

GENERATING DISCOURSE THROUGH PATTERNS

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When trying to analyse the ways of generating a discourse, one can easily understand that this process presupposes a collage of already made linguistic structures likely to be decoded by speakers under certain conditions such as: sharing the same code, assigning the same meaning to the structure in case, etc. Linguistic patterns are condensed formulas communicating universal wisdom whose occurrence in the discourse confers argumentative authority. Originating in former or present lingua franca and being widely recognized, such structures have inroaded into other languages, preserving the same strategic use in view of reaching persuasive goals.

This essay tries to offer a perspective on different possibilities of structuring the discourse as to attain persuasion. Effective persuasiveness is elicited by many linguistic variables that powerful communicators use as a tool to make the listeners conform to their ideas. A skilled communicator, with a high social power position can impose his power on those with less. In this respect, discourse is dependent on both the context of the conversation and the overlearned vocabularies that are acquired over the course of social, professional, and vocational training. In other words, we communicate to some extent using a vocabulary contained in the scripts of our daily lives and daily experiences¹. We are, in fact, concerned with language *use* beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance, with the interrelationships between language and society and with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication.

As Labov (1977) noted, "One of the most human things that human beings do is talk to one another. We can refer to this activity as *conversation, discourse, or spoken interaction*"². As "one of the most human things" which we do, it stands to reason that *meaning* is often assumed to be *shared* in verbal interaction. However, we know that words

¹ Fenichel, M. and Dan, P. *Heads from Post and Times on Three-Mile Island, Journalism Quarterly*, Vol.77, No.2, (Summer 1980), pp.338-339, 368.

² Labov, W. *Therapeutic Discourse: Psychotherapy as Conversation*, NY.: Academic Press, 1977.

are laden with symbolic meaning in addition to being tools for the simple sharing of information or experience. A critical point is that each of us *differs* in terms of our information and experience, and despite the ideal of having a "standard language" even among people speaking the same dialect of the same language, or being truly "bilingual" the fact is that each of us on this planet adds our own nuance to words, or phrases, or intonation, or some combination thereof.

Bronislaw Malinowski³ tried to prove that language is used to perform social functions; in other words, social relationships and interaction are geared to the use of linguistic expressions. One of such functions consists of what he called fatic communion. Language was used to maintain fatic communion - a feeling of belonging to a community. He observed that women used different expressions from those used by men in order to maintain their social role. Fatic communion implies the maintenance of a sense of community, of solidarity with other members of the group, of a particular status within the hierarchies of the group, and at the same time a feeling of accepting others and being oneself accepted by others.

In his essay *Functional Language* (i.e. language at work within a discourse frame), the Romanian linguist Eugen Coseriu⁴ states that the process of speaking can be generally seen as a mixture between *linguistic patterns*, integrated by the author in a special category called *repeated discourse* (that is reproducing fixed/preset formulas) and *free technique* (which means - freedom in combining the formulae mentioned above). By stating this, Coseriu tries to prove that the speakers bear in mind a number of linguistic patterns which they experience through their entire life and make use of them in order to ease their conversation. This way speakers get acquainted to a series of preset formulae (specific to their culture) by interacting with the others, and their only freedom in the speech act is that of originally and personally combining these patterns. In other words *repeated discourse* stands for *linguistic clichés* that share some specific features. According to cultural critic Umberto Eco⁵, we live in an age where the diminutive, the brief and the simple are highly praised in communication.

When talking about persuasion we should have in mind some features observable with linguistic patterns:

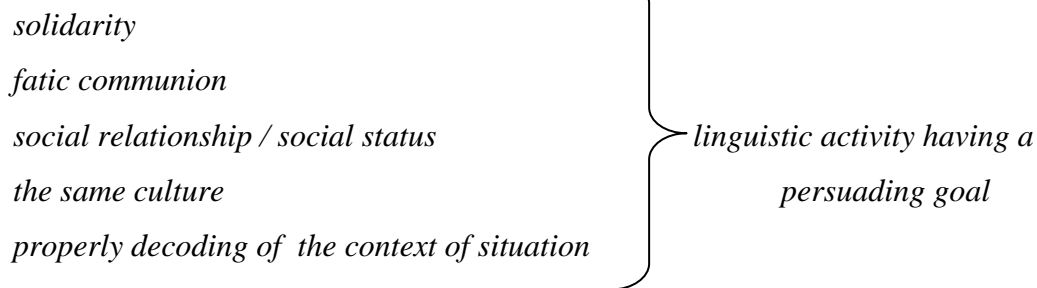
³ Malinowski, B. *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages*, in **The Routledge Language & Cultural Theory Reader**, Edited by Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley & Alan Girvin, London, Reprinted 2001, p. 390.

⁴ Coșeriu, E. *Lecții de lingvistică*, Editura Arc, 2000, pp. 246-265.

⁵ Eco, U., 2002, *Diminutive, but perfectly formed*, *Guardian Newspaper*, 20 April 2002.

- repetition and redundancy – as a message is repeated, over and over, more and more receivers get to understand it. If receivers are not thinking very carefully about the persuasive appeal, a cliché draws their attention and makes them think;
- authoritative or even fear appeal of a preset message;
- fixed topic & syntax, non-fluctuating meaning;
- evidence - is something that somebody else created, that a source uses as a means of persuasion. The effects of evidence are so robust and so strong that they should not be overlooked.

