

Speech Impact Realization via Manipulative Argumentation Techniques in Modern American Political Discourse

Zarine Avetisyan

Abstract—The present paper presents the discussion of scholars concerning speech impact, peculiarities of its realization, speech strategies and techniques in particular. Departing from the viewpoints of many prominent linguists, the paper suggests that manipulative argumentation be viewed as a most pervasive speech strategy with a certain set of techniques which are to be found in modern American political discourse. The precedence of their occurrence allows us to regard them as pragmatic patterns of speech impact realization in effective public speaking.

Keywords—Manipulative argumentation, political discourse, speech impact, technique.

I. INTRODUCTION

SPEECH impact is never spontaneous or out of control. Just the opposite, it is meant for an expected outcome. Since this research aims at the planned organization of speech impact the latter consisting in the right succession of communicative “steps” or acts, it brings us to the notion of speech “strategy”. From linguistic point of view communicative strategy is directly linked to speech impact [1].

II. THE COMMUNICATIVE INTENTION AS THE BASIS OF SPEECH STRATEGY

By the precise definition of Teun van Dijk strategy closely resembles a chess game in which the players must first know the game rules but in order to defend themselves or gain victory they need to use tactics and take special steps [2]

There is an overwhelming markedly divergent variety of explanations and linguistic interpretations in the matter. Here are some of them which seem to have managed to clarify the essence of the communicative category under discussion.

Speech strategy is the overall communicative intention, the speech mechanism of introducing change to addressee’s mind, the correction of his vision of the world [3].

Communicative speech strategies can be of two kinds: dominant and partial, the latter providing variable realization of the former [4].

The existence of partial strategies is possible due to the ambivalence of orator’s intention.

In case of political communication achieving a consensus is hindered by unequal communicative conditions for the two

participants, namely the orator and the audience. The ambivalent intention is clearly observed in the alleged unanimity with the audience and the inconspicuous anxiety to gain control over them. The realization of this kind of intention exactly takes the strategy of manipulative argumentation.

Thus we distinguish between explicit and implicit intentions. The explicit intention of a political leader is to gain acceptance and votes of the like-minded people whereas the implicit intention lies in maintaining control over the audience.

III. THE SPEECH STRATEGY OF MANIPULATIVE ARGUMENTATION

Political language is manipulative language. E. Shegal states that the main function of political language is not imparting information but manipulation of consciousness and behavior [5]. The goal of socio-political communication is to reach an agreement with the interlocutor around political aims, projects and events as well as the justification of former policies and their explanation.

Manipulation is allegedly anti-human which is predetermined by the wish to profit from the interlocutor’s subordinate position of the object of impact. The manipulator is convinced that the interlocutor does not have his own opinion on the problem and even if he/she does, it can easily be changed in the advantageous (for the orator) trajectory. Consequently manipulation, is an outplay of human weaknesses which provides the interlocutor’s “communicative blindness making him the passive recipient of any piece of information suggested” [6].

The kernel idea of manipulative impact can be found in sophisms which comprise techniques of philosophy and rhetoric which are supposedly “deceptive”.

To these reportedly belong:

- amplification
- mockery
- appealing to authority
- discredit
- isolation
- change of the direction of argumentation
- delusion
- abruption
- retardation
- reference
- distortion

Z.A. Avetisyan is with the Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute after M. Nalbandyan, Gyumri, CO 3126 RA (phone: +37498 90 10 40; e-mail: zarinaavet@mail.ru).

- trap [7].

Manipulative argumentation, seen in terms of orator's intention, does contain the element of deception. Its implementation paves the way for gaining control over the communicative situation, superiority over the listener and acceptance while justifying unacceptable political decisions. Utterances having the mode of an opinion are artfully replaced by those of knowledge (cf. [8]).

The mechanism of logical deduction is put to action by making some propositions which are bound to lead the addressee to certain predictable conclusions.

To theoretically prove our main point, i.e. to linguistically "legitimize" the speech strategy of manipulative argumentation we need to rely on the propositions in the field. Our main concern has been the segmentation of an entire political speech into "pragmatic chunks", paragraphs with the identifiable intention of impact, thus dealing with different linguistic formulations of the same intention. We have been nonetheless concerned about the justification of the strategic status of manipulative argumentation. Definitely, theoretical underpinnings have served to disperse doubts and ground the linguistic evidence.

IV. PRECEDENCE AS LINGUISTIC "DÉJÀ VU"

Hence, speech strategy occupies a central place in communication; it is closely followed by a speech technique; there exist holistic relations between a strategy and its technique [9]. Each strategy presupposes a set of techniques for its realization which are "faithful" to the strategic aim.

