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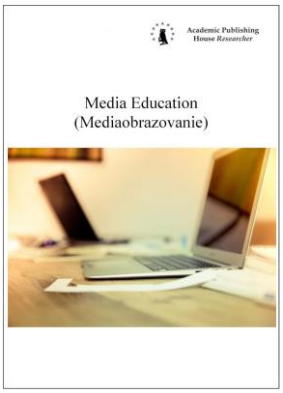
Published in the Slovak Republic
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Has been issued since 2005
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 2729-8132
2021. 17(3): 469-475

DOI: 10.13187/me.2021.3.469
www.ejournal53.com



Rhetorical Presupposition as Counteraction to Manipulation in Media Discourse

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Abstract

The article deals with the types of speech influence, their usage in modern media discourse and the problem of social distrust caused by manipulative technologies. In the author's opinion, fearful public mood is the product of anti-rhetorical activity associated with the lack of public awareness of the main type of speech influence – persuasion, in which argumentation is addressed to critical analysis. Emphasis is put on the prospects of rhetoric that has always considered not only the text but the speech situation and cognitions as well. Rhetoric has always been discursive and it was the first science to observe the language with respect to speech influence. Integrative character of rhetoric was the reason why various sciences explored rhetorical heritage that later became their integral part. At the same time, rhetoric itself was not virtually being developed and at this stage of speech development, when investigating speech influence, it is necessary to combine different aspects, rhetorical and cognitive-discursive in particular. Consideration is taken of cognitive-rhetorical arguments, namely, presuppositional fund of communicants. A more profound assessment of a perceiving party can be done by using the methods of cognitive linguistics that studies the relation between the structure of cognition and language units. With that in mind, for argumentation to be successful it is necessary to study the system of adressee's presuppositions and thereafter construct a dialogue with him involving the arguments most suitable in each specific case. Making logical connections more open and using rhetorical presuppositional fund make it possible for the communicant to persuade the opponent and to disclose his dishonest moves.

Keywords: rhetoric-cognitive approach, argumentation, presuppositions, media discourse.

1. Introduction

Rhetorical knowledge, i.e. knowledge about speech influence and persuasion is of great importance in many fields nowadays: science, art, education, everyday communication. Rhetoric, and especially rhetorical argumentation, has always been an essential part of the intellectual culture in any society. Actually, it often determines our well-being and success: it makes it possible to identify emerging problems and find rational ways to solve them; it enhances personal status; it changes the views, opinions and attitudes of people; it influences their behavior and actions. Rhetorical persuasion is an honest method of speech influence. However, at present, mass communication media rely heavily on manipulative technologies and logical disorientation. A variety of public speaking trainings become commercially successful, Russian and foreign "touring" trainers-speakers-gurus conquer the audience, showing a good command of rhetoric in practice, but the fact of a low-level speech culture and communication skills in the society remains a paradox. On the contrary, overusing presumptuous speech tactics promoted by movies and TV shows communicants use the language not to find out a

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mentally strong position, but as a means of psychological pressure: the stronger is the one who will be the first to throw the interlocutor off-balance through all sorts of polemical tricks. In mass media, sometimes it is not rhetoric that plays the major role, but polemics. In our opinion, the reason is that due to temporary oblivion, rhetoric is not sufficiently updated to have its place in science. Fear and distrust in society are the products of anti-rhetorical activities.

2. Materials and methods

In this paper, we will consider the cognitive aspect of rhetorical argumentation, so the chosen direction can be referred to as cognitive-rhetorical. The aim of the research is to identify cognitive-rhetorical grounds for argumentation in the aspect of persuasion. The main method of this study is a comparative theoretical analysis of researches dealing with the issues of speech influence, as well as the analysis of rhetorical argumentation.

3. Discussion

Recent times have given rise to researches into media discourse dedicated to manipulative technologies (Hameleers et al., 2021; Koa, 2020; Terren et al., 2019). The scholars warn that media consumers do not often have proper motivation, time, or cognitive abilities to be able to analyze the content consciously, they make decisions relying on implicit settings – estimates activated automatically at a visceral level (Arendt et al., 2019). Even those who are thought to be influencers in social media are easier to persuade with weak arguments in news articles (Winter, 2020). Thus YouTube channel recommended videos which proved that the Earth is flat (*Flat Earth Clues* by Mark Sargent and *200 Proofs Earth is not a Spinning Ball* by Eric Dubay). Many survey respondents told that they had ignored those videos at first but later decided to watch and disprove them. However, after watching the videos they arrived at the conclusion that they weren't living on a "spinning ball". The phenomenon of "flat Earth" may set a precedent for wide-ranging and growing distrust of institutions and authorities and also give rise to investigate the reasons for such paradoxical effect since misinformation in the sphere of science, for example, concerning vaccination or climate change may be of extremist character (Landrum et al., 2021).

