Elżbieta Pieniążek-Niemczuk
State School of Higher Education, Chełm (Poland)
ORCID: 0000-0002-9761-3596

Enhancing Politicians' Persuasiveness: Some Remarks on the Importance of Rhetorical Figures of Repetition in Political Discourse

Zwiększanie perswazyjności polityków: kilka uwag na temat znaczenia figur powtórzeniowych w dyskursie politycznym

Abstract

The modern political class, which has been established on democratic principles both in Europe and America, is keen to use rhetoric and tools it provides. Any attempt to define the influence of these tools principally refers to the essence of rhetoric which is persuasion. Persuasion, on the other hand, is core to political discourse which, according to Teun van Dijk (1997, p. 14) is contextual, therefore must be recognized by its functions and/or goals. The functions of the discourse are often expressed in rhetorical devices and therefore play an important role in achieving political goals.

The pieces of information presented in this article depict rhetorical devices as useful in increasing persuasiveness. Attention is paid to figures of repetition which constitute a universal category of rhetorical devices and thus need to be examined in a greater detail, especially in a discourse whose users focus their efforts on constructing effective persuasion.

Key words: *rhetoric, rhetorical devices, rhetorical figures of repetition, political discourse, universal category.*

Abstrakt

Współczesna klasa polityczna, która ukształtowana została w systemach demokratycznych zarówno w Europie jak i Ameryce, chętnie posługuje się retoryką i jej narzędziami. Każda próba zdefiniowania wpływu owych narzędzi zasadniczo odwołuje się do istoty retoryki, jaką jest perswazja. Stanowi ona fundament dyskursu politycznego, o którym Teun van Dijk (1997, p. 14) pisze, iż jest kontekstualny, dlatego musi być definiowany na podstawie jego funkcji i/lub celów. Funkcje dyskursu są często wyrażane za pomocą środków retorycznych, dzięki czemu pełnią istotną rolę w osiąganiu celów politycznych.

Przedstawione w niniejszym artykule informacje dotyczące środków retorycznych dowodzą ich użyteczności w zwiększaniu perswazyjności. Uwaga zwrócona zostaje na figury powtórzeniowe, które stanowią uniwersalną kategorię środków retorycznych, i jako taka wymaga dokładniejszego zbadania, zwłaszcza w dyskursie, którego użytkownicy koncentrują swoje wysiłki na budowaniu skutecznej perswazji.

Słowa kluczowe: *retoryka, figury retoryczne, figury powtórzeniowe, dyskurs polityczny, kategoria uniwersalna.*

Introduction

Politicians' performance predominantly serves two functions, that is establishing and defining values that could be shared by a group if not by the majority of people or convincing the citizens to a given (present or future) policy. For the reason of a great importance is the message contents.

Furthermore, public appearances place certain requirements upon the person of the speaker. Successful candidates are frequently those who encourage public confidence, which can be achieved, among others, through their fluency, experience in language use in public performances, as well as their ability to express their beliefs and stir hearts and souls with these ideas. Hence, the story they tell needs to effectively chain appeals of both reasoning and emotion. The field that best covers both these areas is rhetoric and rhetorical devices are believed to possess the power to mobilize the people within the democratic framework of society.

Rhetorical devices have been the subject of attention of many studies. What enhances unfading interest in rhetorical devices is, among others, that their impact on recipients, can be measured; in political discourse for example, by examining the audience's responses (either affiliative or negative). Such investigations allow examination of the strategies contributing

to the speaker's success and thus may find further application in delivering performance capable of repeating the success demonstrated by the orator who used them in the first place and to a similar degree.

Defining political discourse

The notion is extremely popular; it is studied from an interdisciplinary perspective and used in various scientific fields, including sociology and philosophy, among others. In addition, it plays a crucial role in linguistics.

Political discourse can be seen as identified by its actors, that is, politicians. A great number of studies of political discourse focus on talk and text that are produced by politicians as well as institutions that relate to politics. The focus of attention is most frequently paid to presidents, prime ministers, but also to members of the government, political parties, and parliament, both at international and national levels.

Carbó (1984), Harris (1991), and Holly (1990) all conduct studies from a discourse analytical approach, where politicians are a group of people who can be distinguished from other social groups as they are paid for the activities they perform, and additionally – they are elected, appointed, or self-designated. However, the definition of political discourse is insufficient as these considered factors make political discourse hardly possible to be distinguished from other types of discourse, for example, educational, legal, or medical with participants in education, law, or medicine, respectively. Politicians are not the only participants in politics. As noted by Teun van Dijk (1997, p. 281), the interactional view of discourse analysis ought to include numerous groups of recipients of communicative events such as citizens, the public, social groups, and categories. The moment politics and its discourses are in the public sphere of life, many more participants appear. This, however, is also true for the definition of any other type of discourse, which just like medical (patients), educational (students), or legal (defendants) discourses have to pay attention to the audiences. Hence, it is impossible to establish the essence of political discourse solely by its participants, irrespective of whether they are active in the discourse development.

