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Analyse du discours politique en anglais : Implications pour le développement de l'écoute critique en langue étrangère

Discourse Analysis of Political Speech in English: Implications for Foreign Language Critical Listening development

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Abstract

This paper examines the discourse of political speeches to discover their potential for use in the foreign language classroom to illustrate persuasive strategies and argumentation. Through detailed analysis of authentic speech, the paper highlights linguistic, lexical, and cultural features of this type of discourse in order to demonstrate how such a tool can be used both in and outside the classroom. Among the various types of political discourse, the discourse of candidates in the 2016 presidential election in America receives much attention in large part in this article because of its cultural and linguistic authenticity and its high availability. A variety of practical suggestions to implementing media literacy in ELT, at various levels of English instruction are provided, including how to guide students listening critically to persuasive messages.

Keywords: propaganda, persuasion, discourse analysis, speech acts, rhetoric, critical listening

Résumé

Cet article examine le discours politique oral pour découvrir son potentiel d'utilisation dans la classe de langue étrangère pour illustrer les stratégies et l'argumentation persuasives. Grâce à une analyse détaillée du discours authentique, le document souligne les caractéristiques linguistiques, lexicales et culturelles de ce type de discours afin de démontrer comment un tel outil peut être utilisé à la fois dans et en dehors de la salle de classe et de la communauté scolaire. Parmi les différents types de discours politiques, le discours des candidats à l'élection présidentielle 2016 en Amérique reçoit plus d'attention en grande partie de cet article en raison de son authenticité culturelle et linguistique et de sa grande disponibilité. Une variété de suggestions pratiques pour la mise en œuvre de l'éducation aux médias dans ELT, à différents niveaux de l'enseignement de l'anglais sont fournis, y compris la façon de guider les élèves à écouter de manière critique les messages persuasifs.

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Mots-clés : propagande, persuasion, analyse du discours, actes de discours, rhétorique, l'écoute critique

Academic institutions and universities continuously raise and grapple with questions regarding what should constitute the undergraduate general education curriculum. General education has been defined, in a general way, as the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes important to make the most of the challenges individuals face in their life time. The major goal of a general education curriculum grounded on a foundation of the liberal arts disciplines is fostering Information Literacy (IL). A comprehensive definition of information literacy is "the ability to locate, manage, critically evaluate, and use information for problem solving, research, decision making, and continued professional development" (Orr, Appleton, Wallin, 2001). It is worth noting that it is critical thinking that provides the tools to evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. So, no longer are the basics in education reduced to the accumulation of more and more knowledge, but also on inquiry abilities to enable students to think critically, reason, reflect, engage in argumentation, and develop the capacity for independent learning.

Whilst many countries are beginning to pursue educational goals of critical literacy, still others are not yet concerned with developing in learners such capacity. Today, language teachers in Algeria receive little instruction and, indeed, little research exists on facilitating critical evaluation skills, which are indispensable requisites to prepare citizens to meet many challenges of the new century. In the foreign language learning classroom, students are rarely invited to question speakers' /writers' choices and are always placed in the passive position of recipients. Addressing this issue within foreign language teaching, however, grows increasingly urgent, particularly in light of critical literacy efforts and progressive literacy pedagogies that incorporate socio cultural perspective to facilitate learners' analysis and evaluation of texts when accessing for news and information. The study of media use and access to hypertext and information on the Internet is a matter of some practical significance in language pedagogy and education generally.

This article offers a conceptual framework for incorporating experiential learning into the teaching of critical listening skills to university students. Most published studies of listening skill across languages view the listening process in a passive and static way and the listener as a passive recipient of meaning (White, 1998; Rost, 1992). Listening in which the listener analyzes the ideas presented by the speaker and makes critical judgments about the idea presented has received less attention. Media discourse, whether spoken or written, inscribes in people ideologies about who they are, how they relate to the world "outside", and under what terms should their identities be defined. Within this framework this paper aims to explore the ways and means of teaching students to be critical listeners. In this paper, I attempt to answer two questions: 1) what are the most important needs within the field of critical listening? , and 2) how can critical listening be taught in the language classroom?

