ARGUMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE

Silvana Kalemaj, MA
University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali", Albania

Abstract

The theory of argumentation is based on the assumption that arguments pervade and partly regulate all verbal exchanges. Thus, the idea is that, to speak is like to act upon an addressee by modifying his representation of the surrounding world. Through carefully planned discourse, speakers choose specific words to represent their views and opinions and convert their audience toward their preferred line of action. In principle, argumentation is used to handle the difference of opinion in a way that results in the acceptance of the arguer's standpoint by the addressee. This rhetorical procedure is especially applied in public persuasive discourse.

The study of argumentation in the context of persuasive speech has both a linguistic and social value since it emphasizes the role of argumentation to transmit concepts and ideas for understanding the persuasive communication of today which seems to serve particular interests. In classical times persuasive argumentation was heightened to an art form and used for the common good. The paper will address issues related with argument and argumentation theories, the use of language and argumentation in persuasive discourse, the notion of strategic maneuvering introduced in the pragma-dialectical theory which refers to the continual efforts made in all moves that are carried out in argumentative discourse to keep the balance between reasonableness and effectiveness.

It will particularly examine the use of argumentation as an instrument that aims to persuade by means of reasoning and effectiveness. The actors involved in argumentative discourse are primarily interested in resolving the difference of opinion effectively in favor of their case that serves their rhetorical interests best.

The paper will also deal with rhetorical tactics in fallacious argumentation and the strategies of illusionist argumentation, where logical reasoning can seem to be an argument, but in effect is an emotional mask that serves as a persuasive technique. To evaluate the types, the nature and power of arguments, examples and case studies will be examined from the

political and media field since argumentation is a prominent element of speech used in these domains.

Introduction

Effective communication has a great role in the development of human society. People will always want to chose the best candidate, to approve important issues and support the good causes in society. We communicate to exchange information and experience, to cooperate, to entertain, to understand the society around us and for other needs, as well. In order to have an effective communication, we need to evaluate our linguistic potential. Language represents the means that link our experiences and emotions. Through language we increase the aims of our thoughts and adapt to new situations. The more control we have on our words, the more success we will have.

Thus, language becomes an irreplaceable human value and its study a real need. Through words, people can exchange ideas to work together. Through words, people destroy or encourage each-other. Linguistic symb ols lead to discrimination or favoritism. They lead to war among nations and allow people to offend for racial prejudice. Words can be used to separate or join us. They have a great persuasive power when they make people vote for certain candidates, buy the advertised products or embrace certain doctrines.

Our society can't exist without the influence we exercise upon the opinions and behavior of other people to persuade by means of language. So, persuasion becomes an important act of communication, because success is largely dependent on how well the speaker uses the verbal symbols. Important corporations influence the opinion and image that people have created for them, because they use different persuasive techniques to create on the consumers strong preferences for their products and services.

Persuasion,   advertisement,   the   influence   of   the   media,   the communication of political campaigns and propaganda are terms that intertwine so much with each-other that often are used as synonyms. The common element that creates the basic structure of their existence is the human individuality itself. In essence, the human ego seeks to accomplish its physical and spiritual needs. A part of our ego, reflects benevolent feelings and is led by the sense of sacrifice. A part of our ego wants for us to be in control, to have power and to lead. These parts of our ego that dominate in different degrees in different groups and individuals are very much related with our security. They represent the central essence of persuasion. They represent the main needs of every person, the mental

processes and the emotional desires. In different fields of communication, persuaders have been successful because they have known how to influence our needs, our values and creeds with powerful techniques.

There are many definitions on the concept of persuasion. We can mention Miller, Devito, Berlo, etc. If taking into consideration their definitions and the fact that they all emphasize terms such as: message, logic, emotion, opinion, behavior, we can't think else of persuasion but as a social influence to create the desired viewpoints, attitudes and actions through the identification of our needs. One of the first scholars of rhetoric who put the main foundation on the issue of persuasion was Aristotle. The three Greek terms he used to describe persuasion are: *ethos* which represents the credibility of the speaker; *logos* which refers to the words and arguments and *pathos* related with the emotions of the speaker. Such elements as: the credibility of the speaker, evidence, emotion, identification, argumentation, fear are very important to understand the functioning mechanism of persuasion. The linguistic devices in the transmission of the message should be perceived as closely related to them.