Verba et al. (1993) mention another problem, as far as establishing the definition of the discourse is concerned. According to them, politics is not only official but also professional. Various political activities involve citizens and voters, demonstrators, etc., who can actively take part in the political process, thus becoming involved in a political discourse. (Verba et al., 1993, p. 303-318)

Another approach toward a political discourse is represented by those scholars who tend to focus on the nature of the activities or practices that are accomplished by political texts and talk rather than solely being restricted to the nature of its participants (even politicians are not always involved in political discourses).

As stated by Lemke in his *Textual Politics: Discourse and Social Dynamics*, "Discourses, produce texts that will in some ways be alike in their meanings". (1995, p. 6) When the focus is on the details of an event or occasion, the text is meant. When the focus is on the patterns, cohesion, relationships, and structures that form different texts and occasions, then discourse is meant.

Wodak and Krzyżanowski (2008, p. 6) indicate that 'discourse' is defined on a different, more abstract level as 'text.' 'Discourse' implies patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures, whereas 'text' is a specific and unique realization of a discourse. Texts belong to genres. Thus, a presidential Campaign Discourse may be realized in a potentially huge range of genres and texts (in a TV debate, in a speech, in a manifesto)."

Individuals are participants of political discourse only when they act as political actors (they govern, rule, legislate, protest, vote, etc.). Only then can political actions be considered as discursive practices. Participants and actions can be considered the core of what constitutes political discourse; yet, what is stressed by many scholars, including Teun A. van Dijk, is that all discursive practices can be analyzed through features such as "setting, occasion, intension, functions, goals, and legal or political implications". (van Dijk, 1997, p. 14) This simply means that politicians perform discourse actions during parliamentary sessions, campaigns, interviews, etc., because text and context mutually define each other.

An apparent trap can be noted at this point. It results from the extension of politics and political discourse to a domain that is so immense that would coincide with the study of public discourse in general. Thus, the forms of discourse that exert possible political effects should be avoided. Likewise, impersonal talk about topics, such as gender and race, should not be treated as belonging to a political discourse as most social groups and their members occasionally act politically. Political discourses ought to essentially be defined contextually, that is, through the perspective of events or practices – the goals or functions of which are primarily political. (van Dijk, 1997, p. 14) This way set boundaries, exclude the talk of politicians deprived of political context, and include all the groups, citizens, and institutions that participate in a given political event.

Current research concerning political discourse and rhetorical devices either examines the occurrence of strategies and figures in a given (type of) text but without focusing on any group of figures, or – in contrast – examines certain rhetorical elements in texts which, as the expert literature shows, are frequently performed by different speakers and in different time-space continua.

Examining many factors (message types, strategies), which is the essence of the first approach to research on political discourse, poses, however, ever present risk of the research being less detailed. Nonetheless, the method provides an insight into the entirety of the campaign communication process and allows for the elaboration of a theoretical basis that can be later applied systematically to the entire presidential campaign discourse. One-dimensional studies, on the other hand, allow for studying the topic in detail and thus may contribute to the formulation of conclusions for prospect studies or can become an element of the broader approach. All these advantages outweigh the shortcomings of the method, i.e. the risk of presenting idealistic results which do not grasp the essence of the entire phenomenon.

Despite the differences in the conceptual and practical frameworks of the above approaches, both research types stress the importance and usefulness of using rhetorical devices and strategies to persuade voters in favor of their particular views which are realized in the political discourse.

Rhetorical devices

Classical rhetoric distinguishes two major categories of rhetorical devices, namely schemes and tropes (Charteris-Black, 2013, p. 39) that because of their distinguishable features may be noticed to exist not only in certain rhetorical but also in linguistic domain.

A *scheme*, is a device in which the standard or projected sequence of words undergoes some alteration. Thus, the grammatical structure of the sequence is affected. The rhetorical effect is achieved by a certain rearrangement of word order and may also contribute to increase aesthetic value. (Charteris-Black, 2013, p. 39) On the other hand, a device that deviates words and shifts them away from their usual signification or collocations is a *trope*. (Kamil, Al-Hindawi, 2017, p. 133)

A comparison of both devices enables to draw some general conclusions in terms of differences and similarities. Schemes are related to the grammatical choice, while tropes are related to the choice of lexical units. Hence, texts that are studied for schemes most frequently focus on issues such as

repetition or changes in the standard word order. On the other hand, texts assessed for tropes most frequently aim at analyzing multiple meaning of words (i.e., polysemy).