Taking into consideration all these opinions, we may say that there are some elements, which the in-coder and the decoder of the message have in common in order to interact. *The communication* process depends on a series of factors: social relationships are negotiated and controlled through such means. A speaker's choice of linguistic means can signal his/her perception of the interactional context including formality, acquaintance. The elements that facilitate communication are:



We can mention here different types of linguistic patterns that have the role of persuading the speaker into doing something without any particular contextual specification: proverbs and sayings, comparisons, idioms, quotes.

1. Proverbs and sayings

The category in case here stands for preset formulae bearing a generally accepted meaning. Firstly, they have the authority of being processed in advance, and secondly, of being known and used similarly by all the speakers. This way, they become a kind of 'communication imperative' their advantage being that nobody questions them because they are condensed formulae communicating universal wisdom whose occurrence in the discourse confers argumentative authority.

For exemplification we can make use of some proverbs such as:

- *An apple a day keeps the doctor away!* – The meaning of this statement is not achieved by identifying the semantical value of each word but by interpreting it as a whole. It is meant to induce the idea that eating an apple every day can help to keep you healthy, or

another interpretation can be that: a small preventive treatment wards off serious problems. When trying to convince a child to eat healthy food, the technique of using a proverb instead of explaining in many words the importance of a particular behaviour, might be very efficient because nobody thinks of denying the truth implied this way.

- *A rolling stone gathers no moss.* This kind of proverb lets the receiver the freedom of decoding the message according to the context of situation. One might as well understand that if a person keeps moving from place to place, they gain neither friends no possessions, or that by moving often, the person in case avoids being tied down. In this case the context is relevant for clarifying an ambiguous statement.

- *Better lose the saddle than the horse.* This is a ‘double-bind’ statement when the receiver is offered the chance of choosing the least harming alternative from two inconvenient situations. It's better to stop and accept a small loss, rather than continue and risk losing everything.

2. Idioms

Growth in language abilities takes place as a result of planned language experiences. The ability of using and correctly decoding the idioms proves that language develops in use. The words are used so as to get the receiver to go along with what the speaker intends, perhaps without him or her having to really make a full case.

- If you have **an ace up your sleeve**, it means that you have something in reserve with which you can gain an advantage.

- If people make "**much ado about nothing**", they make a lot of fuss about something that is not important.

- If you are **all fingers and thumbs**, you are awkward and clumsy and do things incorrectly.

- If you say "**I'd give my right arm for that**", you mean that you want it a lot and would do almost anything to obtain it.

3. Comparisons

A third type of *repeated discourse* is the category of traditional comparisons, which are largely used by speakers in order to assign their message a certain degree of authority. For example, nobody questions the truth of the saying ‘*as blind as a bat*’. Such structures have inroaded into other languages, preserving the same strategic use in view of reaching persuasive goals. We can identify certain comparisons in different languages bearing the same meaning: *snow white* in English, *blanc comme neige* in French, *alb ca zăpada* in Romanian.

These cast an issue in a favorable or unfavorable light, or can highlight or suppress certain aspects. They work by suggesting a likeness between a character and the listener, or a situation and the listener's. What is emphasized or suppressed is key.

4. Quotes

When discussing the quotes we should firstly state that they can be of different derivation (i.e. literary, political, etc.). Wolfgang Iser⁶ explains what happens when quotes are inserted in a discourse. "The text provokes certain expectations which in turn we project onto the text in such a way that we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual, configurative meaning".

It is obvious that quotes like the ones presented below have a strong impact on the receiver due to their redundancy.

- *The great question that has never been answered and which I have not been able to answer....is, What does a woman want? -Sigmund Freud*
- *God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. Bible - Matthew 5:8*
- *We know what we are, but know not what we may become. William Shakespeare*

These are just a few samples of famous sayings that are already endowed with a strong significance which are not to be contradicted by anybody.

We have already mentioned that quotations are a very expressive way of inducing certain reactions and attitudes. Most of the time the speaker does not need the complete text, especially when dealing with famous literature or lyrics. This is the case with "*To be or not to be*" where no contextual specification is needed. The same happens when trying to embellish a message with lyrics, such as: *Love of my life ..., I've just called ...,I've got you babe...* The speaker is able to decode the meaning of such text and to give them credit even if he/she is not provided with a complete text.

To conclude we can say that with these prefabs the receiver of a message is assigned the same linguistic competence as the one composing it in order to either persuade or manipulate. Linguistic clichés are used to create or emphasize power so that the communicator can enhance his or her superiority. The present study has provided some initial evidence of the interaction between discourse sequence and affective strategies. It seems that different cultures may utilize different dimensions of linguistic and discourse strategies. Communication between human beings, therefore, involves an active receptivity on the part of the hearer and not a mere passivity. The pattern actualizes some potency in the mind of the

⁶ Iser, Wolfgang, *The reading process: a phenomenological approach*, in **Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader**, Edited by David Lodge, published in the United States of America by Longman INC. , New York. 1988, p. 213.

receiver. It prompts him or her to look at things in a certain way so as to be able to form an opinion and grow in understanding. Their value lies precisely in the attitude that they induce into speakers.

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