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Announcing COVID19 as a global pandemic: Assurance or intimidation

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Abstract---In an unprecedented scene, most of the presidents and prime ministers all over the world announce Coronavirus as a global pandemic in speeches which carry with them great fear. Naturally, and since no solution is introduced for the near future, there must be persuasion for raising moral and instilling a sense of national duty to overcome this crisis. However, Covid19 has a peculiar impact on every aspect of life including the political speeches. Persuasion in such speeches might be fruitless. Therefore, since rhetorical devices could be means for persuasion, in this discourse analysis study, rhetorical devices will be investigated by means of a model composed of Van Dijk's (1980) model of text analysis, and Burke's (1969) model of rhetorical devices. As for the data, two political speeches are chosen; the Germanic Prime Minister Angela Merkel, and the Britain Prime Minister Boris Johnson will be analyzed to decipher the use of those devices to find out their contribution in making powerful speeches in changing people's attitudes, then in creating the required ideology. However, the results show that through Covid19 situation, whether the speech is persuasive and powerful or not, many concepts have changed.

Keywords---Angela Merkel, Boris Johnson, Van Dijk, Burke's classification, rhetorical devices, coronavirus, pandemic, COVID19.

Introduction

The contemporary component of anxiety around the world is called the COVID-19 pandemic. By Coronavirus, this disease is spread all over the world. Therefore under such circumstances, there is a proposal for being distant socially as much as possible and to be informed continually about the situation (WHO, 2020b). The spread of COVID-19 disease might be attributed to the increased social activities and growing population (Owen Jarus, 2020). Therefore, it is the persuasion that will be focused on to see to what extent it is powerful enough to change people's ideology.

Statement of Problem

Because of COVID-19, people's head and heart all over the world are toward their presidents' speeches, which are considered as a salvation to human life seeking for the accuracy of the situation. However, sometimes in dilemmas, humans' anxiety and fear make the situation worse (Taylor, 2019) and presidents are not exception.

Aims of the Study

The study aims at finding out whether the speeches by the Germanic Prime minister and the British Prime minister are persuasive enough to make their people change many aspects of their life.

Questions of the study

- Since rhetorical devices could be a way of persuasion, what are the rhetorical devices that are used by both Merkel and Johnson?
- Do these rhetorical devices add reassurance?, or they might contribute in creating speeches which are somehow fearful?
- Is there a gender difference in persuasion? In other words: Is Johnson's speech is more persuasive than Merkel's?

Significance of the Study

The study could contribute in shedding light on how the decision makers are influenced by crises, and to what extent that effect is revealed on their speeches. Therefore, it might entrench those who are interested in politics and linguistics.

Limits of the Study

- Covid19 is still existed, then, the result might be generalized for how Covid-19 affected the presidents' language at ONLY a specific period of time.
- All decision makers address their people about COVID-19, but only two prime presidents' speeches are chosen randomly.
- Van Dijk's (1980) model of text analysis and Burke's (1969) classification of rhetorical devices is the chosen model for analysis.

Literature Review

Persuasion

From centuries it is known that politics is about persuasion. Assuring the addressee for doing something convincingly is called persuasion (Kerf, 2004). In the fifth century B.C., Greek civilization witnessed the birth of rhetoric as a tool for controversy (Ilie, 2006: 43). Aristotle, a Greek philosopher claimed that the main way of verbal persuasion is rhetoric. Rhetoric according to Aristotle's (1926) as cited by Anita (2016:355- 27) is "*an ability, in each case, to see the available means of persuasion.*" When tackling the gender differences in persuasion, Eagly, (1987) averred that, psychologically, rhetoric involves attributing the different

roles of men and women diversified social expectations. For example, in the stereotyped image of male behavior, there is less concern with the polite behavior, more independent, more task-focused, more competitive (Herring, 1994; Herring & Stoerger, 2014; Jameel, A.S 2022). Women, on the other hand, is more concerned with politeness, less with competitiveness and achieving goals, more related to communal in nature (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Consequently, rhetoric could encompass everything, and everything includes some rhetorical figures as follows

Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical figures are the deliberate deviation from the entrusted usage of language (Quinn, 1993, p. 6). Using rhetorical figures is one way to make an establishment of a balance between obscurity and clarity so that audience's ability in capturing ideas will be increased and, hence, the arguments will be understood appropriately (Corbett, 1999, p. 377). Similarly, Mcquarrie & Phillips (2014:26) supported the previous view by stating that the audiences' attention will be attracted by rhetorical figures and, therefore, they will get the point (Shen, 2006:18).

