

## **INFLUENCE VIA THE RECOURSE TO ALLITERATION**

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*Abstract: Although when some individuals hear of rhetorical devices and figures of speech, they immediately think of literature and poetry and seemingly never-ending classes in school, all forms of communication make use of them, whether political discourse or advertising or everyday ordinary speech is concerned. Discourses meant to influence make use of such devices as they exhibit a different degree of expressivity as opposed to some speech devoid of any rhetorical figures. Such recourses to figures of speech reveal aspects of the personality and orientation of the message sender who is confident that the receiver has the ability to correctly decode the message. It is therefore worth a look into the use of one such device, namely alliteration, across several domains and cultures.*

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The use of any language entails denotation, but also connotation, i.e. those word meanings which are culturally, socially or conjecturally determined and which bear upon the correct decoding of any message and, at the same time, diversify the role of the receiver. As far as communicative pragmatism is concerned, for the accurate decoding of a message, it is necessary that the principle of conversational cooperation and the conversational maxims be observed, with reference to quality, quantity, relevance, and manner of expression. Of the linguistic disciplines, pragmatics deals with the study of the relationship between signs and their users, between signs and context, and highlights the fact the use of language exceeds a simple exchange of information.

Charles Pierce (1990) identifies in the sign a triadic relationship which binds together the sign itself, the designated object and the interpretant, i.e. the mental representation of the object, and draws attention to the fact that the use of language entails the creation and circulation of significations. Although any word has at least one standard dictionary meaning, the so-called denotation, in speaking, a certain distancing from that particular meaning occurs, and the word can be enriched with other meanings resulting in its connotations. This distancing from the primary meaning generates each person's individual style of using language and, as Mihai Dinu notices, people come to understand the meaning of 'love' differently at the various stages of their lives, as a child, a teenager, an adult, a parent etc. because as time passes, the experiences undergone, whether real or symbolic, in connection to this complex concept, enrich it and, notably, the chances of meeting someone else for whom the word would mean exactly the same are practically null (1997: 45).

At the same time, the relationship between the sender of the message and the receiver is understood as a process of mutual determination in which both extremes are active, engaged in a communicative interaction, which means that the receiver, as well, is perceived as a constitutive part of the utterance. Mikhail Bakhtin (1982) underscores the communicative nature of any discourse, which is inherently dialogically oriented, expecting a future discourse in response, provoking, anticipating and even welcoming it (134-5). Consequently, the elaboration of any message is closely determined by its reception and comprehension and the process of meaning production in which the sender engages is doubled by a process of meaning re-creation from the part of the receiver. The ideal discursive situation is the one in which the created meanings coincide

with the recreated ones, but for this to happen it is necessary that a common endeavor take place, based on the conversational cooperation principle. As Paul H. Grice (1975) explained, this principle entails the contributions of each participant to the conversation, according to the expectations of the participants who acknowledge the purpose and the direction of the conversation. The four conversational maxims provide for the following: the information exchanged by the interlocutors must be true, without falsehood or content which cannot be proven as truthful; it must be provided in sufficient quantity for correct decoding to take place and, at the same time, without excess; it must be correlated with the topic discussed; and the manner of passing the information must aim for clarity and logical structuring of the statements.

The sender of the message creates meaning by using language in an individual manner which s/he adapts to the receiver and the context of communication, and thus engenders the personal style. From a linguistic point of view, this entails the level of connotation and constitutes the expression of the personality of the sender and her/his orientation towards the receiver. As Cristian Radu assesses, figures of speech and rhetorical devices constitute ‘a gesture of exhibition of our own subjectivity (sincerity) and at the same time an implicit appreciation of the receiver’ (2011: 61) demonstrating faith in her/his abilities to correctly decode the message. These rhetorical devices can easily be found both in political discourse and in advertising as they are extensively used perhaps because they have a different degree of expressivity or persuasion than common speech. In fact, the language of science approaches the most that text devoid of literary tropes which Roland Barthes proposed as writing degree zero, while all other types of texts cannot but make use of them. What follows is a series of examples of a specific type of trope, namely alliteration, examples collected from advertising and politics, mass media discourse and ordinary speech.

