

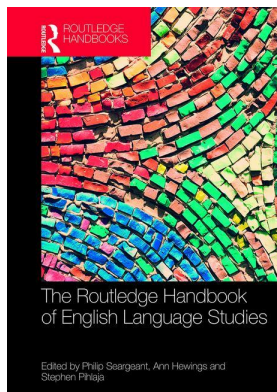
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Persuasive language

David Hann

Introduction

Human beings are highly social animals who use talk as their primary means of communication. It is hardly surprising then that they dedicate a good deal of their energy to attempting to persuade others to a particular action or a particular way of seeing the world. After all, negotiating conflicting viewpoints without recourse to such strategies as intimidation or violence is crucial to a tolerable and civilised existence. It could be argued that persuasion is the true measure of the power of language in that it can effect change without recourse to anything but the strength of its own resources.

This chapter examines persuasive language by, firstly, exploring its nature. It then provides a brief historical perspective on persuasion by looking back to its study by Aristotle, whose influence in the Western tradition of thought can be felt to the present day. The different ways in which persuasion has been understood and conceptualised in the field of applied linguistics are then explored. The chapter also discusses how the field is reacting to a changing world where the place of English as the world's lingua franca, together with rapid advances in telecommunications in the twenty-first century, have cemented its place as the pre-eminent language of political and commercial persuasion. Finally, possible avenues of future investigation are mooted.

What is persuasion?

It is important to establish initially exactly what sort of communicative phenomenon we are dealing with. A reflection on the meanings of two everyday sentences provides a starting point:

- a) 'She asked me to postpone the meeting.'
- b) 'She persuaded me to postpone the meeting.'

Sentence (b) suggests the possibility of initial resistance and an overcoming of that resistance. As such, it foregrounds the importance of the receiver of the message in a way which sentence (a) does not. After all, if the receiver does not comply, there is no persuasion. This explains the

difficulty there would be in hazarding a guess at the linguistic form(s) persuasion would take in a particular instance compared to that for a request. Accommodating to the needs of a receiver and the context of its reception results in a process rather than a single act. In this regard, an associated but rather different meaning of persuasion is helpful. The notion of persuasion as a belief system, as when referring to someone's 'political persuasion', hints at an important element in persuasion itself. The process involves tapping into another's beliefs or viewpoints and moving them in some way. Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that researchers looking into children's developing 'theory of mind', i.e. the ability to attribute feelings and beliefs to others, can effectively do so by investigating how their young subjects persuade another to an action (e.g. Bartsch et al. 2011). Persuasion, then, can encompass more than mere argumentation. As Charteris-Black points out, '[the] language of persuasion appeals both to our conscious rational judgements and to our unconscious emotional responses' (2005: xi). So, persuasive language can move us to change our minds, or at least modify our outlook, which may well involve moving us emotionally. As such, it is necessarily a two-way and interactive process even when it takes a monologic form such as someone standing at a podium delivering a speech. Indeed, the fact that persuasion foregrounds the relationship between the communicative trinity of sender, receiver and text makes it of particular interest to the applied linguist. As will be seen, different approaches place different emphases on these three elements. The interactive and intersubjective dimensions to persuasion, along with the means used in its execution, are all returned to in the course of this chapter.

Before looking at the different ways in which persuasion has been explored in the field of linguistics, however, it is instructive to look briefly at how it was first studied by the Ancient Greeks.

An historical perspective: Aristotle

Aristotle's (2004 [350 BCE]) *Rhetoric* is probably the most influential treatise on the art of persuasion to have been written, certainly in the Western world. The preceding discussion about persuasion appealing to the heart and head are central to its ideas. Aristotle saw rhetoric as comprising three persuasive elements: an appeal to reason (*logos*); an appeal to emotion (*pathos*); and an appeal to the good reputation of the speaker (*ethos*). He also regarded the craft of persuasion as being vital to the functioning of society, something central to the life of a community (BBC Radio 4 2004). It is perhaps no coincidence that it came to be regarded as a discipline worthy of study at a time when early democratic institutions were taking root in the Athenian state. After all, its acknowledgement of the requirement to take account of the needs and wants of an interlocutor is democratic in spirit. Indeed, some have argued that the importance of the persuasive arts has waxed and waned in societies in reverse proportion to the autocratic tendencies of those societies (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005: 8ff).

