 'mess around with' or more specific ones such as 'rip me down and put me back down on my seat'. This colourful language is also used admiringly as in 'boy oh boy oh boy', 'My God'. Familiarity is obvious in the speaker's use of first names when addressing his supporters, showing that they are not only supporters but also his friends, and quite important ones (major, general, admiral, senator, governor), carrying great credibility, which will thus further be invested in him: 'Former mayor Rudy Giuliani. Unbelievable. Unbelievable. He travelled with us and he went through meetings. That Rudy never changes. Where is Rudy? Where is he? Rudy.' If Rudy is unbelievable, so is he. If he went through meetings, so did he. And he asks Rudy on stage so that they can share the victory. How thoughtful and generous of him. And he is also very

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modest. It has been a 'great honour' to work with such 'highly respected', 'tremendous people'. He has won the audience over.

Linguistic choices can make the difference between success and failure. The appropriate words and structures in a certain context can work wonders. Words can draw attention, keep the attention and guide one's stream of thinking. The words and phrases of a text relate to each other by means of text- forming devices, enabling the producer and the interpreter to establish relationships across sentence and clause boundaries and thus tying the text together and giving it cohesion. Linguists (Halliday and Hassan,1976, Leech, 1972, Montgomery, 1986) have identified various types of cohesive devices such as reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, lexical cohesion (reiteration), information structure, parataxis, apposition, parallelism. Trump's speech abounds in amazingly simple but well chosen structures. We will analyze those that occurred more often in his speech or those which we considered more powerful.

At graphic level, there is alliteration greatly combined in a repetitive graded structure: 'dream big and bold and daring' or in a rhyme: 'better and brighter future'. At syntactic level, repetitive parallel structures (parataxis) apply to various parts of speech, from verbs or adjectives, having a very powerful effect on the audience: anaphora e.g. '*It's time* for America to bind the wounds of division […] *It's time* for us to come together […] *It's time* I pledge […]'; epiphora e.g. 'They are tough and they are smart and they are sharp.', or 'the first man, first senator, first major, major politician'; antimetabole (it consists of the repetition of words in successive clauses, but in reverse grammatical order): e.g. 'These are spectacular people, sometimes unappreciated, unfortunately, but we appreciate them.' Repetitive patterns are rhetorical devices that heighten the emotional tone of the message and its importance: 'No dream is too big, no challenge is too great'. Sometimes it is combined with opposing terms for greater effect: ' We will seek common ground, not hostility; partnership, not conflict'.

Ellipsis, the intentional use of incomplete sentences, appears quite often as we have already seen. Montgomery (1986) considers ellipsis to be a rhetoric device, a sentence with an unusual structure where certain elements are simply not mentioned. However, the message sent is comprehensive and to the point: *'Jeff Sessions*. Where is Jeff? *Great man.*'. Not only is the auxiliary verb omitted in this case, but the grammatical subject as well. It is used not just to draw attention but to keep it up. A sense of informality is created since ellipsis is normally used in spoken language, in face-to-face communication: 'He is an unbelievable star. *He is*.' Reference is a device used to refer to an item in another sentence, so for interpretation readers need to move back and forth and sometimes outside the text. The device most frequently used as reference is the pronoun. In an isolated sentence we cannot interpret a pronoun as we do not know who it refers to. In face-to-face communication, they should be easily recognized and interpreted: 'We must reclaim our country's destiny. We have to do *that.*' Since the pronoun 'that' shortly follows the main sentence, it is very clear that it refers to 'reclaiming the country's destiny. In another fragment, the speaker clarifies the meaning and even adds to it: '[…] I thank you and especially for putting up with all those hours. *This* was tough. *This* was tough. *This* political stuff is nasty and *it*'s tough.' 'This' refers to 'putting up with all those hours' but is part of a larger item, the 'political stuff' further reiterated as 'it'.

Information structure refers to the structure of sentences that partly arises out of requirements of information flow from one sentence to another. Speakers tend to put relatively familiar information at the beginning of a sentence (given) and relatively new, unfamiliar information, closer to the end (new). Very often, however, this order is reversed thus treating new information as if it were already known: 'I got to know him as a competitor

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because he was one of the folks that was negotiating against those Democrats. Dr. Ben Carson.'

There are also **the choices about incorporating and representing other voices** in the form of quotations or description of others' speech, which is also a way of representing a view of the world, the world of the speakers. In order to emphasize the idea that he is close to everyone, that he appreciates all his supporters, that he can be trusted, Trump calls upon major groups or important people to be by his side or clearly states they are on his side, increasing his credibility. He mentions the veterans, who are 'loyal' and 'incredible people' and promises to take care of them. There are the 'generals and admirals' who 'have endorsed' his campaign, the Secret Service 'you don't want to mess around with' but who are 'here tonight'. Then there are the members of his family, senator Jeff Sessions, Dr. Ben Carson and many others whose voices are unheard nut whose presence id very much felt. The only real voice that is included in the speech is that of Reince Priebus, the chairman of the RNC who doesn't say much but he acknowledges Trump to be the president, gives him his blessing and expresses his admiration for him: 'Ladies and gentlemen, the next president of the United States, Donald Trump. Thank you. It's been an honour. God bless. Thank God.'
Another voice is that of the opposition but the tone is humorous and non-aggressive but firm nevertheless: 'They kept saying we have a small stuff. Not so small. Look at all the people that we have. Look at all of these people. ' or 'those who have chosen not to support me in the past, of which there were a few…' A powerful voice is that of the audience who reacts to Trump's speech by laughing or by applauding, thus expressing their agreement with what has been said. Trump is the voice expressing what they all feel and believe. He identifies himself with them from the very beginning, 'it's about us' (the winners) but he is also part of a greater group, America 'To all Republicans and Democrats and independents across this nation, I say it is time for us to come together as one united people', and only then does he refer to himself as 'I': 'It's time I pledge to every citizen of our land that I will be president for all Americans [...]'.

Trump manages to raise peoples' awareness on the importance of setting aside political, religious, social or racial differences and emphasizes on their role in the making history by calling it a 'movement' and not a 'campaign': 'It's a movement comprised of Americans from all races, races, religions, backgrounds and beliefs'. He appeals to their sense of duty by mentioning the veterans who once fought for them, to the love for their country and home, which will be rebuilt, while the American dream will be renewed. He establishes common ground by talking about the things that all American know and only then does he make promises, choosing his words so that they surely have an impact. Thus instead of the simple verb use, he uses 'harness' or 'leverage' in 'harness the creative talents' and 'leverage their tremendous talent'. When talking about winning, he refers to the famous horse Secretariat who is widely known as a superstar and even has a bronze bust in Belmond. And Reince is a superstar, therefore a winner.

4. Conclusions

People choose from the multitude of available structures a language has a certain variant according to their aim and to the given situation or context. Thus, their linguistic choices will determine a specific interpretation that will ensure the achievement of their objective. Since more often than not people mean to say more than what first meets the eye,

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they have come to master these choices and use them, consciously or not, to manipulate their interpretation so as to convey the intended meanings.

Although this paper analyses but a few of the linguistic techniques used in Donald Trump's victory speech, we hope that we have managed to show how powerful language can be, how it can show emotions or appeal to them, how it can show a view of the world and reflect social contexts.

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