Persuasion in English

LECTURE NOTES

Dr. Daria Dayter | University of Basel | SS2021

General introduction: What is the study of persuasion all about?

- We study what persuasion is and how it can be performed linguistically
- No language features are persuasive in themselves -> context!
- Near-synonyms to persuasion:
    - Manipulation, deception (sender-centred process)
    - Negotiation (two-sided process)
- Lakoff's distinction between ordinary discourse and persuasive discourse
    - Nonreciprocity of persuasive discourse

> Persuasive discourse – a type of discourse that nonreciprocally attempts to effect persuasion. Persuasion – the attempt or intention of one participant to change the behaviour, feelings, intentions or viewpoint of another by communicative means.
>
> (Lakoff 1982: 28)

- Later research regards all language as potentially persuasive

> Persuasion – all linguistic behaviour that attempts to either change the thinking or behaviour of an audience, or to strengthen its beliefs, should the audience already agree.
>
> (Virtanen & Halmari 2005)

- Audiences also participate in persuasion
- Rudolf von Rohr includes reinforcing a pre-existing belief as a type of persuasion

> Persuasion – a process between at least two parties (sender and receiver), which can target different communicative outcomes through reasoning or urgent requests to act or believe something.
>
> (Rudolf von Rohr 2018: 1)

- Aristotle's elements of rhetoric:
    - Logos is the more content-oriented element
    - Pathos and ethos (emotional involvement of the audience and the credibility of the speaker) can vary with varying linguistic expression
- Application example: Brendan Dassey (cf. Prof. Dawn Archer)
    - Guilty reality paradigm created by the police officers through linguistic means
    - Linguistics markers demonstrate a power imbalance in favour of the officers
    - Probable gratuitous concurrence

Pragmatics theory for the discussion of persuasion

- All utterances do something (i.e. are performative)

- The intent of the speech act can be expressed in the main verb or not
  - Intent expressed = explicit speech act
    - I hereby promise to always love you.
  - Intent implicit = implicit speech act
    - I will always love you.
- Three components of a speech act: locution, illocution, perlocution
- Felicity conditions – certain conditions that need to be fulfilled at the utterance of the speech act in order for it to be effective (Austin 1962)
- There might be a clear and direct relationship between the function of the speech act and the structure of the utterance, or not
  - Direct relationship = direct speech act
    - Could you jump over a fence 1 meter high?
  - No direct relationship (only conventionalized match) = indirect speech act
    - Could you pass me the salt? -> actually asking *Please pass me the salt*
    - Inferential path between the structure of the utterance and its function

INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS OF PERSUASION

- Persuasion is an interpersonal process

> Interpersonal pragmatics is a conceptual framework addressing the interpersonal or relational side of language in use in that it explores in what ways social actors use language to shape and form relationships in situ.
>
> (Locher & Graham 2010: 1)

- Appropriateness of linguistic features to context
- Dynamic negotiation of what is appropriate
  - Face (Goffman 1967)
  - Relational work (Locher 2004)
- Communicative discourse is about "speakers symmetrically engaging in achieving mutual understanding" (Thornborrow 2002)
- Strategic discourse is goal-oriented and contains asymmetric displays of power
  - Who talks more?
  - Who interrupts?
  - Who suggests new topics successfully?
  - Who hedges and who speaks directly?
  - Who addresses the interlocutor directly?
  - Who uses asymmetric address forms?
- Institutions (such as government) traditionally have a privileged position when it comes to persuasive discourse (Van Dijk 2008)

> Synthetic personalization is a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' en masse as an individual.
>
> (Fairclough 2001: 52)

- Synthetic personalization is when a broadcaster acts as if they were addressing you individually

Evaluation as a tool of persuasion

- Persuasion can be implicitly accomplished by indicating whether the speaker thinks a suggestion is good or bad
- Covert vs overt evaluation
- Linguistic means of realizing evaluation
    - Lexical evaluation
        - Encoded vs. connoted
        - "Great" vs. "all-natural"
    - Grammatical evaluation
    - Textual evaluation
- Application case: Trump's & Clinton's tweets (Hoffmann 2018)
    - Trump uses covert (connoted) evaluation more frequently

Persuasion in different types of language data

- Principles of persuasion in psychology research (Cialdini 2009)
    - Commitment and consistency – a desire to be consistent in one's behaviour
    - Liking – physical attractiveness, similarity, and compliments
    - Authority – listening to experts
    - Scarcity – the rule of the few
    - Reciprocity – give and take
    - Social proof – desire to fit in, to measure oneself against other people

POLITICAL DISCOURSE

- Linguistic models of persuasion (Partington & Taylor 2018)
    - Appeal to authority
    - Comparison and contrast
    - Problem-solution
    - Hypothesis – evidence – explanation
    - Association
- Politicians appeal to statistics or other authoritative figures (previous presidents, god...)
- Comparing and contrasting concepts, times, locations

- o Evaluation of comparison
  - o Parallel sentence structure, binomials, bicolons
- Problem-solution model can be effectively used through textual evaluation structure: best solution comes last
- Selective presentation of evidence as persuasive tool
- Humour and metaphor in political persuasion
  - o Semantic script theory of humour (Raskin 1985)
  - o Conceptual metaphor theory

> Conceptual metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.
>
> (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5)

The melting pot is at the heart of the American immigration system.