In the Aristotelian tradition, the study of rhetoric was looked at in the context of public speaking, where its practitioners can draw on a number of rhetorical devices that enhance the appeal of their message. These include the use of figurative language, such as metaphors and similes, and the manipulation of rhythm by various means, such as the use of repetition. These features are readily acknowledged as rhetorical devices to this day.

Key areas of investigation and relevant linguistic frameworks

The formal characteristics of effective rhetoric that Aristotle identified (2004 [350 BCE] Book III) have much in common with the properties of language which Roman Jakobson and the

Russian Formalists in the twentieth century saw as being characteristic of literary texts. Jakobson (1960: 356) sees language as having six principal functions, one of which is the poetic. This function allows language to draw attention to its own semantic, phonological and grammatical properties through the use of figures of speech, repetition and so on, features which Aristotle singled out as effective tools in the art of persuasion. In current linguistic approaches, interest in the rhetorical features in communication is most prominent in stylistics, an approach which has grown significantly in recent years and one which can trace its lineage directly back to the formalist school of literary criticism. Below is a very brief extract from one such example of stylistic analysis by David Crystal as he reflects on Barack Obama's victory speech when he first became American president in 2008:

The rhetorical 'rule of three' is an important feature of the speech. It's something that all famous speech-makers use. Churchill was brilliant at it. But all public speakers know that they can get a round of applause if they use a triptych with structural parallelism:

*I was with you yesterday
I am with you today
And I shall be with you tomorrow!*

(Crystal 2008)

Crystal then goes on to look at how the following paired lines contrast with the triptych to provide variety and pace. Indeed, the linguistic features of the text itself are at the centre of his analysis, something which is typical of the stylistics approach in general. Although the discipline has broadened its focus in recent years to encompass an interest in contextual factors, the text remains its key concern. Nevertheless, it needs to be remembered that even within the formalist frameworks of analysis there are concepts such as foregrounding (Mukarovsky 1970 [1932]) and defamiliarisation (Shklovsky 1998 [1917]) which relate to how people react to texts and thus recognise, at least to a degree, the importance of the receiver in the persuasive process.

Another major approach to persuasion which retains the text as its main analytical focus is genre analysis. This sees the recognisable features of particular genres as being shaped by the communicative purposes to which they are put. Bakhtin (1981 [1935]: 289) sees genres as emerging in the repeated realisation of particular types of communication. Swales (1990) posits that genres are typified by certain types of 'move'. Moves can be defined as 'rhetorical instruments that realise a subset of specific communicative purposes associated with a genre' (Bhatia 2001: 84) and, as this definition implies, they are central in the process of persuasion. So, for example, Cheung (2008), in an analysis of emailed sales literature, identified various moves such as 'establishing credentials', each with their own subset of possible 'steps' (Cheung 2008: 168). This illustrates how the text is shaped, in part, by an anticipation of an audience's needs. This idea is integral to Mikhail Bakhtin's theorising of language, where he sees it as being infused with previous intentions and anticipating responses to come (1981 [1935]: 276–277). His contention that language is fundamentally dialogical and heteroglossic is helpful in explaining the interactive nature of persuasion and how it can be shaped to accommodate the needs of both sender and receiver. However, despite its recognition of the receiver, genre analysis retains a primarily textual focus, maybe in part because it tends to focus on written communication.