When engaging students in listening critically, one task is identifying arguments in language use. Logic, propaganda and persuasion analysis, and general semantics /pragmatic principles should be the basis for such tasks. To develop competence in critical listening, students

require motivation and special training on each of these domains. Below, this point is explained in further details.

1. LOGIC AND ARGUMENTATION ANALYSIS

Argumentation plays a key role in mediating persuasion. It is the area of logic which seeks to develop standards, criteria and procedures for the interpretation, evaluation and construction of arguments. The understanding of and ability to recognize logical fallacies in arguments are keys to successful critical listening. Rhetoricians and teachers of logic seek to create in their students the ability to recognize fallacies in thinking and explain why they are fallacious. Argumentation theorists such as (Toulmin, 1958; Govier, 1985; Walton, 1996) have made several important contributions to advance the scope of discourse analysis. These theories can be used as an organized, general framework to assist teachers in their attempts to describe argumentation techniques that people use in practice to win the approval of others for their standpoints (Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004). In the evaluation of argumentative discourse, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1990) state, the norm of reasonableness lies with the audience: Argumentation is considered sound (or argumentatively valid) if it is successful in influencing the audience for which is intended. Norms prescribe that when teaching the techniques of argumentation, teachers have to expound on the dangers of “post hoc, ergo propter hoc” reasoning: the assumption that there is a causal link between two events simply because one precedes the other.

Most importantly, teachers must help students learn to distinguish between the two types of analogy—literal and figurative. Students are to be warned that literal analogy has some probative force when properly used, while figurative analogy is illustrative only. Literal analogy is the form most commonly used in logical argument. Figurative analogies, many authors claim, are useful as illustrations, but they have no probative force (Freeley & Steinberg, 2013, p. 78).

Obviously, teachers need a knowledge base in these fields to facilitate students’ critical listening ability. This is achieved through pre-service and in-service training or from free voluntary reading. There are a number of books which aim to help teachers to increase their awareness and knowledge. During the past twenty years there have been published hundreds of books and articles which explain the influence of media content on people’s thoughts and beliefs. Douglas Walton (2007), for example, is a seminal book-length study of the use of media for purposes of persuasion, and an important recent contribution which shows the intersection of media sources with argumentation theory, informal logic, computational theory, and theories of persuasion. The book helps Teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice.

2. Propaganda analysis

Since critical listening involves students challenging the ideological content of speeches, teachers seek to create in their students the ability to detect and analyze propaganda in ways that best suit the students. The term “propaganda” is not easy to define precisely. It could in

general be regarded as the deliberate attempt to influence the attitudes and opinions of a target population through systematic dissemination of information tending to affect the emotions (Amstutz, 1999, p. 212). It is also viewed as the dissemination of biased ideas and opinions, often through the use of lies and deception. Although there has not been a uniform definition among authors, many scholars have identified some of its common characteristics. Keith Dowding (2011) cites the following.

First, propaganda typically involves promoting the interests of a particular group outside the government. Second, propagandists texts tend to evince an indifference regarding the truthfulness of the messages they convey. Third, propaganda typically involves elements of manipulation, deception, or suggestion. Fourth, propaganda is employed in the maintenance of power (social, political, and/or economic). Fifth, propagandists tend to use emotional or buzz words and bandwagons in order to get listeners to respond satisfactorily. Teachers' familiarity with the characteristics of propaganda provides an important starting point for incorporating critical listening in language classroom.

There are many approaches, and methods for teaching critical listening. They are mainly drawn from the philosophical perspective of critical theory and critical pedagogy. When analyzing propaganda, many scholars use Lee and Lee's techniques to identify strategies being used by the propagandist. These basic propaganda techniques were published by The Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) in 1939. A brief review of these techniques will follow next.

The technique *Name-calling* is defined as giving a person or an idea a bad label and makes the audience reject that person or idea without looking at the evidence (Lee & Lee, 1939: 26). The technique of name-calling is used with the hope that we will reject a person or idea on the basis of a negative symbol or word. Examples include words such as terrorist, queer, commie, dictator, demagogue, and ugly policy. Such words have pejorative connotations. Donald Trump has been compared to Adolf Hitler in his way of delivering rhetoric and inspiring people.