T. van Dijk defines speech technique as a functional unit in the succession of communicative acts which contributes to the solution of a local or global problem under a common strategy [2].

The present research adopts the two-step model, namely strategy-technique succession.

The fact that the same techniques appear in different speeches of the same orator and those of different orators as well, allows us to speak of the precedence of their occurrence.

Precedence per se is interpreted as "a discourse-related fact which has been implemented in the speech of a certain linguo-cultural community and has become a pattern for further suchlike facts" [10].

The issue that especially keeps us busy is the pragmatic feasibility of precedence, and relevant research raises proficient proof for this fact. In the present research speech impact techniques are regarded as precedential phenomena "which are frequently referred to by the representatives of a certain linguo-cultural community and must be acknowledged by the members of the community. To these phenomena belong proper names, allusions, etc." [11]. Thus the linguistic "déjà vu" (so to speak) is unmistakable.

Another issue touching the pragmatic nerve is the semantic-pragmatic and functional realization of the speech impact technique within a stretch of text since it coincides neither to a sentence nor an utterance.

Speech impact techniques are predetermined by the orator's intention and are accordingly realized via verbal inventory.

The techniques are pragmatically and stylistically marked.

It must be stressed that the pragmatic meaning is invariable; finds its expression in meaning transmission depending on the communicative situation is conducted via different linguistic "embodiment". Moreover, relevant to the research is the following: "Pragmatic meaning can be transmitted via different communicative meanings; different speech acts venting identical pragmatic meaning contribute to the functional-pragmatic paradigm" [12]. We regard the pragmatic meaning as a linguistic variant and the communicative meanings as its invariants.

Hence, the research leads us to the conclusion that pragmatic meaning is of a global character and is localized "upon" the request of the communicative situation.

In case of the strategy of manipulative argumentation the underlying intention which triggers the pragmatic meaning is to tell "the truth" ridding the orator of "the dare"; to bring arguments in order to manipulate social opinion and behavior.

V. IMPLEMENTATION OF MANIPULATIVE ARGUMENTATION TECHNIQUES IN MODERN AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

21st century marked a new chapter in the history of America due to the groundbreaking event of presidential election with the first Afro-American B. Obama for its winner. It started with the electoral campaign between two democrats: the former first lady of the US Hilary Rodham Clinton and the former Illinois Senator B. Obama of a social stratum. The fact that Obama's speeches achieved the perlocutive effect is beyond doubt thus providing a rich soil for linguistic cultivation.

Political discourse analysis with regard to the disclosure of manipulative argumentation techniques outlines the following ones:

- the speech technique of typifying people and events
- false objectivity
- amplifying
- break in the information chain
- selection of undeniable facts
- accentuation of minor details
- "double standards"

The techniques listed above are characterized by a high frequency of usage and nonetheless high productivity due to the semantic and pragmatic flexibility and the simultaneous impact on subconsciousness, consciousness and emotions.

VI. THE TECHNIQUE OF TYPIFICATION

The Technique of Typification is pointed at the stereotypization of people and events regardless of their distinctive features and peculiarities of the situation.

The technique under consideration is pragmatically marked by means of condensation and generalization of relevant features within one person or phenomenon.

There can be no mistaking the author's aim to turn the individual story into a stereotype that underlines his reported and factual awareness of people's problems. Study the following example:

Today, as we commemorate what the ADA accomplished, we celebrate who the ADA was all about. It was about the young girl in Washington State who just wanted to see a movie at her hometown theater, but was turned away because she had cerebral palsy; or the young man in Indiana who showed up at a worksite, able to do the work, excited for the opportunity, but was turned away and called a cripple because of a minor disability he had already trained himself to work with; or the student in California who was eager and able to attend the college of his dreams, and refused to let the iron grip of polio keep him from the classroom – each of whom became integral to this cause. And it was about all of you. You understand these stories because you or someone you loved lived them. (B. Obama, “20th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act”, July 26, 2010).

The orator skillfully manipulates the audience linking his story to the life of the addressee realizing emotional impact. Stylistic convergence consists here of anadiplosis (... we celebrate who the ADA was all about. It was about...), pleonasm (... just wanted to see a movie ... able to do the work, excited for the opportunity/ ... was eager and able to attend the college of his dreams) and syntactic parallelism (... but was turned away because she had cerebral palsy/ ... but was turned away and called a cripple).