1. Persuasive Strategies of Political Leaders

An important personality of the american politics, Hillary Clinton uses her persuasive repertor to influence people to support her ideas in her speech.

"Many things have changed since those times. We have lost a part of the hope and optimism of those times. Today we are confronted with greater challenges in the raising of our children or in the reformation of health care. We think our problems have become greater and unresolvable" (June 13, 1993) (Denton, Robert E.; Rachel L. Hlloway, eds. 1996: 56)

The inclusive "we" is used to identify her common experience with the audience and to convince them that she understands their needs and problems. She tries to create a friendly rapport by means of identification which is considered as a powerful persuasive technique because it raises the self-esteem of the listeners. This is also evident in the following passage:

"First, I would like to testify for the courage and dedication of the professional doctors. I will always appreciate their work and abilities, not simply because they cared for my father and his family, but also because they care for many others whose names I will never know." (Denton, Robert E.; Rachel L. Hlloway, 1996:57)

By highlighting the dedication of the proffessional doctors, Clinton tries to create an atmosphere of support and understanding. She tries to identify with her listeners, by puting the stress on their hard work and dedication toward their profession. Her argumentative style is considered as her strong point. This will naturaly raise her credibility.

The famous words of the albanian national hero Skënderbe are another illustration of the power of identification. "I didn't bring freedom to you. I found that among you". By using this antitheses, the speaker stronly identifies with the listeners by holding a humbling attitude in order to elevate their values.

In her address to the medical association, Clinton accepts the difficulties in reaching a common agreement and makes an appeal to the people to support the solution of the administration.

"I think that this will mean that we have not done our job right. But, I hope and expect that you will support this plan. I also belive that since we are dealing with a very complex problem, it would be difficult to find a solution that will be accepted by all" (June 13, 1993) (Denton, Robert E.; Rachel L. Hlloway, 1996:58)

She is presenting the problem in a reasonable and logical way, by accepting the viewpoints related to the health care reform of some of the members and by pointing out both aspects of the problem. She also accepts the fact that many of them might not agree with the presented plan. So, we see how she tries to answer an argument before the listeners react with a counterargument. Her ideas are presented in an organised logical manner.

Tony Blair is another great speaker in the field of politics who uses language in a powerful convincing manner. His speech at the Labor Party conference in Brighton was viewed as an opportunity to outline policy directions, to convince, to isolate dissenters and attack the opposition. This was a speech that was widely reported and reprinted in the international press.

"We stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy and we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our world. And realise that in Britain you have a friend and an ally that will stand with you". In retrospect the millennium marked only a moment in time. It was the events of September 11 that marked a turning point of history where we confront the dangers of the future and assess the choices facing mankind. It was a tragedy. An act of evil. From this nation goes our deepest sympathy and prayers for the victims and our profound solidarity with the American people. We were there with you at first. We will stay with you to the last.   (The power of community can change the world, Speech by Tony Blair, Prime Minister, Labour Party Conference, Brighton 2 October 2001) (Primhak, 2002:95)

In this speech he addresses not just to party members, or even to the nation, but rather to the "community" of nations. The constitution of "we" throughout the discourse is disjunctional, sliding in identity and polarity. It can be interpreted as both the government and implicitly every individual as well. It   introduces the theme of confrontation with danger and making

choices. It also expresses support for the "American people" the friendly nation. He himself takes the professional role as leader of the government and the "voice" of the nation. A polarized distinction between them (evil) and US (good) represents the fundamental theme in his discourse. The pronouns "we" and "you" are brought together with the preposition "with" which creates an all-inclusive structure in order to show the unity among the British and Americans without any hesitation from "first" to "last". But "we" also represents political bodies – the British government in "we know those responsible".