There is yet another category of rhetorical devices – *chroma*, which has become the center of attention of most recent studies which predominantly aim to establish formal taxonomies of rhetorical figures.

One of the most valuable sources of knowledge, while discussing this category, is the article titled "Toward an ontology of rhetorical figures" (Kelly et al., 2010, p. 156), which defines the features of 'chroma' device as intentional to differentiate it from a concept-oriented trope and scheme that are frequently seen as simply formal components of texts. Chien and Harris (2010) further elaborate the definition of 'chroma' by claiming that the device represents "deviations of intention" and present some prototypical devices that fit the category. They also note that the category was "a grab bag" for all the devices that could not be successfully assigned to two major categories, namely tropes and schemes. (Chien, Harris, 2010, p. 155)

The division of rhetorical devices into schemes and tropes is the broadest and the oldest one; thus, ever since they were established in Classical times researchers have made attempts to organize them into more detailed categories, paying attention to their qualities and the functions they perform. One of the most frequently cited in recent expert literature, among others by Kennedy (1999), Miller (2004), Hart (2011), Farrow (2013), and Raylor (2019), is the categorization developed by Lee A. Sonnino (1968, p. 247-66) who divided the devices into the following categories:

– Figures of addition – digression;
– Figures of admission and concession;
– Figures which amplify the importance of the subject of discourse;
– Figures of appeal to the audience (by threat or promise or entreaty);
– Figures for beginning;
– Figures of comparison and similitude;
– Figures of contrast;
– Figures of description;
– Figures which directly address someone;
– Figures which distort the truth (see also figures which exaggerate);
– Figures involving doubt or hesitation;
– Figures which lead to a certain emotion;
– Figures for emphasizing different points;
– Figures for ending;
– Figures which exaggerate or diminish;

– Figures of exclamation;
– Figures which heap things up;
– Figures which imitate;
– Figures of implication;
– Figures which list things (enumeration or summation);
– Figures which depend upon logical forms;
– Figures which involve memorable phrases or deeds;
– Figures which are narratives;
– Figures of omission, including refusals to speak;
– Figures of personal abuse or accusation;
– Figures which involve a play on words;
– Figures of premeditation;
– Figures which ask questions;
– Figures by which the speaker recommends himself to the hearer – by praise, thanks, etc.;
– Figures of repetition;
– Tropes;
– Figures which cause variations in style;
– Figures which vary the normal syntax;
– Vices and faults;
– Figures which alter the form or grammatical status of a word.

Another arrangement of rhetorical devices into categories was offered by the 20th century scholar – Warren Taylor. Although it is less frequently cited in the expert literature, it is useful for demonstrating the abundance of names of categories. Taylor (1972, p. 145-166) distinguished the following categories of rhetorical devices:

– Argument and Proof;
– Arrangement of the Elements of a Sentence;
– Arrangement of the Elements of a Sentence;
– Development of a Discourse;
– Diction;
– Emotions Expressed or Aroused;
– Form of Words;
– Opponent, Speakers Attitude towards;
– Questions;
– Quotations;
– Repetition;
– Style, Types of;
– Syntax.

Another division, which represents a 21st century approach to rhetorical devices, was offered by Gregory T. Howard and it differs from the divisions developed by the two scholars before him in the number of categories (reduced to four) which, however, include a greater number of rhetorical devices. Thus, in the case of Howard, a shift back to Classical ways of categorizing the devices into larger units can be observed. Howard (2010, p. 117-122) distinguished the following categories of rhetorical figures:

– Figures of definition;
– Figures of reasoning;
– Figures of repetition;
– Figures of questioning.