For persuasion to succeed, it has to have, in Austin's (1962: 101) terms, a 'perlocutionary effect'. In other words, it has to influence the listener's outlook or behaviour and thus, an

analysis of its impact actually lies beyond the persuader's own language. Indeed, it has been argued by some that herein lies the difference between rhetoric and persuasion: 'Rhetoric refers to the act of communicating the hearer's perspective while persuasion refers both to speaker intentions and to successful outcomes' (Charteris-Black 2005: 8–9). As such, successful persuasion is more immediately identifiable in face-to-face interaction than written communication, as the reaction of the targeted audience is usually evident. However, when an analysis of persuasion moves into the area of spontaneous spoken interaction, everything becomes more complicated. There can, of course, be a tension between the desires and needs of the sender of a persuasive message and its recipient, and the moves in spoken interactions are often less premeditated and less predictable than in the written mode, emerging in the process itself.

The potential tension between the needs of the interlocutors in the persuasive process foregrounds the importance of protecting face, the immediacy of which is evident in spoken interactions. Goffman's (1990 [1959]) notion of face, a preferred self-image which speakers present to the world and which, ordinarily, they and their interlocutors seek to safeguard, is one which can be threatened in persuasion. In Brown and Levinson's (1987: 62) seminal politeness framework, persuasion can be seen as a threat to someone's 'negative face', the need that his or her 'actions be unimpeded by others'. Given the face threat that persuasion entails, some speakers may choose to be indirect, allowing their interlocutors to infer meanings that lie beneath the semantic surface. These off-record utterances have the advantage of being deniable. The philosopher Grice (1975) coined the term 'implicatures' to describe the ways in which inferences can be triggered when what he sees as the default cooperative maxims of conversation are flouted, as, for instance, when there is an inherent face threat in a communicative act.

The lasting legacy of the ideas of Goffman, Brown, Levinson and Grice can be witnessed in the analyses of influential contemporary figures in the area of persuasion, such as Culpeper and Haugh (2014). For instance, when exploring the to-ing and fro-ing of an interaction between a counsellor and pregnant client where the former is attempting to persuade the latter to stop smoking, the authors refer to Brown and Levinson's notions of off-record utterances and negative politeness while also drawing on Grice's concepts of implicature and the flouting of the maxims of Relation and Quantity (Culpeper and Haugh 2014: 212–214). However, the limitations of these influential frameworks have also been much discussed and both politeness theory and the cooperative principle have been criticised for underplaying the importance of cultural variation and the open-ended and contingent nature of communication. Indeed, Culpeper and Haugh themselves question politeness theory on these grounds (2014: 202–212). It also needs to be remembered that an important dimension to politeness and, by extension, persuasion, is the crucial role that paralinguistic features such as tone of voice play in the process. The cultural dimension to communication and its multimodal nature are returned to later in this chapter.

Persuasion as storytelling

An aspect of our everyday communications which can be an effective vehicle for persuading others to our view of the world and of ourselves, and one which is often collaborative in nature, is storytelling. The idea of the narrative has come to be seen as important, not only in academia, but also in everyday discourse, especially in relation to persuasive texts such as adverts and political speeches. The typical ways in which we narrate our experiences are structured in persuasive ways. It has been noted, for example, that Labov's influential model of the component parts of everyday narrative structure (Labov and Waletzky 1997) has clear

parallels with the classical Roman rhetoricians' recommended sequencing for persuasive texts (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005: 137).

Recalling Crystal's analysis, mentioned earlier in this chapter, of part of a speech at the beginning of Obama's presidential career, an examination of one at the end of it illustrates the close parallels between classical rhetorical structures and the narrative structures associated with Labov's framework. These extracts are from the President's last State of the Union address in 2016. Although only a small part of the speech is presented here, the extracts provide an insight into its overall structure. The brief analysis which follows looks at each of the sections in turn:

- a) Tonight marks the eighth year that I've come here to report on the State of the Union. And for this final one, I'm going to try to make it a little shorter. (Applause.) I know some of you are antsy to get back to Iowa. (Laughter.) I've been there. I'll be shaking hands afterwards if you want some tips. (Laughter.) And I understand that because it's an election season, expectations for what we will achieve this year are low. (...)
- b) We live in a time of extraordinary change – change that's reshaping the way we live, the way we work, our planet, our place in the world. (...) America has been through big changes before – wars and depression, the influx of new immigrants, workers fighting for a fair deal, movements to expand civil rights. Each time, there have been those who told us to fear the future; who claimed we could slam the brakes on change; who promised to restore past glory if we just got some group or idea that was threatening America under control.
- c) And each time, we overcame those fears. We did not, in the words of Lincoln, adhere to the 'dogmas of the quiet past.' Instead we thought anew, and acted anew. We made change work for us, always extending America's promise outward, to the next frontier, to more people.
- d) And because we did – because we saw opportunity where others saw only peril – we emerged stronger and better than before.
- e) What was true then can be true now.

Section a), the introduction is, in classical rhetoric, where rapport with the audience needs to be established, one dictated by the structuring principle of *ethos*. Obama clearly does this through his use of humour and by his deliberately relating his own experience to that of his audience ('I've been there'). This is reinforced by his informal 'antsy', an American English word for impatient. In terms of Labov's narrative structure, the story hasn't really started at this point, although it could be argued that it forms part of what is classified as 'orientation' – some background to the story he's about to tell. He frames the speech in terms of it being his final hurrah and nobody expects his administration to achieve much in the coming year.

Section b) could be classified in rhetorical terms as a combination of the 'statement of facts' and 'the point at issue' (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005: 136). Of course, how facts are presented has a big effect on how they are perceived and there is a clear setting up here of an oppositional narrative ('there have been those who told us to fear the future'). In Labov's terms, this recounting of what had happened is part of the story's orientation.

Section c) is a combination, in classical rhetorical terms, of the 'proof of the case' and the 'refutation of the opponent's case' where 'we' overcame the fears that others had expressed. In Labov's terms, this is the 'complicating action' – the things that happened without which there would be no story. Note how Section c) comes as no surprise, as the expectation of such an outcome has already been seeded in the preceding section.

Section d) is, in rhetorical terms, part of the conclusion which the previous discussion leads to. Labov would classify it as the ‘evaluation’ of the story; that is, the lesson to be learnt from it. However, although positing evaluation as a possible stage of a narrative, Labov recognises that speakers’ explicit and implicit evaluations pervade the stories they tell through such means as lexical choices (Labov 1972: 370–375).

Section e) is again part of the conclusion. Labov, however, defines it as a separate stage of the narrative – its ‘coda’, where the narrator relates what has been said to the here and now.

Although each stage of both classical rhetoric and Labovian narrative is somewhat fuzzy in its boundaries and may not even be present in a particular persuasive or narrative text, the brief analysis above shows the parallels between the two and how narrative is often used for persuasive ends. This is hardly surprising as stories are imbued with particular viewpoints and the very objective of persuasive texts is to seek to influence viewpoint.

The Cognitive Turn

The persuasive power of the narrative form is evident at the individual cognitive level, and work in this area focuses much of its attention on the receiver of the persuasive text. The importance of storytelling to cognition has been increasingly recognised in various disciplines, especially since the twentieth-century philosopher Walter Fisher reacted against the notion of a rational or scientific approach to knowledge. He maintained in his Narrative Paradigm theory that all meaningful communication is a form of storytelling where we understand the world through the stories we tell about it (Fisher 1984). For example, the concept of schemata (patterns of expectation shaped by our experiences), first mooted in psychology by Bartlett (1932), indicates that we bring a generic mini-narrative, a script of what-happens-when, to the situations we meet in our everyday lives. Memory is not merely receptive but constructive in nature and we make sense of the world by generalising from the specific. Thus, we relate new experiences to expectations based on what has gone before. These expectations can be exploited by the skilful persuader: ‘Messages become persuasive when they evoke things that are already known or at least familiar’ (Charteris-Black 2005: 10). This relates to the similarity model of argument (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005: 91), where the speaker or writer evokes similarities between one situation and another in order to convert an audience to their view. In Obama’s State of the Nation address featured above, the story of people being presented with obstacles and then overcoming them against the odds is a universally recognised one which traverses cultures. The similarity model of argument links to another important area of cognition that the persuader can exploit to his or her own ends: the use of metaphor.