The news sector has its own ways of creating mediated reality to ensure appropriate political and social status and, partially, preconceived ideas result from the system which governs newsmaking. Although in the course of time the regulations and proceedings of media coverage have undergone changes, experts frequently identify the distortion of news-related realities (Simons, Strovsky, 2019). For example, media-framing is a powerful analytical framework for media representation and a process that puts emphasis in a narration making it possible for media producers to provide one set of information rather than another and obtain a positive or negative evaluation of events (Kilgo, 2021). Under conditions of digital communication getting increasingly more fragmented, correctness and truthfulness of information have become subject of heated debates. Thus, the problem of distortion and misinformation is related not only to information itself being truthful, but to its discursive construction as well (Geiß, 2019; Hameleers, Minihold, 2020).

Most researchers distinguish three types of speech influence: *argumentation* (a method of constructing influencing speech based on rational arguments), *suggestion/manipulation* (emotional and volitional pressure), *persuasion* (all sorts of combinations of argumentation and suggestion) (Anisimova, 2004). *Persuasion* acts as the most complete form of speech influence and it is addressed to figurative and logical thinking simultaneously, in contrast to *manipulation*, which affects the psyche by appealing to figurative thinking (Khazagerov, 2006). *Persuasion* respects the freedom of a person, *enforcement* involves violence or the threat of violence, and *manipulation* imposes someone else's will on a person by fraudulence, deception or through other dishonest means (De George, 2007). Persuasion is supposed to affect the consciousness of a person by appealing to his own critical judgment, *motivation* is a direct impact on the will of the recipient, *suggestion* is an impact on the subconscious, emotions and feelings of a person due to the weakening of the control and regulatory function of consciousness) (Shelestyuk, 2009).

According to E.V. Menshikova there are such types of speech influence as *argumentation* (logical and emotional), *volition* (order, command, request, inducement), *pseudo-communication* (the speaker's aim is to give voice to his thoughts, regardless of whether the words will have any effect) *manipulation* (masking the true communicative intention), *linguistic adjustment* (linguistic imitation) (Menshikova, 2016). The works which instead of the term "types of speech influence" use the concepts of "techniques/tactics/strategies/technologies" are also noteworthy. For example, I.M. Dzyaloshinsky

distinguishes only between techniques: *safe techniques of communicative influence* (informing, persuasion, dialogue); *relatively safe techniques* (managing a communicative situation, using provocative statements and actions, using various forms of mimicry, techniques of social responsibility); *dangerous techniques* (disinformation; pseudological techniques; psychological manipulation; psychological violence); *highly dangerous techniques* (social induction; suggestion, neuro-linguistic programming) (Dzyaloshinsky, 2012).

In most of these works persuasion is recognized as a correct and, moreover, the most effective form of influence. The question arises: why is manipulation so widespread in public communication, why are professional, television and household dialogues so emotionally and logically inconsistent? Why is there fear and distrust in society? A research by R. Stingl (Stingl, 2015) showed that it is irrational fear that is often escalated in the society deliberately: in order to gain votes, sell medicines, and make people want military action. The use of phobia poses an ethical problem, but it is rhetoric that is accused of these manipulative strategies: since time immemorial, such inexplicable fear has been associated with politics, and in contemporary times rhetoric goes even further – it is updating its ability to manipulate not only in the sphere of politics, but in mass media and economic activity as well (Stingl, 2015). However, it should be remembered that it was the ancient rhetoric that introduced the demand for the ethos (along with the logos and pathos). It was the first scholarly field associated with speech influence used as an instrument of philosophy at its early stage (Perelmuter, 1980). Philosophers of logic used this tool for thinking activities and speech production to justify their theories, and sophists made active use of rhetoric as well but they focused not on revealing the truth or securing justice, but on gaining influence and power.