We know those responsible. In Aphganistan are scores of training camps for the export of terror. Chief among the sponsors and organizers as Osama Bin Laden. He is supported, shielded and given succour by the Taliban regime . . . Be in no doubt: Bin Laden and his people organized this attrocity. The Taliban aid and abet him. He will not desist from further acts of terror. They will not stop helping him. (Primhak, 2002:98)

Here, Blair is directly asserting an opinion that he presents as shared belief, upheld by a series of assertive statements given as evidence. He attributes responsibility by naming the agents, by using repetition to enforce ideas and by using linguistic devices such as verb alliteration. In particular, the attribution of shared responsibility is essential to justify military action in Afghanistan.

Just two weeks ago, in New York, after the church service I met some of the families of the British victims. It was in many ways a very British occasion. Around the edge of the room, strangers making small talk, trying to be normal people in an abnormal situation. And as you crossed the room, you felt the longing and the sadness: hands clutching photos of sons and daughters, wives and husbands, imploring you to believe them when they said there was still an outside chance of their loved ones being found alive, when you knew in truth that all hope was gone. And than a middle aged mother looks you in the eyes and tells you her only son has died, and asks you: why? I tell you, you do not feel like the most powerful person in the country at times like that (Primhak, 2002:97)

It is by creating identification with the powerless and by denying his position that Blair requests for empathy here. He uses the first person singular, "I" to recount his experience. He then switches to the non-deictic "you" which is used in a distributed sense, so that the audience is drawn into his experience. His communicative style can be characterized as direct, personal and informal.

This is not about the west versus Islam. Decent Muslims, millions of them in European countries, have condemned these acts of terrorism in New York and elsewhere in America with every bit as much force as any of the rest of us. Let us be clear, when we listen to the words of Osama bin Laden,

if he has his way the regimes that he would replace regimes in the Arab world with would be like the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. We do not act against Islam. The true followers of Islam are our brothers and sisters in this struggle. It is time the West confronted its ignorance of Islam. Jews, Muslims, and Christians are all children of Abraham. This is the moment to bring the faiths closer together in understanding of our common values and heritage, a source of unity and strength. It is also a time for parts of Islam to confront prejudice against America and not only Islam but parts of western societies too. (October 8, 2001 interview to al-Jazeera satellite TV station) (Primhak, 2002:105).

Through categorization - the division of a group into good and bad, or in Blair's language "decent" "innocent" Muslims and "the violence and savagery of the fanatic", Muslims are divided unlike any other faith or ethnic minority.

Blair's policy requires support from the British Muslim community for the potential Us attacks on Iraq. If the war were to be seen as the West against Islam, it could be potentially destabilizing. The word "decent" with its overtones of propriety and morality, is consistently used to describe those Muslims who support military action in Aphganistan.

The true followers of Islam are our brothers and sisters in this struggle. Bin Laden is no more obedient to the proper teaching of the Koran than those Crusaders of the 12th century who pillaged and murdered represented the teaching of the Gospel. It is time the West confronted its ignorance of Islam. Jews, Muslims and Christians are all children of Abraham. This is the moment to bring the faiths closer together in understanding of our common values and heritage, a source of unity and strength. It is also a time for parts of Islam to confront prejudice against America and not only Islam but parts of western societies too. (Primhak, 2002: 106)

A clear distinction and polarization is made between the "true" Muslims who are "our brothers and sisters" and implicit false Islam represented by Bin Laden. Through comparisons, Blair apparently criticizes Christianity and the West. The West must confront the "ignorance" of Islam, but Islam its "prejudice" against America.

We have no choice but to fight. We have no choice. We must hound down the mass murderer Osama bin Laden, obliterate his network, and this threat. And we will do that, I'm completely confident. The difference between ourselves and Bin Laden is that we do everything we can to minimize civilian casualties, he does everything to maximize them". "The bombing is absolutely targeted . . . Inevitably, in any bombing campaign such as this, there will be things that don't go right. The vast majority of bombs reach their target. (Daily Mirror 31 October, 2001). (Primhak, 2002:108)

Blair reinforces the message of fight by means of repetition. By using the techniques of mitigation and exaggeration in his arguments, Blair continues to polarise us and them. By using absolute statements followed by concession he attempts to persuade by the argument that the bombing is targeted. The high level of popular support for British military involvement seems to indicate Blair's success in constructing a doctrine of "the international community".