As previously mentioned, metaphor is something identified by Aristotle as one of the tools at the disposal of the rhetorician. It allows the speaker to liken an idea or concept to another, possibly more familiar one and, through forging a novel resemblance, deepen the audience’s understanding of the former. However, Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) notion of cognitive metaphor conceptualises metaphor not so much as a figure of speech but as a figure of thought, something central to our understanding of the world. They claim that we make sense of abstract concepts through relating them to the physical world around us. This is important in persuasion because metaphor, it is argued, can subconsciously frame and constrain the ways in which an audience perceives an issue. Lakoff (2004: 3–34) himself noted how, for example, the concept of the nation can be understood using one of two related but competing metaphors: the stern father or the nurturing parent. Through the parent/nation metaphor, the abstract and imagined community of the nation is made accessible by relating it to our everyday experiences of the

family. However, these two frames carry within them two very different ideological viewpoints. The stern father model values discipline, hard work and self-reliance while the nurturing parent model prizes cooperation and protection (see Lakoff 2016 for an application of this framework to the American presidential campaign of that year). Needless to say, these metaphorical understandings of the nation envisage very different roles for the state in people's lives. Thus, the use of metaphor to frame a description or discussion in a particular way can be seen as a powerful weapon in the persuader's arsenal. Other features of language that appear in persuasive discourse such as hyperbole and irony, which are traditionally regarded as rhetorical tropes, can usefully be looked at through the cognitive lens (e.g. Burgers et al. 2016).

Insights from social psychology can throw light on the conscious and subconscious cognitive processes at play in persuasion. Following an influential paper by Tversky and Kahneman (1974), a dual process theory of reasoning has held sway in the field of psychology. This posits that human beings have two distinctive systems which they use to make sense of the world: one which is largely subconscious, automatic and determined by biases and past experiences, and another which is conscious, effortful and employs logical reasoning. We might like to think that we usually use the latter but, in practice, it is the former which we more frequently rely on – in part because we don't have the cognitive stamina to do otherwise. Various theoretical models based around the dual process theory have been hypothesised (e.g. Sloman 1996; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). These models, though often quite different in detail, retain a notion of the two systems at work, one conscious and the other predominantly subconscious.

An appreciation of the importance of the subconscious system of cognition provides an insight into the effectiveness of particular textual features in an audience's reception of a message. For example, McGlone and Tofiqbaksh (2000) found that messages which rhyme have a greater chance of being believed than those that don't. Repetition, often employed in persuasive texts from political speeches to adverts, has been shown to be an important means of ensuring a message is not only remembered but believed in what is known as the 'illusion-as-truth' effect (Kahneman 2011: 59ff). The very name of this phenomenon communicates an underlying uneasiness, a wariness of the power of persuasion to exploit which goes back to the birth of the study of persuasive language as a discipline in Ancient Greece.

Persuasion: skill or spell?

The boundary between persuasion and manipulation is a fuzzy one and the former has been viewed by some as a dark art. Even before Aristotle, Plato was wary of rhetoric, regarding it as a form of flattery that could sway the ignorant (Plato 1961 [fourth century BCE]). This suspicion of the art of persuasion lingers to this day. Words that frequently collocate with 'rhetoric' such as 'empty' or 'mere' point to an attitude where the features of persuasive language are regarded as indicative of show rather than substance. In Plato's day, this distrust of the persuasive speaker was directed towards the likes of the sophists – teachers of the arts of philosophy and rhetoric. Nowadays, such scepticism is more likely to be generated by the words of politicians, spin doctors, advertisers and, today's propagandists, the PR industry. Invariably, the accusation, to put it in Aristotelian terms, is that too much emphasis is placed on *ethos*, an appeal to the speaker's good name, as can be found in celebrity endorsements and the cultivation of corporate identities, and *pathos*, an appeal to the emotions, while not enough is put on *logos*, our logic and reasoning.