The *Glittering Generality* is defined as "associating something with a "virtue word" and is used to make us accept and approve the thing without examining the evidence" (Lee, 1939, p. 47). It is an attractive, emotionally appealing word or phrase that "outshines" any facts or reasons that might have been produced to support it (Mills, Harry A. Artful (2000, p. 98). An example of this could be the use of words such as democracy, equality, justice, freedom, and love of country. They are vague and ambiguous but have positive connotations that appeal to our emotions. Propagandists often use them because they know we will be touched by such words. A good illustrative example is given by Craig Mackay (2008, p. 171). It is an extract from a speech of by Vice President Cheney in which he said: "we will use America's great power to serve great purposes, to protect our homeland by turning back and defeating the forces of terror, and to spread hope and freedom around the world"

A third device is *Card Stacking* which involves "the selection and the use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions, and logical or illogical statements in order to give the best or worst possible case for an idea, program, person, or product" (Lee & Lee, 1939: 95).

It is in other words, the selective use of only the most extreme evidence, whether positive or negative, to "stack the deck" in favor of one's position (Martha D. Cooper and William L. Nothstine, 1998, p. 25). Lee & Lee (1939) claim that the propagandist employs all the arts of deception to win public support. He uses under-emphasis and over-emphasis to dodge issues and evade facts. He resorts to lies, censorship and distortion. He omits facts. He offers false testimony. The most important part of card stacking technique is "selecting arguments or evidence that supports a position and ignoring those that do not support the position" (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 116).

A fifth device is *Plain Folks* or "common man" by which "persuaders present themselves as 'just plain folks' to create an identity with ordinary people and convey a favorable impression about their ideas and proposals" (Eileen Gambrill, 2012: 110). The device is used by advertisers and politicians alike to emphasize their similarity to ordinary people, rather than the differences. Examples of this could be the use of slang, idioms, and jokes, the use of the personal pronoun "we" or "our", and talks with street kids.

The *Testimonial* technique involves the use of testimonials, or quotes from authorities or famous people as evidence to persuade the public. The device is used by advertisers and politicians alike. Politicians invoke authority figures in an effort to lend credibility to their messages. Bill Clinton and George Bush both tried to compare themselves to Harry Truman during the 1992 presidential campaign. In a YouTube video posted by RWW Blog, Lance Wallnau, a catalytic figure and an internationally recognized speaker, recounts meeting with Donald Trump and hailed him as a modern-day Winston Churchill or Abraham Lincoln who, in his words, God is raising up "to answer the cry of God's people." in his effort to help promote the candidate.

Through the technique *Transfer* candidates link themselves with an idea or object that has a positive connotation, or in which they link their opponent to an idea or object that has a negative connotation. To give an example, the expression "keep the flag flying" has a positive connotation. The flag is the most recognized symbol of nationhood, freedom, and national unity everywhere. The propagandist's reference to conquering heroes and martyrs also aims to encourage the transfer of feelings. Transfer is closely related to the testimonial technique.

The technique *Bandwagon* basically tells the audience "everybody is doing it", "join the crowd", and "jump on the bandwagon". This technique is an attempt "to convince us that all members of a group to which we belong are accepting this program and we must therefore follow our crowd and 'jump on the bandwagon'" (Lee & Lee, 1939: 105). Purpose of the *bandwagon* device in political speech is giving the sense that most other people already supported the speaker. "We have tremendous support from almost everybody" is an expression used by English politicians to convince others to jump on the bandwagon.

A survey of the published research investigations in this field show that each of these techniques has been used by critical media literacy instructors for training listeners for the evaluation of political bias and propaganda. But their use in foreign language curriculum is still rare.

3. Speech act and persuasion

The development of critical listening requires a command of the fundamentals of semantics and pragmatics; the higher levels of discourse beyond the lexicon, although the two words may not be used by either the teacher or the students. Examining the denotations and connotations of persuasive symbols helps us study the semantic dimension of language. Inquiring about the persuader's purpose, the ends to which the symbolism was directed, and how words influence audiences toward their ends is fundamental to effective teaching. The notion of speech acts is central to the analysis of political propaganda due to the fact that politicians use different kinds of speech acts in different kinds of situations to perform various actions. The idea behind speech acts is that sentences can be categorized into particular types.