Burke's (1969) Model

In the new rhetoric, Burke and his peers of scholars stressed the importance of 'identification' to be under special concern (Burke, 1951:203; and Ehninger, 1975:450). therefore, the term 'identification' has significant perspectives by Burke that there is an agreement between him and Aristotle's observation that identification might be a means of persuasiveness by politicians when there is a need to reveal their identities to their audiences (Burke, 1951). In this study, Burke's (1969:20) classification of rhetorical tropes, which are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony will be followed:

- **Metaphor**
In both verbal and non-verbal communication, Metaphor is considered a cognitive means that functions in different ways simultaneously (Forceville, 2009, 2010).
- **Metonymy**
For embodiment an idea, physical object might be used suggestively, or as averred by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:35) by metonymy "*we are using one entity to refer to another that is related to it*".
- **Synecdoche**
When a part of a physical object is used for the representation of the whole object, then it is Synecdoche, which is a Greece word means: understanding one thing with another (Reisigl, 2006:603).
- **Irony**
Irony, according to Burgersa et.al (2015) is explained as an evaluating things or ideas by mentioning their contradicting ones.

Van Dijk's (1980)

On the path of analyzing the above rhetorical devices and their use in the political speeches, discourse analysis conforms to getting the answers to the queries aroused in such a political context. Van Dijk's (1980) model of text analysis will be adopted. According to this model many discourse types is discerned to have functional categories which are applied to the sequencing of information in discourse. The first category is "introduction" in which the information and the details of the background of the subject are provided. The second category is called "problem" since it involves the highlighted problem or event. The conclusion is the third category in which there is an inclusion of conclusions, summaries and decisions for future action (ibid: 110-111).

Data Analysis

The eclectic model in this study is a combined of Burke's model of rhetorical tropes, then the data will be analyzed according to Van Dijk discourse analysis. Analyzing Merkel's and Johnson's speeches come with the following results:

Table 1
The Frequency of the Four Strategies of Burke's Model of Rhetorical Tropes in
Both Merkel's and Johnson's Speeches

	metaphor	Metonymy	Synecdoche	Irony	No. of Items
Angela Merkel	39	4	7	0	50
Boris Johnson	13	10	0	0	23

- Apparently, the overwhelming share of rhetorical devices is used by Merkel, whereas Johnson has not reached that level.
- As for the classification by Burke (1969), both politicians did not use irony.
- Metaphor and Synecdoche are used more by Merkel whereas Johnson comes first in using metonymy strategy with no Synecdoche.

Results and Discussions

When the two political speeches analyzed, it can be discerned that each one has same structure according to Van Dijk' model with the following clear cut differences:

- Merkel initiates her speech with using the metaphor along with the present continuous tense in the confrontation that the effect of Covid 19 is continuous on the social life only without mentioning the real danger of it. But in the rest of her introduction, few numbers of rhetorical devices are used.

"The coronavirus is changing daily life in our country dramatically at the present"(Merkel, 2020)
- Stalling is the best word to describe Merkel's introduction. Merkel initiates her speech with excessive use of justifications and apologies expressed with simple present tense to stress that the mentioned facts are imperative, with

including (*we* pronoun) to indicate the inclusiveness of everyone including the government in the consequences of the crisis, along with the hedges (*perhaps*) and (*cannot*) for mitigating the force of her statements. It is the feminine nature crawling slowly in facing the facts, or the situation is too hard to be declared apparently in the introduction of her speech.

“and, perhaps what is most difficult, we all miss social encounters that we otherwise take for granted”(Merkel, 2020)

- Merkel’s uses of (*I* pronoun) in the introduction is for expressing needs and feelings hesitantly not for stating achievements.

“I’m addressing you in this *unconventional way* today because I want to tell you what guides me as *Federal Chancellor* and all my colleagues in the Federal Government in this situation”(Merkel, 2020)

By means of the modal verb and the conditional *if-clause*, Merkel’s pleas for her people along with her suspicions of their ability in cooperating with the government, comes before going into the details of the problem which is Covid19.

“I firmly believe that we will pass this test if all citizens genuinely see this as THEIR task. Allow me therefore to say that this is serious. Please also take this seriously” (Merkel, 2020)

- The second part of the speech, which is the problem, includes the majority of the rhetorical devices used by Merkel in her speech introducing the most significant point she would like to shed light on. Merkel’s first focus was urging her people to prevent the inflection from each other(*slow the spread of the virus*) and accept to be quarantined in this period until finding the treatment and vaccine (*buy time*)

“-- then only one thing matters, namely that we slow the spread of the virus, flatten the curve over the course of several months, and buy time”(Merkel, 2020)

- Obviously, before reminding her people of the crisis in their hospitals, there is assurance introduced by means of metaphor, or it might be a reminder that no matter how great the Germanic healthcare system is, there will be a crisis if there is no cooperation between the government and the people.