Political discourse analysts often turn to the personal pronouns, namely “I” and “we” which are recognized as “politicised” linguistic units [13]. Anyway nonetheless effective and pragmatically sufficient is the pronoun “you”. Hence, in the above-mentioned example (You understand these stories because you or someone you love lived them) the pronoun “you” apparently neutralizes the orator’s opinion. It evokes the “inner voice” of the listener resuscitating his/her personal life experience. It conveniently rids the orator of the necessity to prove his point, or stand his ground bringing into limelight his awareness of the real state of things. The knowledge of the addressee serves as a persuasion too/ to the orator. This shortens “the distance” between the speaker’s opinion and the listener’s knowledge, actually making them identical (cf. [13]). Psycholinguistic tool of rapport frequently applied in neuro-linguistic programming bridges the listeners to the cited facts (And it was about all of you/ You understand these stories because you or someone you love lived them).

VII. THE TECHNIQUE OF FALSE OBJECTIVITY

In case of false objectivity the manipulator as a rule expresses contradictory opinions formulating pros and cons with a positive bias forward his preferences.

The illusion of “objectivity” is created by means of the appraisal of the opponent which is the immanent property of refined political etiquette. The “falseness” is unmasked by the sharp criticism which closely follows the praise; this path of reasoning turns into a uniform mode of expression.

Pragmatic evidence for false objectivity can be inferred from the context of the following passage:

In just a few short months, the Republican Party will

arrive in St. Paul with a very different agenda. They will come here to nominate John McCain, a man who has served this country heroically. I honor that service, and I respect his many accomplishments, even if he chooses to deny mine. My differences with him are not personal; they are with the policies he has proposed in this campaign.

Because while John McCain can legitimately tout moments of independence from his party in the past, such independence has not been the hallmark of his presidential campaign. (B. Obama, “Presumptive Democratic Nominee Speech”, St. Paul, Minnesota, June 3, 2008).

In the present passage B. Obama “anchors” the name of John McCain to decreasingly popular George Bush to discredit and inspire mistrust, which is also due to the newly lost Iraq war, failed leadership and the failure to find WMD.

But before all that, B. Obama expresses “genuine” admiration and respect for his opponent sliding into harsh criticism: “I honor that service, and I respect his many accomplishments, even if he chooses to deny mine”. Via pleonasm (I honor that service/ I respect his many accomplishments) the orator displays tolerance underlining lack of mutuality by means of the subordinate clause of concession (even if he chooses to deny mine). The underlying idea is apparent: McCain is a good citizen, yet a bad politician.

The next sentence is direct insult, a technique of the strategy of discredit, the analysis of which is imperative for the disclosure of how false objectivity technique works: “Because while John McCain can legitimately tout moments of independence from his party in the past, such independence has not been the hallmark of his presidential campaign”.

B. Obama accepts the presence of independence as an obligatory precondition for democracy in the policies of J. McCain but – only in the past. Underpinning democracy in the context of the past Obama ousts it from the present, untags it from the current policies of J. McCain making it impossible to reverse even by “touting”.

VIII. THE TECHNIQUE OF HYPERBOLIZATION

The technique of hyperbolization takes source in the intentional distortion of reality by way of under- or overestimation of an ongoing event.

For instance, the deliberate “geographical extension” of a political event may solve two problems, namely:

The cited facts acquire definite outlines and are localized by means of geographical toponyms, oftentimes it manipulates the audience inspiring the feelings of alarm and unrest.

The technique of hyperbolization is implemented in the following:

All across the world, in every kind of environment and region known to man, increasingly dangerous weather patterns and devastating storms are abruptly putting an end to the long-running debate over whether or not climate change is real. Not only is it real, it’s here, and its effects are giving rise to a frighteningly new global phenomenon: the man-made natural disaster. (B. Obama,

“Energy Independence and the Safety of Our Planet”, April 3, 2006).

In the example under discussion this technique embeds the convergence of epithets (increasingly dangerous weather, devastating storms, long-running debate, frighteningly new global phenomenon, man-made natural disaster) and conversion (Not only is it real, it's here).

The pragmatic context rests on pleonasm (here: the reduplication of the adverbial modifiers of place: “all across the world” = “in every kind of environment and region known to man”).

IX. BREAK IN THE INFORMATION CHAIN

The present technique consists in the deliberate pragmatic ellipsis of information which plays right into the hands of the orator. The extremity of this technique is a biased lie. The technique has been labeled so since “the truth” appears at the service of the orator. The technique proves efficient also due to the fact that the orator is better “equipped” than the audience and thus has the privilege over them.

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”. (B. Obama, “The American Promise”, Denver Colorado, August 28, 2008).