Examples of speech-acts that have been much discussed in the literature on political speech include speech acts making a claim to truth (*Representatives*). *Commissive speech acts* are acts that commit the speaker to some future course of action (e.g. promises, threats). *Expressive speech acts* serve to express the pragmatic meaning of the speaker's self representation to an audience (intentions, attitudes, and experiences). *Directive speech acts* containing commands orders, requests, injunctions, prohibitions, and so on. The fifth type of speech act consists of the *declaratives* (or declarations). These are speech acts by means of which a particular state of affairs is called into being by the speaker or writer, such as proclaiming a constitution, announcing an election, or declaring war.

Among categories of speech acts, declaratives and imperatives have received the lion's share of attention in rhetorical criticism. For a speech act to be appropriately performed or realized, certain "felicity conditions" must be satisfied as for example, whether the person performing a speech act has the authority to do so or not. One has to bear in mind that there are many speech act classifications. Austin's, Searle's, and Ballmer's classifications are cited much more frequently as the basis for research on speech function in political speech. It is probably true to say that Searle's classification has been the most widely accepted for use in teaching critical listening in English as a Foreign Language.

For the language teacher of critical listening the particular significance of a theory of language based on speech acts is that it will enable him to show the learner, in a principled way, not only ways of performing particular speech acts of certain speakers, but also ways of deconstructing speech as being acts of propaganda which embody ideological claims and values. Students' development of abilities to consider the patterning of meaning in its semantic as well as pragmatic aspects strengthens their ability to resist the unsound appeals and temptations of the propagandist.

4. Summary report of a workshop on teaching critical listening

In order to illustrate applications of the critical method to teaching listening, I will offer a brief description of a task, I employed in my on-going action research. A workshop was conducted in order to explore critical listening skills and the ability to identify propaganda among ELT Algerian students at the University of Mascara. It is important to keep in mind

that my primary concern here is not with the actual ‘findings’ of this research, but with what ‘critical listening’ might mean in the language classroom by considering a particular activity.

The participants of the study were 40 Master students learning English as a foreign language at Mascara University. The students were primarily young adults (ages 24-27), out of these participants, 6 were boys and 36 were girls. In order to select student participants, I visited two Master classes: one specializing in applied linguistics, the other in civilization. With their instructor's prior permission, I introduced my study and asked for students’ volunteer participation. The workshop took place over two weeks. It was implemented in three class periods during April, 2016. It involved an a 3-hour introductory lecture on the fundamentals of analyzing political speech, two practical sessions for 1.5 to 2 hours, and a 2-hour testing session.

To stimulate students’ thinking, a list of questions aimed at focusing their critical attention on certain aspects of language use in political speech was provided:

- What is the primary rhetorical purpose of the speech?
- What is the controlling idea?
- Who is the target audience?
- Why is this audience targeted?
- What is the prevailing attitude projected in words choice?
- What evidence does the speaker use to substantiate his claims?
- Does the speaker use lots of evidence? Little evidence? Sufficient evidence for his subject matter and his target audience?
- How are the strengths and weaknesses of the types of evidence demonstrated in the speech?

Provided below is a detailed description of workshop tasks. The aim of these critical thinking tasks was to encourage students to evaluate the content of political speeches in terms of their rhetorical devices embedded in their structure to persuade a particular audience.

I prepared classroom activities and a few reflection/discussion questions that relied on downloaded videos from YouTube; I recorded them on a DVD to be played through a projection system. The activities employed extracts which make use of emotional devices from the speeches of Donald trump and Hillary Clinton— the two American 2016 presidential candidates. It is time consuming and frustrating for students to watch or listen to a full speech. The videos were selected as optional listening materials due to their authenticity and up-to date nature which provide motivation for students.

