A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL DISOCURSE

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Abstract

This article aims to focus on the main characteristics of a political speech from the point of view of the manner in which it is built, delivered and perceived by the protagonists to the communicative instance. It is important to underline that the article lacks and denies any intention to analyse any political message or political aspects. It is a mere intent to discover and investigate the manner and reasons behind the choice of words, from a linguistic and stylistic perspective.

Keywords: discourse analysis, political speech, text production

People, as actors on the social stage, have always needed leaders to take them on the road to success and evolution. Being able to lead has always been considered a mere act of courage, wit and inspiration. It involved will to do good and means to do it. It involved ability to communicate efficiently and mastery in dealing with words. As words are the ones endowed with power to carry out evolution, governing and change. This enterprise has been performed under the form of politics, which is a term that "can be traced back to early Antiquity, with seminal works such as Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Politics and the work of Confucius."[2] According to the same source, the term comes from the Greek term *politika*, meaning "affairs of the cities", or "of, for, or relating to citizens". Thus, it became clear that all the protagonists involved in this act of politics aim at the same purpose, i.e., to communicate in an effective, helpful and meaningful manner to one another.

We have already stated in an article on communication and some factors that enhance it, that "there is an impressive number of specialists in human behaviour, psychologists, sociologists, public speakers, teachers of communication-related subject matters who author books that form the specialised literature of the communication techniques field. What all of them seem to have in common is the belief that qualitative inter-human relation and rapport is possible only by complying with a set of common sense rules, imposed by a well-supported awareness regarding the individual as a part of a community."[3] This leads us to believe that the act of communication is to be treated with a great amount of care and respect by all the protagonists to the communicative instance.

So as to illustrate and defend our idea, we are going to consider a political discourse from the point of view of its main characteristics, the manner in which it is built, delivered and perceived by the protagonists to the communicative instance. From the get-go, we must underline the fact that we deny any intention to analyse any political message or political aspects of the matter. Our open intent is to discover and investigate the

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[2] acc. to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics
[3] *Factors Enhancing Communication, or What (Not) to Do When Speaking in Public* in vol. CCI 3, "Petru Maior" University Publishing, Tg. Mureș, Romania, 2014, p. 195, http://www.upm.ro/cci3/

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manner and reasons behind the choice of words, from a linguistic and stylistic perspective. Thus, we consider that the discourse analysis approach is a clever application and a useful tool in studying the political meanings.

In order to perform our intended analysis, we ought to briefly describe the intent, ingredients and manner of the political discourse. Nevertheless, "political discourse analysis in many respects will be like any other kind of discourse analysis. The specifics of political discourse analysis therefore should be searched for in the relations between discourse structures and political context structures. Thus, whereas metaphors in classroom discourse may have an educational function, metaphors in politics will function in a political context, (…). An account of the structures and strategies of, e.g., phonology, graphics, syntax, meaning, speech acts, style or rhetoric, conversational interactions, among other properties of text and talk is therefore necessarily part of political discourse analysis only if such properties can be politically contextualised."[4]

One of the aspects upon which all political discourse analysts have agreed upon is that regarding the aim of such a discourse, i.e. that of convincing the listeners by use of (smartly managed) arguments, that of persuading them on an emotional level or even manipulate them, or even a mixture of them all. Above all, the one delivering such a sophisticated discourse ought to have certain socio-political background knowledge. There are rather straightforward conditions and specific discourse structures more or less effective for the political functions they may have. Thus, "parliamentary debates, for instance, are expected to be held in relatively formal style of address and dialogue. That is, at least for the official, public forms of political text and talk seem to have a number of stylistic constraints, which may not be exclusive. Some of the more formulaic expressions, forms of address and textual and dialogical conventions are even specific for bills, laws, regulations, parliamentary debates, or political speeches."

Yet, from the point of view of our editorial intent, let us only consider the main structural ingredients of such (or any type, for that matter) a discourse. From this point of view, a political speech generally begins with an introduction, which should contain the speakers' intent to catch the attention of the public, intent formulated under the form of presenting the purpose, topic and importance of the speech, even presenting a story or picture, an object, a photo, statistics, etc. that might be relevant to the topic.

Secondly, in the main part of the speech the speakers should do all their best to maintain the attention audience, forming rather short and clear-cut sentences, presenting legit and valuable ideas and background information able to support their ideas, also offering suggestions or solutions to the problems debated. The use of personal experience as an incentive or example, or the appropriate rhetorical devices such as repetition, alliteration, comparisons, emphasis etc. might also come in handy in order to make the speech more convincing.