The first sentence appears to be direct insult which is one of the techniques of the discredit strategy.

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 (J. 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.

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 [14].

The technique under discussion has been interpreted in more general detail in P. Chilton's “Analyzing Political Discourse” where he looks at the strategies of representation and misrepresentation [9].

We deal with Chilton's “misrepresentation strategy” which we believe is identical with the technique under discussion, as

a case of pragmatic ellipsis. The goal of the break in the information chain is to allow gap-filling by the audience with predictable inferences. This technique also turns the listener into the involuntary co-author of the narration.

X. THE TECHNIQUE OF ACCENTUATION

Accentuation of minor details discloses the awareness of a politician of everyday problems and ways of livings. It creates the precise picture of reality and inspires confidence in the orator's person.

Yes, government must lead on energy independence, but each of us must do our part to make our homes and businesses more efficient. Yes, we must provide more ladders to success for young men who fall into lives of crime and despair. But we must also admit that programs alone can't replace parents; that government can't turn off the television and make a child do her homework; that fathers must take more responsibility for providing the love and guidance their children need. (B. Obama, “The American Promise”, Denver Colorado, August 28, 2008).

The everyday realities are transmitted to the listener in minute detail. Parallel assertive constructions starting with “Yes” labeled by N. Fairclough as “emphatic assertions” [13] reaffirm government obligations and “must” urges the audience to believe that the orator has worked out an emergency plan for each and every case. Convergence is expressed through parallel constructions (government must lead on..., we must provide..., we must also admit...), metaphor (...we must provide more ladders to success for young men who fall into lives of crime and despair) and parallel subordinate clauses (... that programs alone can't replace parents; that government can't turn off the television and make a child do her homework; that fathers must take more responsibility for providing the love and guidance their children need).

XI. TECHNIQUE OF UNDISPUTABLE FACTS

This technique is especially remarkable as it is attitude-conscious; by attitude we mean that of the target audience, their expectations, prejudices and beliefs. According to Bob Neer, B. Obama's biographer, B. Obama once confessed: “On finding the issue which concerned a great number of people, I could put them to action. And on that I could build power” [15]. The technique is remarkable for it sheds light on panhuman problems which, at the same time, concern every single person: black or white, gay or straight. The issues are mainly those of environmental protection, global warming prevention, anti-terrorism campaign, etc.

Since the same stance “echoes” differently in different auditoriums, by different audiences the orator designs a speech to meet the requirements of listeners; it closely resembles the creation of a pill that would affect all the patients despite the danger of rare side effects. The technique represented so far can be found in the following:

94 years ago one of the great atrocities of the 20th century began. Each year, we pause to remember the 1,5

million 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 Armenian people. (B. Obama, "Obama on Armenian Remembrance Pay", April 24, 2009) [16].

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 "atrocities" 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. It is also apparent that acceptable as the cited facts are for the American community, they are altogether denied and repelled by the Turkish Community.

XII. THE TECHNIQUE OF DOUBLE STANDARDS

Shift of connotations which ends up in acceptable conclusions when drawn by the orator and utterly unacceptable ones when inferred by the opponents, is the pragmatic underpinning of the technique of double standards. It is properly observed in the implementation of "ideological" words which allow of ambiguous interpretation.

One of the most efficient speech impact means is the "pragmatic reconstruction" of the content of a linguistic unit in the result of which the orator touts one of the possible interpretations of reality to the addressee.

Thus the notion of change is the cornerstone of Obama electoral campaign and for this reason the perception of change is split, is clear-cut by Obama in contrast to that of his opponent:

So I'll say this - there are many words to describe John McCain's attempt to pass off his embrace of George Bush's policies as bipartisan and new. But change is not one of them (...)

Change is realizing that meeting today's threats requires not just our firepower, but the power of our diplomacy - though, direct diplomacy where the President of the United States isn't afraid to let any petty dictator know where America stands and what we stand for. We must once again have the courage and conviction to lead the free world. This is the legacy of Roosevelt, and Truman, and Kennedy. That's what the American people want. That's what change is. (B. Obama, Final Primary Night, Presumptive Democratic Nominee Speech, St. Paul, Minnesota, June 3, 2008).

The discredit of the opponent (So I'll say this – there are many words to describe John McCain's attempt to pass off his embrace of George Bush's policies as bipartisan and new. But

change is not one of them) naturally splits the notion of "change", in plainer words, the audience is exposed to two possible interpretations of "change". "So I'll say this" formulation has the impression of self-effacement and inner struggle especially due to the modal verb "will" which signals the revelation of truth. The present pragmatic context the words "bipartisan" and "new" are of special pragmatic value.