An approach in linguistics which reflects this general wariness about the tools of persuasion is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It sees its job as one of uncovering the ideological

workings of language which exercise power through ‘consent’, a power which it regards as perpetuating the status quo and, thus, social inequalities. It is an approach which seeks to reveal how a text can work on people’s perceptions through its ideology, that is, the embedded assumptions about hierarchy and power that lie within it (Fairclough 2001: 2). One of CDA’s aims is to bring this process of manipulation (be it intentional or not) to consciousness.

CDA draws on a number of methodologies in its analysis. At the textual level, it tends to favour a functional approach, examining, for example, how particular elements within a text are assigned grammatical roles which present ‘reality’ in a particular way. Beyond the text itself, it looks at the ways in which texts are produced and consumed and how they perpetuate existing societal structures. Ideologically driven, it tends to concentrate on institutional, commercial and political discourses.

CDA has attracted criticism from various quarters. It has been accused, for example, of finding only what it wants to find, of lacking secure theoretical underpinnings and having a tendency to overlook important contextual factors such as the intersubjectivity at the heart of people’s interactions (Jones 2007; Widdowson 2004). Nevertheless, some of its main practitioners retain a powerful influence in the applied linguistics field (e.g. Fairclough 2001; Van Dijk 2008; Wodak 2015). Furthermore, it has been argued that the accusation of bias levelled at it can be countered, at least to a degree, by the application of corpus software which provides a systemised means of revealing the ways in which readers can, over time, be ideologically positioned by texts such as newspaper articles (Coffin and O’Halloran 2010).

A new environment: implications for the researcher into persuasive language

The previous mention of corpus software reminds us that the study of persuasive language does not stand still but is inevitably influenced by technological and social changes that feed into and shape each other. One of the most significant developments of recent times in the media landscape has been the advent of the internet, and particularly social media, which has provided the first opportunity for ordinary citizens to broadcast to the many and receive responses in return without having to do so through channels controlled by others. This shift in the balance of receptive and productive activity in the new media has profound implications for the study of persuasion both in terms of the social effects of the widespread use of digital technologies and in terms of the aspects of persuasion which this new environment brings to the fore for analysis.

The fact that anyone can tweet or retweet a message or can post a video to YouTube is blurring the line in the political arena between the politician, the activist and the electorate, and, in the commercial sphere, between the advertiser and the consumer. As a result, the relationship between the persuader and their audience is becoming more complex and the former is having to adapt accordingly. In the commercial world, the ease with which a consumer can avoid advertising in the new media environment means that the producer/advertiser must find new ways to reach and engage their target audience. One strategy for doing this is to endeavour to build a long-term relationship with the consumer. This can be done through the consumer encountering a brand or product across multiple platforms and media. This enables the construction of a brand story, with the essential element of *pathos* that this can bring to selling a product: ‘The emotions are a serious opportunity to get in touch with consumers. And best of all, emotion is an unlimited resource’ (Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, quoted in Jenkins 2006: 70). In this regard, the affordances of the digital environment mean that advertisers are able not just to create sales texts but to build an architecture of hyperlinks around

the text, bringing together multimedia and multimodal experiences for the consumer that can appeal to the senses and trigger a direct emotional response. Furthermore, they can encourage or incentivise potential consumers to send links to their own networks of friends and family (Cheung 2008: 162).