The integrative character of this discipline was the reason why various sciences mastered and developed various aspects of the rhetorical heritage, while rhetoric virtually did not develop. The situation changed only in the middle of last century after Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteka's references to Aristotle's works. The authors were so amazed by the perfection of the ancient theory that, having enriched it with new terms, they named it "new rhetoric". However, this did not make it fundamentally new. We fully agree with the opinion expressed in the work (Sidorenko, 2014) that such a term is unnecessary for rhetoric, since new knowledge that was applied to the concept of Aristotle cannot change the name of the discipline, just as well as new knowledge in the field of physics or mathematics does not give grounds to call these subjects neophysics or neomathematics. One cannot but agree with the very principle of revising rhetoric in a historical context by referring to serious works in this field of humanities. In this regard, the research by G.K. Meinberger is interesting, the author considers the idea of A. Arnault and C. Lanslo to be more relevant today than ever: texts are to appeal to people's ethos, not only their minds. Presently, the processes going in the language undergo fundamental changes; the basic information technologies have conquered communication and transformed it into mental processes. Therefore, these days rhetoric assumes responsibility for human dignity and the unity of mankind: today, being a part of the universal language community irregardless of the origin is the criterion of humanity (Meinberger, 1998). By taking a step towards classical rhetoric, we gain the lost ethos and logos. As for the logos, which is usually understood as knowledge of the subject of speech, logical sequence and strong argumentation, it is logical knowledge that should become the main anti-manipulative technique.

For example, we will show a rhetorical analysis of some extracts from the article "Minister of the Absurd" taken from the newspaper *Permsky Obozrevatel* (Viatkin, 2008). The text of the article is presented as translation from Russian.

Minister of the Absurd

"Chairman of the Committee on Economic Development and Taxes of the Legislative Assembly of the Perm Region, director of Semya retail chain Elena Efimovna Gilyazova: "In the near future, small businesses should master the area where they still feel very cautious."

– The principal issue that required attention during the year was the creation of the ministry itself. It was necessary to form a team, and we have met this challenge - we have formed a team that can turn the world upside down even being resisted.

And to confirm her pretentious statement, Elena Efimovna explained how exactly the "world was being turned" in her ministry: "We have introduced a public procurement system, one of the best in Russia, in my opinion, including an electronic auction system that is 99.9 percent corruption-free." The minister did not mention which corrupt official was to blame for the "leakage" of one-tenth of a percent. Well, it doesn't matter – Elena Gilyazova's department is not responsible for the level of corruption anyway.

"The ministry's scope of responsibility, in general, follows from its name. If you noticed, it has recently changed. Now we are called the Ministry of Trade and Entrepreneurship Development. Actually, I really like the word "development" in the name of the ministry because it implies a vector. And everything we do should be aimed at development."

Notably, the word "development" very often appears in the speech of the Minister. It occupies the place of a concept – the central point of all her theoretical assumptions. Development of entrepreneurship, development of medicine, development of infrastructure, development of tourism, and so on, and so forth.

But, as it sometimes happens, due to being overused, the concept of development has virtually lost all its essence. Detached from its direct meaning, the word began to wander chaotically through the speech landscapes.

"The third department is the Department of Marketing and Development. As a matter of fact, this is the department whose mission is to develop all the positive and beneficial things that have existed in trade. Well, and finally, the fourth...". After these words the conversation, which took place in the radio program "Public People", developed in the best traditions of absurd communication.

Gilyazova: "Yes, tourism is also in the same department. It's a long-suffering industry which..."

Radio presenter: "Which is kicked back and forth like a ball."

Gilyazova: "Well, in the Ministry of Trade we have a lot of things that they kicked around a little bit and now they have scored a goal against us."

Here it should be noted that Elena Yefimovna's line of thought is no less interesting, and in terms of research, perhaps, more promising than the tourism she mentioned. Illogic and semantic discontinuity of her speech – that's what is hidden behind the flood of words, seemingly correct and appropriate...

It is obvious that Elena Efimovna prefers the persuasiveness of her speech rather than argumentation. The latter feature, as we can notice, may be absent altogether. But this does not make any problem for the Minister. The main characteristics of her style are internal inconsistency of speech, inappropriate consequences and reasoning, unfounded judgments and conclusions. For example, to the remark that this year a large number of retail spaces were introduced in Perm, the Minister of Trade replied:

– Nevertheless, we do not have enough shopping centers – the Perm Region lags significantly behind the neighboring regions in terms of availability of high-end shopping areas.

However she didn't explain how and which neighboring regions the Perm Region lags behind, and most important, what is wrong with it. Perhaps it was due to her work experience as a commercial director of Semya retail chain.

Here is also an example of equivocation, that is, a logical error consisting in using the same word in different meanings:

– Today we are developing a program under which we plan to train entrepreneurs. This means not only teaching the basics of entrepreneurship, but training personnel working for small entrepreneurs as well. For example, drivers, if it is a transport company, sellers, if it is a trading company..." (Viatkin, 2008).