The workshop procedure was simple. At first, I asked participants to divide into groups of three. The first step in this task was to ask students, in groups, to discuss what they understand propaganda to mean. Following the group discussions, I elicited student responses, wrote key words and phrases on the (white) board to reinforce students’ existing knowledge and experiences and to avoid promoting a predominantly Western approach to the concept. Then, I presented the class with various definitions for further consideration. Next, I discussed with students how propaganda works in political speech and commercial advertisements. In this

step, the objective was to make students familiar with some of the basic techniques of Propaganda and Persuasion. In a third step, I divided students into small groups (3 or 4 to a group) and played the audio. Then, the groups were asked to analyze the speech according to the criteria presented in Step two and write a paragraph in response to the themes. A checklist was used when analyzing speech. Checklists help save time and avoid frustration. After completing the writing task, students read aloud the persuasive words, phrases and techniques being used which they viewed designed to affect opinion changes. Then, they described to the whole class why and how they made their evaluations:

Activity Box

Title of video: -----

Read over the following questions; then watch the video and answer the questions.

Main theme in the speech:

Write a summary (around 50 words) to express how you felt while watching this

Listen to the speeches and identify as many propaganda techniques as you can.

Write them in the space below.

After watching the movie, talk to a friend about it. See if they agree with your perceptions and feeling about the movie.

The final stage of the task involved the presentation and analysis of a sample text (speech) I prepared in advance in response to the assigned topic. The teacher's own bias should be pointed out. The teacher should raise students' awareness of how their expectations, experiences, and biases can have an influence on the analysis, so that's what I did. The attention students paid to the speech by Clinton and rate as markers of propaganda include the following: First, *Defending women* as stated in her speech: "When women participate in peace-making and peace-keeping, we are all safer and more secure", "Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights", "It is past time for women to take their rightful place, side by side with men, in the rooms where the fates of peoples, where their children's and grandchildren's fates, are decided." Second, *Securing better laws in relation to children* as she says: "My wish for the new millennium is for all children... to grow up wiser, and stronger and more prosperous for the future than ever before." Third, *being against homophobia*, as in her words, "Being gay is not a Western invention. It is a human reality."

Fourth, *taking a stand against racism* as stated in her speech: “Black people across America still experience racism every day. Since this campaign started, I've been talking about the work we must do to address the systemic inequities that persist in education, in economic opportunity, in our justice system. But we have to do more than talk we have to take action. Fifth, *taking a no anti-Israel bias* as stated in her speech: “We have a close, unshakable bond between the United States and Israel, and between the American and Israeli people. We share common values and a commitment to a democratic future for the world...”

The attention students paid to the speech by Donald Trump rate as markers of propaganda include the following: First, *promise to create jobs* as stated in his speech: “I will be the greatest jobs President that God ever created. I'll bring back our jobs and I'll bring back our money.” Second, *help the lives of middle class families*, as stated in his speech “everybody is hitting the middle class and something has to happen because we're not going to have a middle class or the middle class is going to do something that you and I and nobody else is going to like and who can blame them? They are getting decimated.” Third, *promise to rebuild what has been destroyed*, as stated in his speech, “We have to rebuild our infrastructure: our bridges, our roadways, our airports.” Yes, this means more spending, but don't worry, because “Nobody can do that like me. Believe me.” Fourth, *planning to prohibit Muslim immigration*, as stated in his speech: “Each year, the United States permanently admits more than 100,000 immigrants from the Middle East, and many more from Muslim countries outside the Middle East. Our government has been admitting ever-growing numbers, year after year, without any effective plan for our security.”

It was noted during the workshop that participants did not pay much attention to the micro level details of language use as would be expected. It was probably due to their limited opportunities to interrogate language use. They generally used to be taught to listen for ideas and information or entertainment, not for evaluation. Developing critical listening skills require training and practice, as well as encouragement and support.

Despite its great importance for young people's needs, critical listening has rarely been covered in depth in applied linguistic literature. The literature contains little or no experimental work even closely related to the teaching of critical listening. This is probably because teaching it not an easy task even for expert teachers. In fact, many researchers have reported that it is difficult to improve students' critical thinking skills. Part of the reason why it is so difficult to teach it is because it is associated with higher levels of knowledge or skills which are difficult to assess within an objective format. The meaning of a text is not objectively given but it depends on the understanding of the listener. What is, in short, worth bearing in mind is that emotional biases may influence the ability of listeners to evaluate speaker's purpose and point of view. For the sake of objectivity, we should not teach critical listening with the aim to produce bias for or against internal or external groups or practices, but rather we should seek to act as facilitators of learning in which the outcomes are understanding of why and how propaganda works, and why and how language embodies certain domineering ideological and discursive tendencies.

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