In the political field, the ability of citizens to tweet about events as they unfold allows the real-time dissemination of news and is as often a means of speaking to the outside world as it is to a domestic audience (Murthy 2013: 104). In this regard, the use of English on banners and posters during street protests in predominantly non-English speaking countries reveals an awareness among the politically active of the importance of influencing global opinion and the role that English, as the world's main lingua franca, inevitably plays in that process (e.g. Aboelegg 2016).

The mixing of English and local languages on protest banners is indicative of the way an interconnected world has facilitated the meeting and fusing of the global and the local. This process of 'glocalisation' can be seen in the ways that the prevailing political discourse, heavy with the ideological terminology of 'knowledge economies' and 'flexibility', is adapted or resisted at national and local levels (Wodak 2005). Glocalisation is evident in the commercial arena where multinational companies attempt to retain the power of their global brands and products, yet adapt their advertising and marketing to suit local cultural conditions (e.g. Kobayashi 2012). Commercial enterprises are, like street protestors, well aware of English's global reach. And this global reach gives it a symbolic significance as the language of modernity (e.g. Hasanova 2010); its use, as much as its semantic content, can have the power to persuade. Therefore, in a globalised context, it comes to function emblematically as much as it does linguistically (Blommaert 2010: 30–43). As a result, a common feature of adverts, packaging and labels is to mix English with local language(s) in order to trigger positive associations (e.g. Luna and Peracchio 2005).

The very media that allow commercial and political vested interests to promote their messages also allow an opposing discourse. The digital revolution has allowed people to reproduce, repurpose and recontextualise texts with ease, opening up officially vetted materials to parody and ridicule. As a result, 'memes' that take content and subvert it in some way are a common feature of online political discourse. They encourage resistance to established authority and are part of a transgressive discourse. To take just one example, a poster that came out in 2014 in response to the then Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's attempt to ban Twitter (Taylor 2014) featured a picture of Erdoğan with the words 'Yes, we ban'. This was an intertextual reference to Obama's original electoral slogan 'Yes, we can', contrasting the small-minded dictatorial action by the Turkish Prime Minister with the high-minded idealism that the latter phrase encapsulated.

The preceding discussion reinforces the idea that language is dialogical and heteroglossic. The digital environment brings into relief the multi-layered, multi-voiced, complex and contingent nature of communication, one which researchers into persuasive language need to accommodate through the approaches that they use, such as linguistic ethnography which endeavours to provide a detailed account of local interactions within their broader social contexts (Blackledge 2012) and a CDA approach based on 'ethical subjectivity' which attempts to uncover the voices of the powerless through using a corpus tool (O'Halloran 2014). The internet also highlights the issue of how persuasive language manifests itself in different cultural soils and, indeed, what happens when different rhetorical styles encounter each other.

Contrastive Rhetoric has been one response to the need to move away from an exclusively Anglo-Saxon notion of rhetorical norms in order to explore how persuasive texts are realised

in different cultures. However, the contrastive approach is seen by some as risking an essentialist and reductive view of culture which privileges the national dimension and ignores the fact that cultures are multi-faceted, fluid and complex entities (Conor et al. 2016). The new globalised, interconnected world which many people now inhabit brings to the fore the fact that individuals are not just members of one culture but inhabit different social, professional and familial cultures. Indeed, some would argue that culture is best studied and understood by focusing on the individual rather than the group (e.g. Atkinson and Sohn 2013), thereby highlighting the contextually-dependent nature of rhetorical norms.