So, from the text above, we see that the author proves the thesis: E. Gilyazova is the Minister of the absurd. The absurd is known to mean "nonsense" or "ridiculousness". The thesis stated in the title of the article is justified by the following: the minister "prefers the persuasiveness of her speech, but not its evidentiary base; ...the main characteristics of her style are internal inconsistencies of the speech, improper consequences and inferences, unfounded judgments and conclusions". The arguments are supported by facts (the minister's remarks) and the journalist's comments. The analysis shows that E. Gilazova's remarks "become absurd" after the journalist's ironic comments, but it is impossible to figure it out until a logical and rhetorical analysis is made. The comments mentioned being put aside, the following framework remains:

E. Gilyazova is the Minister of the absurd.

1. She formed a team that implemented the system of public procurement and electronic auctions that is 99.9 percent corruption-free.
2. The word "development" is very often found in the speech of the minister, it acts as a concept – the central part of all her theoretical assumptions.
3. The "tourism-ball" analogy proposed by the interviewer was supported by the Minister and expanded in the football context.

4. She is planning to train not only the entrepreneurs themselves, but their employees as well, etc.

That is, the factual material presented in the article does not support the journalist's arguments, but, on the contrary, shows their inconsistency.

4. Results

Researches into argumentation, according to various authors, are viewed within a wide range of scholarly fields: logical, epistemological, applied, cognitive-discursive (Lisanyuk, 2016); epistemological-communicative, non-rhetorical, pragmadialectical (Migunov, 2016); logical, rhetorical, cognitive (Prigarina, 2015), logical, rhetorical, pragmadialectical (Eemeren et al., 2002; Tindale, 2004). Rhetorical argumentation, or argumentation which is used to exert speech influence or persuade depends largely on the targeted audience: what is appropriate for one auditory will be rejected by another. The principlal motivation that encourages to accept or reject opinions is evaluative judgment (Kashchey, 2012) comprising a part of the communicants' presuppositional fund (the stock of knowledge preceding communication). Under the principle of cognitivity (Evans et al., 2007), one should rely on interdisciplinary findings on thinking and the brain. The presuppositional aspect was adressed in the works by G. Frege (Frege, 1977), P. Strawson (Strawson, 1950), B. Russell (Russell, 1982), S. Levinson (Levinson, 1983), C. Fillmore (Fillmore, 1971), D. Lyons (Lyons, 1977), etc. There are semantic presuppositions (relations of semantic consequence), pragmatic presuppositions (knowledge of what will be appropriate in a given communication), and logical presuppositions (knowledge of logical conclusion operations). Researchers of modern public media discourse express the opinion that semantic presuppositions are the most common method of language manipulation (Issers, 2009; Larionova, 2013; Soskina, Sur, 2013), since they are addressed to the unconscious. The process of *persuasion* is more concerned with the pragmatic and logical presuppositions. In the work (Kozlova, 2018), using cognitive approach, we proved the assertion that it is essential to know addressee's values and cognitions in order to assess the relevance of a statement. Taking into account that the theory of argumentation in rhetoric is related to persuasion, and logical consequences are aligned with a rhetorical thesis, we may speak of *a rhetorical presupposition, which involves the knowledge of rhetorical means to substantiate the thesis and errors in doing it*. As a result of an experimental study into the language personality of modern young people in the cognitive aspect and the issues of speech influence (Kozlova, 2015a; 2015b; 2017), we have reason to assert that the modern audience is extremely poorly oriented in argumentative rhetorical discourse until it receives special rhetorical knowledge about the theory of argumentation and pragmaesthetic means of speech influence. The study of various advertising genres and works on speech influence has recorded techniques based on the violation of logical connections, a kind of "logical disorientation" (Kozlova, Kosterina, 2016), classified as extremely aggressive and highly dangerous for adressees' psyche. It is probable that from a cognitive-rhetorical point of view, irrelevancies in argumentation and logical presuppositions can be considered failures in communication. Making logical connections more open, polishing the logical presuppositional fund, the communicant has the ability to persuade the opponent and to reveal his dishonest moves.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the rhetorical approach implies argumentation, simultaneous focus being made on logical and emotional influence on the value system of the auditory. Such effect which is referred to as persuasion in rhetoric is certain to exert influence on people in a more honest and fair manner. Moreover, persuasion is more efficient and does not lead to fearful moods in the society. Consequently, if public communication is focused on rhetorical knowledge, it becomes sustainable and does not result in discredit and mass hysteria. Furthermore, rhetoric has to use the advances of all fields of science that have something to do with communication. Therefore, a step forward at the present stage of language development will be to address to new branches of linguistics and other sciences, cognitive linguistics, pragmalinguistics and so on. In our opinion, the combination of rhetorical and cognitive-discursive approaches is particularly relevant. Rhetoric has always aimed not at the text itself, but at the text in a particular situation. It paid special attention to the addressee/audience, their system of values and axioms of their consciousness. Therefore, presently, the discursive approach to the study of speech influence is more effective in combination with the cognitive one.

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