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INFLUENTIAL POWER OF LANGUAGE IN POLITICS, MEDIA AND ADVERTISING

Abstract

An epitome of development in communication and social interaction, a language, presents us with the power to mold our words and related gestures into a means of persuasion. This makes languages a rather complex study of ways through which one can attain the maximum benefit from mastering the art of correct and effective usage of words. The aim of this paper is to highlight the influential aspect of language in the fields of politics, media and advertising, three key areas that emphasize greatly on persuasion. Previous studies highlight the established means through which language techniques are used in each field. This paper critically analyzes these techniques and its implications on persuasive power in order to determine the norms of credibility that are cemented through the effective play of words.

Keywords: Politicians, Communication, Message, Words, Statements

Introduction:

Language, in simple words, are a means of communication developed by human beings to make use of meaningful sounds called words to express themselves. The choice of words and body language to compliment them can have a greater impact on a listeners mind if done effectively. The complex study of linguistics has covered this variety of impact that a flexible use of words can have. The persuasive power of language can be understood by a simple mechanism of trigger that it entices in the minds of human beings. Different words connect to one's level of consciousness on

a variable level. If stronger and ambiguous language is used it is likely to trigger the high level of consciousness in a human mind, encouraging cognitive analysis, suggestions and belief.¹ The reaction thus, can differ from person to person. However, certain language cues and words are proven to connect to a lower level of consciousness of a human mind, bypassing their belief system and cognitive process and trigger a self-prompted, almost predictable, response. This implicates that the correct use of language can give one the power to hone the thinking and reaction of the listener ultimately exercising potential command over manipulating the desired response.

Persuasive Power of Language:

The persuasive power of language has been acknowledged, studied and implemented in various walks of our daily lives. One tends to accept it as a norm, however, upon conscious consideration it is easy to ascertain how they are being influenced by this play of words. Three fields identified for this study have been chosen on the basis of high need for persuasion in each. Politicians require the masses approval to get elected and pass the laws of their choosing, with the majority's support as well.

Thus politicians make careful choice of words and languages to persuade the people. Media plays a fundamental role in shaping the mindsets of the people as it has a strong outreach and impact on the listener and viewer. Manipulating language is a key strategy employed in media to gain the desired reaction or influence the thoughts of the masses. Advertising and marketing requires a high level of persuasion as well. A well-known fact about marketing and advertising is its aim to influence the target market to believe that they need the marketing goods and services, thus, creating the need itself instead of catering to an already existing one, as one can easily ascertain, this involves high level of influence that use of words and other cues accomplish. Positive words metaphors, quotations, vagueness etc. are just some of the many persuasive language techniques used to influence the minds the listener. An elaborated classification of language techniques for each of the fields of politics, media and advertising presented below will clarify how command over language and its effective use can help in greater persuasive power.

Language and Politics:

Politics represents the power of governance in a state and political language generally consists of dialogues between the ruling parties and opposition or of these parties with the masses or people governed. As the purpose of communication in politics changes so does the ideal use of language for each situation. Politicians who have mastered their command over language and persuasion techniques fare well in smartly shaping the response or questions through their speech. On one hand a politician may be aiming at persuading the masses to vote for him or support him in adopting a certain social attitude or passing a law, on the other he might be addressing key journalists in a press conference for media. One can imagine the need for language skills to address all these situations. The voters are likely to be more open to a politician's message if he talks in a relatable speech, one that makes effective use of words and gestures, building an overall charm that can attract the voters to give him attention and grasp his message. A different form of language is used all together when addressing journalists. They need not be persuaded but be influenced to interpret the given message in the desired manner, as their interpretation is ultimately shown in the media. A technique called a language 'spin' is used to influence the information in a way that the listener interpreted in a desired manner. When interacting with other politicians, the use of language could be flexible i.e. language forms can be taken up loosely or under an arbiter's rule, a norm in speaker's debate within the US House of Representatives and UK House of Commons. Some language forms that are used to attain influence in politics are mentioned below.

Persuasive language techniques for speech stem from ancient Greek concept of a public speaker called a 'rhetor' meaning orator.² Records of ancient speeches may they be political or religious show a patterned use of words that suggest a historical trend of use of language to persuade. According to a researcher, Max Atkinson from Oxford University, political speeches show a reliance on a range of powerful language techniques like the following:

- Repetitive use of words and sounds, also known as alliteration.
- Antithesis refers to an inversion of speech where two or more contrasting phrase are used to clearly send a message across and gain the listeners attention.

- Subtle hints or allusive language tends to shape the interpretation of the listener into a predictable and desired one.
- Asking questions and suggesting possible responses makes it more likely that the actual response matches these suggestions.
- Using lists of the same words most commonly three consecutive items to levy emphasis.
- Use of relevant established metaphors make the speech or the message more relatable to the listeners, increasing the chances of greater understanding.
- Parallelism is also a useful technique that involves the inclusion of identical words in a single sentence to give it more weight. The identical words can be chosen on the basis of their meaning, sound or structure.
- Parenthesis or adding words that suggest one's own opinion is one means to influence the other's opinion.