One aspect of the digital age which is pertinent to current and future analyses of persuasive texts is the increasingly multimodal nature of such texts. Of course, ever since persuasion was first deemed worthy of study, the importance of elements beyond language itself has been recognised. Classical rhetoric acknowledged the crucial effect that a speaker's delivery has on the persuasiveness (or otherwise) of the words uttered. The role of images that accompany words in advertising has been central to the genre since its inception. Yet, although multimodality is not new in itself, new technologies have facilitated the growth of multimodal, multimedia texts. One of the challenges for the researcher, even one focused primarily on the language of persuasion, is how to accommodate and talk about other semiotic resources such as image, colour and layout (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) and how these interact with language to produce meaning. There is not the space to discuss multimodality in detail here. However, it is worth noting that, as with other current approaches, its focus is on situated action, on the fact that communication in different modes has been shaped by its socio-cultural functions in those modes, and on the interaction of modes as part of the meaning-making process (Jewitt 2015: 69–70). Because of the complexity of factors at play in multimodal analysis, it often involves sampling videoed interactions and the use of analytical software (e.g. O'Halloran et al. 2013).

Finally, technological developments mean that the researcher has increasingly sophisticated tools at their disposal. The well-established use of corpus software has already been mentioned and is now core to much linguistic study. There are other technologies which have recently been developed that can be of aid to the researcher. Indeed, the commercial field has been quick to pick up on eye-tracking devices, MRI scans and electroencephalography (EEG), all of which have now become part of the marketing researcher's toolbox, allowing a glimpse into what is going on in our heads as we think and react to what we see and hear around us. These developments have intensified the age-old fears of the persuasive dark arts that Plato warned against (Garvey 2016). However, although eye-tracking devices have quickly been adopted in the research into how readers comprehend texts in educational settings (e.g. Was et al. 2016), this technology is yet to be exploited by scholars in understanding how texts can be used to sway an audience's viewpoint. It seems reasonable to assume that such exploitation is only a matter of time.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that we are living through interesting times for the analysis of persuasive language. Primarily due to technological advances in communication that have grown exponentially in recent years, there is the potential for individuals with limited resources to access audiences, however remote they might be culturally and geographically, and seek to influence them. They will often do so in English, which, given its current status as the world's lingua franca, looks set to retain an important role in such persuasion for some time to come. Persuaders can now reach their audiences across a range of platforms, using a range of media

and adapting existing materials for their own ends. Research into persuasion needs to be able to encompass this multimodal, multi-voiced and often multilingual environment. At the same time, new tools are emerging which can be used to measure the effectiveness of persuasive texts. These tools can be used in the refashioning of such texts for commercial or political ends, but also have potential to facilitate academic research into them. However, despite the undoubted impact of the digital age on this and many other fields of communication, new debates are, in many ways, previous debates in modern guise. One of these is to do with the degree to which persuasive language can be trusted. Yet persuasion is essential to healthy private and public debate. The effective persuader must be able to appreciate how their audience views the world, and needs to understand the possible objections and arguments that can be raised to counter their own messages. In short, an effective persuader needs to appreciate both logical argument and empathy. As Aristotle himself asserted, the key to effective yet socially responsible persuasion is a balance between *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. As citizens, we need to be vigilant when it comes to detecting imbalances in the persuasive messages that surround us. Linguistic knowledge and analysis are key to this vital process.

Further reading

- Charteris-Black, J. (2005) *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. This book focuses specifically on political discourse and demonstrates how a cognitive framework can throw light on the mechanisms at work in persuasion in the public arena.
- Cockcroft, R. and S. Cockcroft (2005) *Persuading People: An Introduction to Rhetoric*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. A useful introduction to the skills of rhetoric and how established linguistic frameworks and approaches can inform an analysis of the tools of effective persuasion.
- Hann, D. and T. Lillis (eds) (2016) *The Politics of Language and Creativity in a Globalised World*. Milton Keynes: The Open University. The chapters in this collection focus on creativity and the shift from reception to production in the digital age. It looks at creative language as a resource for political activity as well as the politics surrounding the production, ownership and evaluation of creative output.
- Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press. Using a series of mostly American case studies, Jenkins explores the effect of 'convergence culture' on areas such as politics, advertising and education. While acknowledging the potential pitfalls of the digital age, he sees it primarily as empowering and democratising.

Related topics

- Metaphor studies and English
- The politics of English
- The language of social media
- Discourse analysis: studying and critiquing language in use.

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