2. Argumentation Strategies

In the contemporary pragma-dialectic theory introduced by Eemeren and Grootendorst, argumentation is an attempt to overcome doubt regarding the acceptability of a standpoint or criticism of a standpoint. Argumentation is not just the expression of an individual assessment, but a contribution to a communication process, between persons or groups who exchange ideas with one another in order to resolve a difference of opinion. In pragma-dialectics, argumentative discourse and texts are conceived as basically social activities, and the way in which argumentation is analysed depends on the kind of verbal interaction that takes place between the participants in the communication process.

In argumentative discourse people are oriented toward a difference of opinion maintaining certain standards of reasonableness and expecting others to comply with the same standards. Strategic maneuvering is a concept introduced by van Eemeren and Houtlosser which refers to the continual efforts made in all moves that are carried out in argumentative discourse to keep the balance between reasonableness and effectiveness.

In the example below taken from a BBC political interview the participants are engaged in an argumentative exchange where the strategic aim is to make the politician accept the interviewer's standpoint according to which the decision of the politician is inconsistent by using the technique of dissociation introduced by Perelman and Olbrechts- Tyteca. Jon Sopel is the interviewer for William Hague who is a former leader of the Conservative Party. (Van Eemeren, 2010:161).

Jon Sopel : And Labour say the big thing that you could do to help would be to support identity cards. It's fair to say that this is an issue that your party has rather flip flopped on isn't it.

William Hague: Well it's … I think it's become clearer over time where we stand on this, let's put it that way, because we've got the government adopting an identity card scheme, but one that is so bureaucratic and involves a vast data base and this is the government of serial catastrophes when it comes to data bases as we all know, costing now, according to the London School of Economics, up to twenty billion pounds and we said that if some of that money was spent instead on an effective

border police and strengthened surveillance of terrorist suspects, we would actually get a lot further ………..having identity cards.

Jon Sopel : Isn't that a detail of the legislation. I mean you supported identity cards back in December 2004, less than two years ago

William Hague: We supported, I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out. The details are not impressive and the grasp of detail and the ability to control the costs of the current government is so terrible, that it's not a scheme that we can support.

Based on the argumentative confrontation that serves to hold the politician to account, we can argue that if the politician admits that he acted inconsistently, he thereby retracts any doubt he might have against the standpoint of the interviewer, which is, of course the response favored by the interviewer, who can than maintain his standpoint without any further defense. The interviewer selects a propositional question aimed at limiting the politician's options for response to either an explicit acceptance or rejection.

In the context of a political interview, such a choice is part of an effort to make the politician account for his decision. If the politician avoids answering the question, it shows the audience that the politician does indeed make an attempt to escape from giving an account. If the politician accepts the expected answer implied in the interviewer's first question, he thereby admits that his party flip-flopped on the issue. If the politician rejects the expected answer which is in fact what he does, he acquires the difficult job of defending the opposite standpoint.

Instead, the politician steers the discussion toward a favorable outcome by making a dissociation (division) between the principle and the practice of introducing biometric identity cards. In dissociation, something which is regarded by the audience as a conceptual whole or unity is split up by the speaker into distinct elements. As far as the principle is concerned, his position remains unchanged. However his present position has to do with something different and far more important: the details of putting the idea in practice were a prime concern. So, he has not changed positions at all.

If this perspective is accepted, the difference of opinion ends in favor of the politician. The technique of dissociation serves to delineate a particular standpoint, distinguishing it from other potential standpoints, in such a way that the standpoint becomes the most favorable for the protagonist, with which he can avoid criticism and which is easiest to defend. It also may serve to get rid of standpoints that are less welcome in an effective way, by replacing them in an authoritative way with another standpoint, that is more to the liking of the speaker. In other words,

dissociation is an excellent means for manipulating the "disagreement" space.