Being defined in the "Dictionary of Government and Politics" as "accepted by the opposition as well as by the government" [17], the word "bipartisan" acts as a case of enantiosemia in the present context, since it stresses the fact that the Republican policies are welcome only by the Republicans. This naturally implies that the wants and needs of a tangible social stratum remain unheard and unsolved. According to Obama the situation will be aggravated by the election of McCain, the latter being formulated via a metaphor (John McCain's attempt to pass off his embrace of George Bush's policies). Non-arbitrary is the coupling of the words "new" and "bipartisan" which leads us to the conclusion that the Republicans are just now going to expose themselves to the concerns of the majority, which, in fact, is futile. So here the semantic implicature takes on the leading role. The following sentence "Change is realizing that meeting today's threats requires not just our firepower, but the power of our diplomacy – though, direct diplomacy where the president of the United States isn't afraid to let any petty dictator know where America stands and "what we stand for" is an example of semantic implicature; it hints at the lack of decisiveness on the part of the President and his retardation in revealing his viewpoint, which is supposedly due to the lack of a viewpoint. The orator appeals to authority (That is the legacy of Roosevelt, and Truman, and Kennedy) subconsciously anchoring Obama's name to those of eminent Democrats and the Party's policies of providing feasible positive change. In the next sentence opinion is deceitfully replaced by knowledge and this way B. Obama voices the American people's wish ("That's what the American people want"). The paragraph ends up by restatement of his own judgment in the matter.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The research makes it abundantly clear that manipulative argumentation equips the orator with a number of inventive speech tricks which pave the way for cutting communicative corners in the simplest way possible.

The audience is highly critical and it comprises people of different age, religion and race. The latter make their choices in the "political market" and there are "political" products they may choose to snub. Anyway regardless of their initial preferences, an artful orator has every chance to win the favor and support of potential voters and to unite them around a common political idea thus taking the lead and the power.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wants to thank Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for financial support.

REFERENCES

- [1] N. Mikhalkin, "Logics and Argumentation in Judicial Practice", St. Petersburg: "Peters" Press, 2004, p. 228.
- [2] T. van Dijk, "Language. Cognition. Communication", Translated from English by Editor-in-Chief N. Gerasimov, Moscow: "Progress", 1989.- p.310.
- [3] S. Gorin, "Have You Tried Hypnosis?", Moscow, 1994, p. 3.
- [4] V. Chernyavskaya, *Discourse of Power and Power of Discourse. Issues of Speech Impact*, Moscow: "Flinta" and "Nauka", 2006, p.46.
- [5] E. Sheigal, *The Semiotics of Political Discourse*, Volgograd: "Peremena", 2000, p.368.
- [6] M. Bityanova, *Social Psychology: Science, Practice and Ways of Thinking*, Moscow: "EKSMO Press", 2001, p. 576.
- [7] plato.stanford.edu/entries/sophists
- [8] E. Shelestyuk, *Means, Types, Devices and Instruments of Verbal Impact/Classical linguistic formations in modern multicultural dimension*. Pyatigorsk: PSU Press, 2006, pp.153-164.
- [9] P. Chilton, "Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and Practice", Cornwall: International Limited, 2004, p.226.
- [10] I. Alefirenko, *Towards the Problem of Discourse-Text Cultural Universe.// Linguo-rhetoric, pragma-theoretic and applied aspects*, Sochi, 2002, pp.10, 5-12.
- [11] V. Krasnikh, *Virtual Reality or Real Virtuality? // Man. Mind. Communication*, Moscow: Moscow University Press, 1998, p.52.
- [12] I. Borisova, *Russian Conversational Dialogue: Structure and Dynamics*, Ekaterinburg: Ural University Press, 2001, p.214.
- [13] N. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, Second edition, Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2001, pp.149-226.
- [14] D. Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Moscow: "Progress", 1998, p. 75.
- [15] B. Neer, *Barack Obama for Beginners: An Essential Guide*, Moscow: "Europe", 2009, p.33.
- [16] <http://edition.enn.com>
- [17] P.H. Collin, *Dictionary of Government and Politics*, London: Peter Collin Publishing, 2001, p.303.

Z.A. Avetisyan, Gyumri, 04.02.1984 BA and MA degrees in the English Language (Second Foreign Language French), Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute, Gyumri, RA, 2001-2006. Ph.D. in Philology, Yerevan State University, Yerevan, RA, 2012. Research Interests: Political Linguistics.