Repetition of words help instill a memorial ability of a message and levy emphasis on something

One can evaluate the use of these techniques through the study of historical political addresses. For example, the statement below was given by Mr. Harold Wilson on the occasion of UK's general election in 1974:

"This election is not about the miners; not about the militants; not about the power of the unions: it's about the disastrous failure of three and a half years of Conservative government which has turned Britain from the path of prosperity to the road of ruin."³

One can detect the use of anti-thesis of 'is not about' and 'is about'. Repetition of words imposes a sense of greater impact of the message being conveyed. Similarly, the phrases 'path of prosperity' and 'road od ruin' serve as metaphors and petition of the same structure of words, hence, use of parallelism. The historical words of John F. Kennedy on occasion of inaugural address of 1961 makes effective use of metaphors to depict the people's strength in making the country prosper:

"The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all

who serve it, and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.”

Here, light and glow, two relatable phenomena, are used as metaphors to connect to the people and explain to them the impact that their efforts could have on growth and advancement. The next lines from the same speech are well known in history and present an effective use of anti-thesis:

“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not, what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”

Parliamentary language incorporates use of special vocabulary that is formal and understood explicitly by the members, abusive labels are restricted, rules for equal turns for each side to speak and most importantly speaking for the support of the chairperson, speaker and deputy speakers.⁴ Specific political jargons are also common in parliamentary addresses because they are understood by the members and not the outsiders, acting as a coded language for discretionary speeches for example ten minute rule bill, green paper, blocking motion, adjournment debates etc.

Language and Media:

Media serves as a means of communication where the message is structured in a specific way in order to fulfill various purposes.⁵ It could be to influence attitudes, make the audience believe in the writer/broadcaster’s perspective, or simply criticize a matter. The types of media have diversified greatly over the years and can be broadly classified into traditional and digital media. Traditional media incorporates print and broadcast media mainly and digital media include the new media like the internet, social networks, blogs etc. the language features that are used in the media are aimed at expressing wholly and many media texts accept their content as assumptions, perspective or a stance. Media language structures also make use of complex techniques to give weight to the content and make it more believable for the audience.

Media makes use of lexical connotations to convey a message without being too direct or touching upon a disapproved word. Use of euphemism is also common as a means to camouflage strong content like the use of words like collateral damage to depict loss of civilian lives and property damage.⁶ Political correctness is a

diplomatic attitude often adopted by media texts to give a neutral perspective to matters. Apart from these the context is also an important aspect that controls the variety in language structure and content. For example, shows for children are not likely to refer to issues like sex, alcohol, blasphemy etc. similarly channels like BBC would ensure that they make use of formal language and literary forms to talk about something like a historical piece of political literature.

Rational use of props to support the content is also a common media language technique. For example, images that are shown behind the new broadcaster are likely to influence one's perspective. For example a politician's case hearing is being briefed with an image of that politicians looking sullen or worried. Even though this might be an image from his previous years, it is bound to give the viewers a biased perspective of the news. If the same news is accompanied by a background image of the politician showing a victory sign, the influence on the audience might be different. The accepted norms of content are also greatly influential in content creation. For example, a losing contestant in a game show may be addressed supportively by the host to ensure he doesn't feel dejected and humiliated for losing. Reality game shows however have a completely different theme with losing contestants being openly insulted by the hosts and other participants.

Grammar usage in media language is also highly influential in determining the tone of the content or news. Many media outlets adopt the typical subject, verb and adverbial sequence which is effective in related the whole story in a proper flow. Reporters usually do not have ample time to focus on grammar structure as their priority is getting the news across.⁷ However, recasting these statements as questions and answers are an effective way to increase the tendency to influence the perspectives, mainly through the use of stylistics and semantics.

Language and Advertising:

Advertising has one of highest needs for persuasion as the communication is aimed at making the audiences adopt product service or lifestyle. Advertisers have long used language manipulation to get the maximum benefit out of the promoted message. Various studies have highlighted the list of words and the emotions they tend to trigger in the human mind. Advertisers make effective use

of these words to attract and stimulate the target market to absorb the message and take action. According to David Ogilvy, major qualifiers for words that are effective in advertisements include fresh, natural, free, new, good etc. verbs like go, look, feel and give etc. also have a significant impact on shaping the thought process in the audience.⁸ In today's world, where every other brand tends to use these words to promote their product or service, it has become imperative for advertisers to stand out and be unique in what they say, to grab the people's attention thus, wordplay like puns, rhyme, assonance etc. are also a norm when it comes to advertising content. For example, where so many brands have focused on becoming unique by using a lot of effective words, Visa Debit cards successfully ran an international campaign with the simple slogan 'Go.'. Not only was this an understandable term even in non-English speaking countries but the simplicity of the overall theme made it unique in itself. Cheeky taglines like the one adopted by Barclay's Bank to promote its 6 month free business 'a win, win, win, win, win, win situation' are also effective in gaining ones attention to the extent of shaping his/her perception regarding the brand and the promoted goods/services.