Scholars of argumentation generally maintain that in a persuasion dialogue, the interlocutors must not prevent each other from advancing doubt on each-other viewpoint. They must defend their own viewpoint by means of arguments. And a party must withdraw a theses if not successfully supported or if the contrary viewpoint is successfully defended.

Another interesting case that makes use of dissociation used as a persuasive technique is that presented in the 1988 presidential campaign speech of George Bush. His slogan was that "all existing wetlands, no matter how small should be preserved" (Van Rees. 2009:25).

However, farmers mounted increasing pressure against the protection of them. Bush's solution after this opposition was to redefine the concept of a wetland. He introduced the distinction between "genuine wetland" which deserves to be protected and "farmland". In this way, he would be able to claim that he kept his promise while allowing the development of areas previously designated as wetlands. His opponents considered the redefinition as "political" in contrast to the existing "scientific definition". In the field of politics, as these cases show, dissociation is a powerful instrument of exercising power and of using that power to advance particular interests.

Persuasive definitions are considered as extremely powerful argumentation rhetorical tactics. The concept of a persuasive definition is introduced in the work of the philosopher Charles Stevenson. The distinction between descriptive and emotive meanings of the words is considered as the basic element of this theory which specifically stands upon the redefinition of the descriptive meaning of the word while covertly retaining its old familiar emotive meaning.. The emotive inertia factor is a key aspect of the process, showing how the use of such definitions can be both persuasive and potentially deceptive.

The persuasive impact of the word "truly" in Ronald Reagan's pledge to trim spending in assistance programs while maintaining benefits for the "truly needy" in a speech given in 1981 is a good illustration summarized from the account in Zarefsky, Miller-Tutzauer and Tutzauer, 1984 (Quoted in Walton: 2001).

The use of the word "truly" in the phrase "truly needy" demonstrates the use of persuasive definition. Even though it is admitted that the word "needy" is being redefined or altered, the word "truly" suggests that those who are in need will not have programs cut. Anyone who depends on such a program will feel that he is definitely in the class of "the truly needy".

In fact, later in the year, Reagan cut social security and disability programs, but continued his pledge that the government would respond to the "truly needy", thus narrowing the list of the "safety net" programs. The use

of the persuasive definition was in this case reassuring to the voters, while at the same time leaving a lot of latitude so that cuts could be made without the danger of breaking a promise. Besides logical moves in the persuasive attempts, emotions are often used to influence an opinion.

An emotional appeal may be an argument with little or no real relevance to the issue being discussed, but because of the emotional impact the audience may be inclined to presume that it is relevant. Although such argument appears relevant, in fact it is not. Moreover, it is fallacious because it replaces the laborious task of presenting evidence and rational argument with expressive language and other devices calculated to excite enthusiasm, excitement, anger, or hate.

Based on emotional appeal arguments such as the *ad hominem,* a fallacious argument is to be diagnosed as straying away from the point of the original dialogue. In the following case, an argument that starts out to be legitimate fails to support its standpoint because it resorts to inconsistency and failure to reason.

The subject of debate in the U.S Congress in 1813 was the New Army bill, a proposal to raise more troops for the war against England. Speaking for the opposition, Josiah Quincy argued that the additional troops would be insufficient, that an invasion of Canada would be unsuccessful and immoral, that a conquest of Canada would not force England to negotiate, and finally that the bill was politically motivated, "as a means for the advancement of objects of personal or local ambition of the members of the American Cabinet."

In his speech, Quincy backed up his argument that the advocates of the bill were not to be trusted because they were motivated by personal ambition. This argument would have some weight, if Quincy had given good reason to support his contention. However, when Quincy went on in his speech he is reported to have called his opponents "*toads, or reptiles, which spread their slime on the drawing room floor*". The speaker has resorted to the abusive ad hominem, which if carried to far, can cease to be a relevant one. (Walton, 1989: 599)

Conclusion

In conclusion, we must say that the skillful use of what is offered to us through language can really make a difference in what the speaker claims to achieve in his interest. Persuasive speech is strongly based on the power of skillful argumentation techniques.

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