“Germany has an excellent healthcare system, perhaps one of the best in the world”(Merkel, 2020)

- Sympathizing with her people, Merkel used metaphor and metonymy to describe the severity of the quarantine

“I know how dramatic the restrictions already are. These are restrictions, the likes of which the Federal Republic has never seen before”(Merkel, 2020)

- The other point which is highlighted by Merkel is assuring her people of their economic state when using metaphor

“I assure you that the Federal Government is doing everything that it can to cushion the economic impact - and, above all, to safeguard jobs”(Merkel, 2020)

- Merkel detaches herself from the intimate way of addressing her people and, by using *Synecdoche*, there is a clear criticism of her people reactions concerning the economics.

“Panic buying, as if there’s no tomorrow, is pointless and, at the end of the day, shows a complete lack of solidarity”(Merkel, 2020)

- When using *metonymy*, Merkel avoids repeating herself in encouraging her people,

“We are not condemned to accept the spread of this virus as an inevitable fact of life. We have the means to fight it”(Merkel, 2020)

- When starting giving her instructions to be followed by her people, Merkel, did not use rhetorical devices as if it is meant that rhetorical devices are used for preparations the addressee to receive more serious facts.
- The last part of Merkel’s speech ,which is conclusion, involves fueling the sense of responsibility which Merkel did by means of metaphor and Synecdoche

“How many loved ones will we lose? The answer, to a great extent, lies in our hands” (Merkel, 2020)

- As for Johnson’s speech, the rhetorical devices are used with fewer numbers than Merkel’s, but the distribution is different. Thus, in the introduction, Johnson resorts to metaphors to make his point clear and precise.

“The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades - and this country is not alone. All over the world we are seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer”(Johnson, 2020)

- On the contrary to Merkel, Johnson did not give any justifications nor apologies since, for him, it is an emergency with no room for courtesy. Also, his use of *metonymy* and *Synecdoche* might be an indication that in this unprecedented situation all share the same responsibility.

“And so tonight I want to update you on the latest steps we are taking to fight the disease”.(Johnson, 2020)

- Still in the introduction, Johnson detached himself from the responsibility of the actions taken against the social gatherings by the use of the *metaphor* with using (*I* pronoun) to indicate his action of reminding only.

“And I want to begin by reminding you why the UK has been taking the approach that we have”(Johnson, 2020).

- In the second section of Johnson’s speech which is the problem, Johnson got to the point without prerequisites. His language is pessimistic and direct with only one hedge (*could possibly*) to mitigate the force of his statements and with the underlined metaphors.

“Without a huge national effort to halt the growth of this virus, there will come a moment when no health service in the world could possibly cope; because there won't be enough ventilators, enough intensive care beds, enough doctors and nurses”(Johnson, 2020).

- Through presenting the instruction to be followed by his people, Johnson did not use rhetorical devices since his language is direct with forceful statements and excessive use of (*You* pronoun) which imply justification and negative relationship.

“You should not be meeting friends. If your friends ask you to meet, you should say no”(Johnson, 2020).

Prior to introducing the actions taken by the government, Johnson threatens his people with the conditional *if- clause* for reducing the force of this threat.

“If you don't follow the rules the police will have the powers to enforce them, including through fines and dispersing gatherings”(Johnson, 2020).

- In presenting the actions of the government, Johnson did not use rhetorical devices; instead his language was direct with the use of future tense since the instructions are specifically for the near future.

“We will stop all gatherings of more than two people in public - excluding people you live with”(Johnson, 2020).

- the last section of Johnson’s speech ,which is the conclusion, involves the resumption of using the rhetorical devices (Synecdoche and metaphor) since the point that comes to existence is Covid 19 with the promises to defeat it. The tense is present continuous which signifies some hope in the future.

“And we are buying millions of testing kits that will enable us to turn the tide on this invisible killer”(Johnson, 2020).

- With the inclusion of the addressees in taking the responsibility of this unprecedented situation, Johnson used the metonymy (*fight*) along with the (*We* and *Us* pronouns) as if his thought says that we are all at the same boat.

“But in this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted. Each and every one of us is now obliged to join together”(Johnson, 2020).

- It is worth noting that *irony* is not used in both speeches for the situation is not ironic anymore. At peculiar spectacle, the presidents ask their people to wash their hands which might be funny under other situations.

Conclusion

- The effects of Covid19 overwhelmed everything including the presidents’ language, but some essentials are not liable to be changed under hard times. In other words, the feminine and male language under such circumstances shared some characteristics, but the main differences are still existed.
- Both speeches have similar effects on their people since all countries, with or without developed healthcare system, share similar amount of victims. Consequently, under this unprecedented crisis, there could be no persuasive speech since the concept of persuasion might be understood differently according to the situation.

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