SOURCE DOMAIN	UNDERLYING STRUCTRAL SIMILARITY	TARGET DOMAIN
Steelmaking	Many different elements thrown together	American culture
	MAPPINGS	
Minerals melting together	→	Different cultures coming together to form a homogenous whole
Steel is stronger than the original ore	→	American culture is more unified than individual diasporas

- Application case: Reagan's and Clinton's speeches (Halmari 2005); Trump's language
  - o Aesthetic use of language
  - o Involvement of the audience through language

LANGUAGE OF ADVERTISING

> Presupposition is a piece of information or a proposition whose truth is taken for granted in the utterance of a sentence
>
> (Huang 2007)
>
> Presupposition is the common ground embedded in an utterance which is taken for granted by all the participants in a speech event.
>
> (Levinson 1983)

- Qualities of presupposition
  - o Constancy under negation
  - o Defeasibility
- Presupposition triggers (Karttunen 2016):
  - o Definite descriptions

- o Factive verbs
- o Implicative verbs
- o Change of state verbs
- o Iteratives
- o Verbs of judging
- o Temporal clauses
- o Cleft sentences
- o Implicit clefts with stressed constituents
- o Comparisons and contrasts
- o Non-restrictive relative clauses
- o Counterfactual conditionals
- o Questions
- IMPORTANT: not all presuppositions have persuasive function!
- Persuasive use of presupposition is when something that is *beneficial to the advertiser* and *might otherwise be contested* is encoded in a presupposition
  - o "Never forget how big our burritos are" ->>> our burritos are big
- Reason vs. tickle persuasion in advertising
  - o Reason is factual and content-based
  - o Tickle is emotional and appeals to face wants

Reason	Tickle
Justified argumentation (facts and statistics via numerals)	Vivid concrete nouns
Citations	Numbers
Elaborate connectors	Short words
Sentence complexity	Personal pronouns
Longer, Latinate or Greek words	Sentiment words (hooray and boo)
Nominalizations	Orality punctuation
Hedges	Vocatives
	Deictics
	Questions

Expert identity

- Concepts of credibility and trust
- Staged model of trust in discursive psychology (Sillence et al. 2006)
  - o Heuristic > site content evaluation > long-term engagements
- Authors need to justify their views and arguments

Warranting strategies are designed to give fellow participants reasons to take the information seriously.

(Richardson 2003: 172)

- Richardson's warranting strategies
- Expert voice creation through persuasive relational work
- Application case: advice column online (Locher 2006)
  - 7 relational strategies of creating an expert voice

> Lucy's authority clearly stems from her status as expert in her roles as a knowledgeable source of accurate information and as an institutional helper. The other strategies identified, however, make her an attractive advice-giver, whom people can trust and turn to, as evidenced by the large weekly intake of questions.
>
> (Locher 2006: 203)

Medical information online

- Current information landscape of "informed patient" and equating a responsible citizen identity with monitoring own health
- Medical professionals benefit from online dissemination (Locher 2010), but so do patients (Richardson 2005)
  - Anonymity, access...
- Flagging health information websites: how-to, imperatives, noun phrase+how-to or imperative
- Communicative strategies between medical experts and non-expert audiences (Gülich 2003)
  - self-categorization as expert and other categorization as non-expert;
  - 'category bound activities' such as reformulation, illustration, introduction of specialist terms;
  - reference to research results;
  - evaluation of other's work and of available information;
  - structuring of interaction
- The ideal of non-directiveness

> Since the response text is created asynchronically, there is time to carefully construct and design it in such a way as to guide the readership in a non-directive manner. This non-directive manner, however, does not mean that the content of advice is ambiguous. The messages of the individual responses are in fact quite clear, but are packaged in such a way that the reader gets the impression that the decision to take the advice is up to him or her.
>
> (Locher 2006: 252)

Persuasion in forensic contexts

- Simple language is more persuasive for juries than complex legalese
- Interpersonal factors such as lawyer's likeability to juries
  - Linguistic politeness
  - Linguistic accommodation
- Powerful vs. powerless language (Erickson et al. 1978) ~ the stance of certainty vs. uncertainty
- 'Malicious persuasion' in forensic contexts: manipulation of vulnerable witnesses

> "Children, second dialect speakers and people from different cultural backgrounds should all be officially included as vulnerable witnesses as they are all particularly vulnerable to experience disadvantage in court for various reasons."
>
> (Eades 2010: 84)

- Case study: Western Canadian Aboriginal suspects in police interviews (Fadden 2007)
  - Suspect-to-investigator speaking ratio is low
  - Aboriginal suspects are wary of confrontational speaking style
  - Aboriginal suspects use fewer direct address forms than non-Aboriginals
  - Lack of denials and failure to provide one's side of the story make Aboriginal suspects appear guilty to a Western jury
- Case study: Derek Bentley (Hardacker 2019)
  - Bentley conforms to Eades' definition of a vulnerable witness
  - Ambiguity in the utterance "Let them have it, Chris!" construed to incriminate Bentley
  - Bentley's allegedly monologue statement shows many linguistic signs of a dialogue

Courtship and pick-up

- Pick-up artists (PUA) – a community of (mostly) men who practice 'speed seduction' based on a belief in certain verbal scripts and rules as a pathway to attraction.

Courtship encounter viewed as...	
PUAs - strategic discourse (goal-oriented, clear roles)	Women – communicative discourse (social, dynamic roles)

- PUAs speak twice as much as the women
- PUAs are more direct in their address

- PUAs choose the topics and ask the questions, and therefore are in a more powerful conversational position (Bolander 2013, Paoletti & Fele 2004)
- Strategies suggested in the Daygame Blueprint model are not very frequently used
- PUAs exploit interactional, sequential and social obligations that a cooperative conversation creates (cf. Huma et al. 2018)

> "Pick-up artists in fact prioritize engagement over liking despite their ostensive aim of seduction. In the first seconds of an in-field, they place value on the ability to keep a woman talking rather than walking away from them. This means that promoting the ongoing activity of friendly conversation is PUAs' first and foremost aim in The Capture Phase."
>
> (Dayter & Rüdiger, forthcoming)

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