Similar to Howard, Ward Farnsworth (2016) also developed a taxonomy of rhetorical devices and presented these categories, which in his opinion, possess the greatest practical value. Although the author himself admits that his primary objective was not to develop any classification of his own, nonetheless he did not refer to any of the already existing taxonomies and offered a division of rhetorical devices arranged in three categories. In terms of the number of categories, this is close to Howard's division. In his *Classical English Rhetoric*, Farnsworth (2016, p. vi) distinguishes the following sub- and main categories of rhetorical devices:

- Repetition of Words and Phrases, the category further including:
    – Simple Repetition of Words and Phrases;
    – Repetition at the Start;
    – Repetition at the End;
    – Repetition at the Start and End;
    – Repeating the Ending at the Beginning;
    – Repetition of the Root.
- Structural matters:
    – Parallel Structure;
    – Reversal of Structure;
    – Inversion of Words;
    – Using Extra Conjunctions;
    – Leaving Out Conjunctions;
    – Leaving Out Words.
- Dramatic devices:
    – Saying Things by Not Saying Them;
    – Breaking Off in Midstream;
    – Correcting Oneself;
    – Rhetorical Uses of Negative;

– Rhetorical Questions;

– Asking Questions and Answering Them.

What can be noticed on the basis of the four divisions above is that there are many schemes according to which individual devices can be grouped. Nonetheless, irrespective of the number of major categories offered by the above scholars, some similarities between the taxonomies can be found. The table below presents the categories whose equivalents can be found in all the above categorizations.

Table 1: Equivalent categories of rhetorical devices in classifications by L. A. Sonnio (1968, p. 247-266), W. Taylor (1972, p. 145-166), G. T. Howard (2010, p. 117-122), and W. Farnsworth (2016, p. vi)

Author	L. A. Sonnio	W. Taylor	G. T. Howard	W. Farnsworth
CATEGORIES	Figures of description	Description	no equivalent	no equivalent
	Figures which lead to certain emotion	Emotions Expressed or Aroused	no equivalent	no equivalent
	Figures which vary the normal syntax	Syntax	no equivalent	no equivalent
	Figures which cause variations in style	Style, Types of	no equivalent	no equivalent
	Figures which ask questions	Questions	Figures of questioning	no equivalent
	Figures of repetition	Repetition	Figures of repetition	Repetition of words and phrases

On the basis of information presented in Table 1, it can be noticed that there are several categories which reveal a similarity of name. Four categories appear solely in the taxonomies of Sonnio (1968) and Taylor (1972) and possess no equivalents in the categorizations which were developed by Howard (2010) and Farnsworth (2016). These are categories which include rhetorical devices referring to description, emotions, syntax and style. One category – including figures of questioning – appears in the taxonomies of Sonnio, Taylor and Howard, but Farnsworth treated the figures belonging to the group as the subcategory of "Dramatic Devices." There is yet another group of rhetorical devices which appears in all the above taxonomies, namely repetition.

But the scholars differ not only in the number of distinguished categories and their naming, but also, as depicted in Table 2, in the number of individual devices they include in the categories.

Table 2: Rhetorical figures of repetition in classifications by L. A. Sonnio (1968, p. 247-266), W. Taylor (1972, p. 145-166), G. T. Howard (2010, p. 117-122), and W. Farnsworth (2016, p. vi) – comparison according to name and number of devices in the category

Name of the author	Name of the category	Number of devices included in the category
Lee A. Sonnino	Figures of repetition	20
Warren Taylor	Repetition	16
Gregory T. Howard	Figures of repetition	35
Ward Farnsworth	Repetition of words and phrases	7

The category which includes repetition devices contains a similar number of figures in the case of two scholars – Sonnino (20) and Taylor (16) – but is the largest for Howard (37), which, due to the fact that the scholar distinguished fewer categories, seems natural. Farnsworth, on the other hand, included and described only 7 figures of repetition, although it can be assumed that if his research had been aimed at establishing a taxonomy of the figures rather than about identifying those most practical ones, the number would most probably have been close to those provided by other scholars in this section, as can be judged by the number of major categories he distinguishes.

Rhetorical devices have been the subject of various research projects which, however, predominately focus on eliciting and later examining the impact of rhetorical devices in specific types of text (Stellato, 2013), or field of science (Fahnestock, 2003). These studies rarely focus on any category in particular, but rather on identification of most frequently occurring types and general impact of the rhetorical devices, irrespective of the division accepted by the author. Although they comment on the application of the devices, this cannot be seen as examining the topic of rhetorical devices in depth. The approach can, however, be partially justified on the basis of the large number of available devices.

While little agreement can be found among scholars on the issue of categorizing devices, a good starting point would be a detailed examination of the category, which, in view of presented data (Tables 1, 2), can be conside-

red *universal*, namely figures of repetition. Although it cannot be claimed, unless verified in the course of more detailed analysis, that the category has been described by all scholars who have ever aimed at establishing taxonomies of rhetorical figures, the fact remains that it appears in many, if not the majority, such categorizations.

What is repetition?