The grammatical structure used in advertising is also distinctively unique.⁹ For example, if one look through a magazine and focuses on the language used, it is easy to detect the poetic tendency of the words, which is not a standardized language norm for day-to-day conversations. Also, the use of short sentence formations to construct minor sentences is attributed to a typical reader's short span of glance that he attributes to an add. The advertisers aim at making the phrase catchy and concise so a customer pays attention to and comprehends an ad effectively. Use of words that add mystery and intrigue are also means through which advertising content is generated.

Many governments levy restrictions on advertising language and content in order to regulate the use of these as a means to manipulate the people's thinking. In order word around these laws, advertisers use connotations that depict implied meanings. Not only do these help the advertisers get the message across but they can also unfairly use suggested meanings instead of stated meanings to give the customers the illusion of the product having features it does not one technique here, used mostly for cosmetics, over the counter medicines and baby food, is the use of scientific

names of the ingredients to make the product sound complicated and undecipherable for the customers. Use of jargons makes the audiences believe that the product is highly advanced, quality and research based, ultimately driving sales.

Use of practicality to relate to the target market of the advertised product, service or lifestyle is an effective way to grab attention as well. For example, everyone likes to enjoy affordable, quality and fashionable clothing. This is accepted by the advertisers as a norm and then shaped into the advertising message like ‘do you want affordable, quality and fashionable clothing under one roof?’ pragmatic approach like the above example immediately taps on an individual’s desires and he/she is more likely to pay attention to the subsequent message. This also explains the use of words like sale, discount, % off to cater to the majority’s need for off-price goods and services. Lastly, storytelling or sequential advertisements are used to captivate the audience to follow the advertisements because the curiosity keep them motivated to pay attention to the whole them throughout the process.¹⁰

In a nutshell, advertising makes perhaps the best use of word play to persuade prospective customers to pay attention to the message being communicated.

Implications of Variable use of language on Persuasion in Politics, Media and Advertising:

Persuasion is one of the key powers that a language allows us humans to exercise. By studying patterned structural use and techniques of language that are used by politicians, media personnel and advertisers, we can understand the multiple implications that it can have on the audience. As a student of language studies, the intrigue of how change in structural pattern of language can affect the processing of the overall message is a rather interesting phenomenon.¹¹ The changing times also call for keeping different techniques of language up to date with the changing mindsets of the people. The study of language and how it can be used to the best advantage of individuals that need to communicate and persuade, can benefit communicators greatly into making their message clear and more impactful.

Persuasion whether to grab one’s attention, establish trust or motivate one to take action is an art which has been mastered by only a few. A literacy skill and a powerful tool, language

techniques of persuasion are broadly characterized into three types by the Creative commons basic, intermediate and advanced.¹² Basic techniques include cues like claims, joining a bandwagon, use of celebrities as the speakers, humor, testimonials etc. These are basic techniques used by majority of the advertisers. Intermediate persuasion techniques involve extrapolation, euphemism, flattery, name-calling, rhetorical questioning etc. the advanced techniques however include complex structural and thematic modifications in the language whether its diversion, majority belief, scape gating, timing etc. however these advanced techniques involve careful selection and modifications of words s that they fulfill the purpose of persuasion without taking advantage of manipulative language. Each technique can only be complimented through the selection of words that complete its purpose.

Conclusion:

Language is a vast study of concepts and techniques which, if mastered, allow us more than just expression. Use of language in the areas of politics, media and advertising shows that by playing with words and their respective triggers, we as human can be easily influenced by them. Subconsciously, the use of certain words allows us to bring down our barriers of consciousness, becoming vulnerable to accept the given message and generate the desired action without carrying out a cognitive process. One can ascertain the degree to which such power can be exercised to control or influence the minds of the people.

Use of language for a greater impact or better understanding is a positive feature of language manipulation; however, introducing biases and undue influence through word play is an act to be controlled. On one hand language is a tool to attract and take the audience into confidence on the other hand it may be used as a tool to take undue advantage of how the words impact their minds. Thus, language has several implications for politicians, media personnel and advertisers to maintain the thin line between persuasion and manipulation and use the art of language to the maximum and just advantage of all. The study of language opens several avenues for further studies in terms of specialized languages for different fields. An in-depth research on the potential rules to determine acceptable levels of manipulation and the triggers that can help get a message across more effectively is bound to facilitate the

participants in various fields into becoming better orators and communicators. In a world where persuasion is ingrained in nearly everyone's personal and professional life, the power of language techniques can go a long way in helping us learn how to shape one's perception and getting our own ideas across in a better manner.

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