



The Rhetoric of Persuasion. Talking to Our Emotions

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Abstract. Persuasion is based on emotional aspects. It does not have to do with logical arguments, but with resources that will aim to the heart. The sender of the message intends to change the behavior, feelings, intentions, or viewpoint of another by communicative means. The speakers we refer to – mainly politicians, since they usually try to manipulate us– address a group with which they have something in common, for example, race or religion, and they use fears and hatreds, prejudices and inclinations, convictions and ideals common to the group. Different techniques will be used to manipulate. We can study them from the classical rhetoric perspective, paying attention to *elocutio* (stylistic elements), *ordo* (order) and *dispositio* (organization of arguments), focusing on how words are chosen, repeated or avoided. The sender will also use previous speeches, predictions without any base, and other strategies to instill fear in the recipients (the Other is a menace). It is also necessary to consider the different channels available nowadays to disseminate ideas, as the authors of the different articles in this number will do.

Keywords: persuasion techniques; manipulation; emotion

[es] Retórica de la persuasión. Hablando a nuestras emociones

Resumen. La persuasión se basa en aspectos emocionales. No tiene que ver con argumentos lógicos, sino con recursos que apunten al corazón. El remitente del mensaje intenta cambiar el comportamiento, los sentimientos, las intenciones o el punto de vista de otro por medios comunicativos. Los oradores a los que nos referimos, principalmente políticos, ya que generalmente intentan manipularnos, se dirigen a un grupo con el que tienen algo en común, por ejemplo, raza o religión, y usan miedos y odios, prejuicios e inclinaciones, convicciones e ideales comunes al grupo. Se utilizarán diferentes técnicas para manipular y podemos estudiarlas desde la perspectiva retórica clásica, prestando atención a la *elocutio* (elementos estilísticos), el *ordo* (orden) y la *dispositio* (organización de argumentos), centrándonos en cómo se eligen, repiten o evitan las palabras. El remitente también utilizará discursos anteriores, predicciones sin ninguna base y otras estrategias para infundir miedo en los destinatarios (el Otro es una amenaza). Además, debemos considerar los diferentes canales que existen actualmente para difundir ideas, como lo harán los autores de los diferentes artículos de este número especial.

Palabras clave: técnicas de persuasión; manipulación; emoción

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While “convincing” someone means bringing a person to a certain conclusion using logical arguments, “persuasion” is based on emotional aspects. Therefore, we would say that to convince we turn to the head of the other person; and to persuade, we turn to the heart. It implies manipulation; if well done, the recipients will never know that they were manipulated.

Persuasive discourse is defined by Robin Lakoff (“Persuasive Discourse and Ordinary Conversation, with Examples from Advertising”, 1982) as the nonreciprocal “attempt or intention of one party to change the behavior, feelings, intentions, or viewpoint of another by communicative means”.

When someone wants to convince us or gain our trust, such as a politician or an advertiser, they use the word. If we think of the etymology of the term “parole” in French, “word”, as Breton (2007: 19) indicates, it comes from the Greek term *parabolé, παραβολή*, that is, parable, referring to the morals in a narration, for example, the biblical stories. It is a concept that has been used in the sense of going towards the other with an objective.

I would like to focus on politics and persuasion. Bernays explains that the conscious and intelligent manipulation of organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society (1928: 9). The organization of political chaos is explained as the consensus of citizenship, in which the mechanisms of political parties provide or reduce the options for candidacy to less than four elements per election. This is generated given the number of candidates that are allowed for election in a political position. Voters, as Bernays explains, would realize that their vote, without an organization or goal, would only cause chaos, given the large number of possible nominations (1928: 10). The type of political system existing is explained in such a way that it seems beneficial for society, since it would be almost impossible, in practice, that the citizens could do an investigation on their available options and, thus, reach their own decision. For this reason, there is a vast and continuous effort to capture our minds in the interest of some politics, ideas or consumer goods (Bernays 1928: 11).

When analyzing texts with persuasive power, we need to consider aspects such as credibility (given by the receptors, and depending on the competence –does the message senders have the experience and knowledge (or the moral or institutional authority) to give us information or advice?–, and sincerity –many times achieved by talking against their own interest– perceived by the message recipients, or power of attraction (charisma triggers attention and retention; it affects beliefs, values, and actions). Also, we need to consider how close or how similar the senders and the recipients of the message are. There must be something in common between them (age, culture, ethnicity, religion, economic level...).

The speakers address a group with which they have something in common, for example, race or religion; fears and hatreds, prejudices and inclinations, convictions and ideals common to the group are used. Politicians try to convince the audience that they and their ideas are “of the people” (*plain folks technique*). They raise the history of the group, its traditions and contributions to the creation of the nation to gain support for their ideas. The history of the group is glorified, which can occur both by including many people, or by being interested only in one group and excluding others. Since democracies are based on majority opinion,

those who claim to represent the desire of the majority increase the probability of gaining public support.

Emotion in general will be widely used. In the process of appealing people's feelings, they usually talk about their personal problems and crises, which seem to interrelate with the national crisis.

Politicians and sellers choose their words, avoiding some and repeating others to satiety (using anaphora, for example, to leave a word in the listener's mind) and insisting on the sincerity of their words and how excited they are about what they propose or sell. Within persuasive language there can be a lexical selection that is motivated by the desire to elicit an appropriate response to a word from a previously identified frame. The lexical selection is, therefore, the fundamental weapon of a persuasive communicator. The sender intervenes manipulating the terms in two ways, as J. de Santiago-Guervós (2019) points out: in the coding process, changing the meaning of the word to manipulate the decoding; and in the inference process, which conscientiously stimulates a specific frame in agreement with the person's interests.

There will also be avoiding techniques. Lack of precision can be considered one of them. According to Zheng (2000), techniques such as not talking about the bad thing that one does, or the lexical selection and the expressions that contrast the good of the self and the bad of the other or opponent would become part of the constant avoidance of the politician.

The fear technique is also widely used, considered by Zheng (2000) a reinforcement strategy (together with testimony, quotes from historical and religious speeches, emotion and investment techniques and logical fallacies, already seen); political leaders employ threats or other fear techniques to take control of a situation and propose a solution. The use of historical discourses in a modern context, adapting them to their ends, is equally frequent. Responsibilities are thus avoided, and the illocutionary force of discourse is enhanced. They can use harsh words, but those have already been said by others, becoming, then, more acceptable to the public; or they appropriate something said by others (something people like) to increase their adherence.

In this special issue, several experts in Linguistics and Communication will study various discourses, and describe how persuasion occurs, mainly through words, syntactic structures, and images, which implies a deconstruction in order to get to the original idea the author had in mind when creating it.

In each article, the authors will reflect on the effects that discourse has on the recipient, asking themselves why the specific texts studied are able to persuade, and how that is accomplished; which arguments, words, format, images are used (*elocutio*), and what effect they have on the recipients. Also, what ideas are being transmitted, and whom is the discourse directed at. Other tools such as *ordo* or *dispositio* (arrangement of material) will be of importance, too, and those related directly to the persuader (ability, empathy, or just training). They need to know what the listeners want to hear, or those things that will catch their attention.

Since the classical rhetoric, classifications of genres in speeches were made, but what is even more important now is the diversification of channels through which these parliaments can be disseminated. The transmitters are multiplied, and the channels too. Researchers here will study persuasion in different means of communication during different periods, and in different societies.

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