Last, but not the least, the ending is to be considered carefully, in order not to baulk the entire communicative instance that has been so cautiously presented to that

[4] http://discourses.org/OldArticles/What%20is%20Political%20Discourse%20Analysis.pdf

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point. This would be the point when, again, to enforce the main idea and the speakers' position, they might as well appeal, again, to the intellect and/or emotion of the audience by summing up the main ideas/arguments in one or two sentences, or briefly mentioning what the outlook might be, or asking the audience to support their view, ideas, programme, etc.

Obviously, there is so much more than that when it comes to d esigning a convincing political speech; other important aspects that deserve our attention might be: special attention to key words and phrases; clusters of words (a series of words that are related to each other in meaning); opposing terms (negative/positive, like/hate); use of slogans, symbols, stereotypes; use abstractions and generalisations vs. the presentation of specific issues or events; metaphors, analogies, comparisons, demonstrative examples and, very importantly, well-taken care of style, semantics, grammar.

Regarding some stylistic devices that appear to be frequently used by the political speakers, we consider the following: (1) *analogy*, which means resemblance in some particulars between things otherwise unlike. (2) *simile*, which is a figure of speech in which two things are compared because they have something in common although they are different in all other respects; its general purpose is to make the description more vivid and more striking. In a simile the comparison is explicitly stated with the help of *as* or *like*. (3) A *metaphor* is a simile condensed: a simile says merely that one thing is like another, whereas the metaphor says that one thing is another. (4) *Alliteration*, which is the repetition of a consonantal sound of two or more neighbouring words. (5) The *repetition* of words or phrases is sometimes made use of for the purpose of emphasis. (6) In *parallelism* two or more parts of one sentence (sometimes of two or more sentences) are given a similar form so as to give the whole a definite pattern. This symmetry tends to produce an agreeable rhythm. It can also help to bring out the point of a paragraph - to emphasize a contrast, for example, by balancing some words or parts of speech against each other. (7) *antithesis*, which denotes the opposing of ideas by means of grammatically parallel arrangements of words, clauses or sentences so as to produce an effective contrast. [5]

All of the above mentioned features are more or less applicable to most speeches, especially those of persuasive nature. Nevertheless, "when we think of politics, we think of it mainly in terms of the struggle for power in order to secure specific ideas and interests and put them into practice. This process of manifesting a political will and transforming it into concrete social action is realised first of all between political parties. In this process, language plays an important role. In fact, any political action is prepared, accompanied, controlled and influenced by language. We could easily add other verbs to this list, such as guided, explained, justified, evaluated, criticised…" argues Christina Schäffner in her editorial *Political Speeches and Discourse Analysis* [6].

[5] apud. http://www.commoncorehistorysocialstudies6to8.com/uploads/1/3/5/2/13524571/political_speech_analysis.pdf
[6] Christina Schäffner (editor), *Analysing Political Speeches*, Multilingual Matters Ltd. Publishing, 1997, p. 9

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In the same article, the author makes us aware of the fact that there is a disputed concern regarding the study of language, reputed by, on the one hand, political scientists, and on the other hand linguists; thus, they take into consideration different aspects when they discuss the relationship between language and politics, and they also apply different theories and methods in doing so. "Political scientists are mainly concerned with the consequences of political decisions and actions for (the history of) a society and they may be interested in the political realities which are constructed in and through discourse. Linguists, on the other hand, have always been particularly interested in the linguistic structures used to get politically relevant messages across to the addressees in order to fulfil a specific function. But also a more narrow linguistic analysis of political discourse cannot ignore the broader societal and political framework in which such discourse is embedded."[7]

Above the whole analysis, another important aspect rises: this normativity of official discourse, discourse structures may also satisfy criteria of effectiveness and persuasion. Thus, lexical items not only may be selected because of official criteria of decorum, but also because they effectively emphasize or de-emphasize political attitudes and opinions, garner support, manipulate public opinion, manufacture political consent, or legitimate political power. The same may be true for the selection of topics, for the use of rhetoric figures, the pragmatic management of speech acts, interactional self-presentation, and so on.'[8]

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[7] idem

[8] http://discourses.org/OldArticles/What%20is%20Political%20Discourse%20Analysis.pdf

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