Repetition is used everywhere – in advertising, media, and politics, but it is also used while producing everyday life utterances. Merriam-Webster (2017) dictionary defines repetition as "the act or an instance of repeating or being repeated." Nonetheless, many researchers who study repetition agree that it may take many different names.

One such researcher is Aitchison (1994, p. 15) who noted that it is possible to correctly identify the type of repetition only after identifying crucial aspects such as who uses the repetition, what is being repeated, and where. After providing answers to these questions, one may find that children's repetition is in fact called imitation, autistics' repetition is echolalia, repetition of people with a speech disorder may take the form of stuttering, etc.

The Aitchison's list of terms related to repetition is broad. The researcher concludes that perhaps it is the entire field of linguistics that can be considered a form of repetition and justifies her claim by stating that language system is entirely pattern-dependent.

Like Danesi (2012, p. 36), other researchers agree with the assumptions of information theory, which assumes that a message or some aspects of what is communicated in the form of repetition can simply be made redundant. In the view of such a claim, an immediate question arises regarding the purpose of using repetition in the first place. The answer is provided by Grice (1989) who explains that people acting rationally communicate as they are driven by some purpose. Such a purpose in the case of politicians who aim at winning support of voters in elections might be to attract their attention and focus it on a keyword, phrase, or idea. Thus, the aim of repetition is persuasion through emphasis.

It is yet to be assessed and unequivocally confirmed if repetition is good or bad. Moreover, no restrictions exist with regard to the frequency of incorporating the device in the text. Some speakers may intentionally choose to avoid using the tool due to some negative stereotypes ascribed to it, namely, too much repetition can be considered as nagging and the message itself can become mundane.

A number of psychological research studies confirmed that repetition is a powerful tool that serves persuasion by helping recipients to remember the message. Begg, Anas, and Farinacci (1992) from McMaster University in Canada proved that people tend to value a statement that has been repeated to them once as more true in contrast to pieces of information to which they have been exposed for the first time. The research also revealed that people rated statements as truer even when the person delivering the message to them was repetitively lying.

It can thus be considered that people become more persuaded by a message content if they think it is true. Psychologists describe the effect as "the illusion of truth" and justify the phenomenon as grounded in cognitive fluency, i.e., the ease with which pieces of information are processed to develop understanding of what they convey. (Moons et al., 2009, p. 32) Things that are recognized by our brain as familiar require less effort to process them and the comfort which this ease brings is subconsciously recognized by our brain as truth. In short – whatever is easy to understand for humans seems more true because familiarity breeds positive connotations. On the other hand, if a message is difficult to process, it leads to a lesser extent of people believing in it if at all.

At this point, a claim can be made that the difference between objective truth and illusion of truth is minor. Additionally, research in the field of effectiveness of repetition showed that the less attention is paid to arguments, the more effective the message is. Moons, Mackie and Garcia-Marques (2009) proved that if people pay attention to what is actually being said, repeating a weak argument will produce no effect. On the contrary, when the audience is not determined to examine what is actually being said, repeating the argument will arouse the sense of familiarity and thus will be more persuasive. Only when people are motivated enough to scrutinize the argument they are exposed to, even though the strategy of repetition is applied it may fail. However, if the argument is strong, the issue of concentrating and scrutinizing is unnecessary – persuasion is bound to work. Moons' (2009) research proves one additional aspect, namely that people (voters) should never switch off their critical thinking, because they might end up with repeating empty slogans and unverified pieces of information.

Conclusions

Irrespective of their category, the key feature of rhetorical devices is their persuasive nature aimed at influencing the audience. When rhetorical

devices are directed toward the speaker, they can evoke positive emotions and values such as solidarity, honor, and pride. They can also be directed toward political opponents to evoke negative emotions such as fear, shame, and hostility. Whenever the orator aims at evaluating a topic either positively or negatively, intensifying an appeal by the power of language, rhetorical devices appear to be the most valuable tool.

Repetition is a universal, cross-scientific, and multidimensional device. When additionally the fact is realized that the 'impact of repetition on humans finds proof in a number of psychological research studies, the more advisable for the purpose of building an effective politicians' performance seems assessing the impact of the figures in linguistics research which so far has not been performed. Such research could serve to increase the awareness on figures which build the category thus naturally affect their further use in other discourse types or genres, which in turn may lead to highlighting the differences between them as well as indicating the figures which may potentially enhance the discourse user's performance as well as awareness of their impact on recipients.

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Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Elżbieta Pieniążek-Niemczuk, Ph. D. in linguistics; Assistant Professor – a faculty member of the English and American Studies Department (The State School of Higher Education in Chełm, Poland).

E-mail: e.pieniazek.niemczuk@gmail.com