Alliteration has broadened its understanding from the original recurrence of an initial consonant sound, i.e. a type of consonance, so that today it denominates also the repetition of a vowel, overlapping with assonance, or even a sequence of letters (Lanham: 1991, 7). When used, alliteration aurally captivates the audience and draws attention to the particular section of the discourse where it is used. It generates rhythm and sets a certain mood, engendering feelings or conveying connotations, as suggested for ‘s’ which in certain contexts might trigger the idea of deceit or jeopardy (<http://udleditions.cast.org>).

Alliteration has been used since ancient times as pointed out in some studies on Sanskrit poetry (Kenneth Langer, 1978) or as an incursion into northern European onomastics would show, for example the royal string of Æthelwulf, Æthelbald, Æthelbert, Æthelred, Æthelstan, Æthelflæd etc. in Wessex (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wessex>). This tradition is more recently recognizable in the popular series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin where names repeatedly come up in the family tree, with or without slight variations, as is the case of the Lannisters: Tarbeck, Tytos, Tygett, Tyreack, Tywald, Tyland, Tybolt, Tywin, Tyrion, just to quickly look at the male side of only one of the families which play an important role in Westeros (Martin et al., 2014).

In fact, the names of many characters from the world of fiction, regardless of the medium used – cartoons, graphic novels, movies etc. – exhibit the recourse to this device: teenager Peter Parker, alias Spiderman; scientist Bruce Banner, also known as the Hulk; news reporter Clark Kent, whose secret identity is Superman, and Lois Lane, the award-winning journalist from *Daily Planet* and Superman’s main romantic interest; the mighty King Kong; the mischievous Bugs Bunny and the fast Road Runner from the Warner Bros., or Disney’s famous characters Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, just to name a few. Also, many TV shows use alliteration: ‘Big Brother’, ‘Biz Bazar’, ‘Cronica Cârcotașilor’, ‘Kiki Riki Miki’, ‘Pro Patria’, ‘Breaking Bad’, ‘Mad Men’, ‘WestWorld’, ‘The West Wing’ and the list could go on.

In brand naming and advertising, alliteration plays an important role as it generates noteworthiness and makes for easier recalling of the brand. Agencies specialized in naming and strategic branding, such as *NameLab*, help companies and individuals choose the most suitable name for the campaigns or products aimed at electors or consumers, and some of these contain alliterations: ‘Tom Tailor’, ‘Voi cu Voicu’ (a Romanian TV show, here combined with punning), ‘Gilmore Girls’, ‘Tic-Tac’, ‘PayPal’, ‘Méli-Mélo’, ‘Fast Fit Studio’, ‘Bon Bijoux’, ‘Happy Hour’, ‘Bed, Bath & Beyond’, ‘Coca-Cola’, ‘Range Rover’, ‘Weight Watchers’, ‘V for Vendetta’.

Alliteration appears also in slogans ‘Himalaya herbal healthcare’ (Himalaya co.), ‘ZU is you’ (Radio ZU), ‘veni, vidi, visa’ (Visa cards, here combined with punning), ‘Danone, discover the difference’ (Danone co.), ‘Grace, space, pace’ (Jaguar), ‘Cașcavalul Hochland: lăptos, cremos, gustos’ (Hochland), ‘I like Ike’ (Dwight Eisenhower), ‘A tested and trustworthy team’ (Jimmy Carter), ‘A voice for the Voiceless’ (Pat Buchanan), ‘Prosperity and Progress’ (Al Gore), ‘Compassionate conservatism’ (G.W. Bush), ‘The whole world is watching’ (protesters against war), ‘Ma Mati Manush’ (Mamata Banerjee in Bengal, 2009); ‘Le Québec aux Québécois’ (the separatist chant of the Quebeckers in the 1970s). The rising popularity which Donald Trump registered during his campaign for the US presidency was encapsulated in the mantra ‘Can’t stump the Trump’ and the catchiness of ‘Power to the People’ is evident in the many campaigns it has been used, either in politics to protest against the ruling class, against the military campaign in Vietnam; in music by artists such as John Lennon, James Brown or bands such as *Rootz Underground* or *Big Mountain*; or in advertising as in the case of *Progressive Auto Insurance*.

The various mass media as well resort to alliteration: the official website for the 2017 edition of the Australian Open headlines its stories as follows: ‘Murry in a hurry’, with reference to the swift victory of the British tennis player; ‘Eight straight for Stan’, in reporting the Swiss’ string of victories. Similarly, the site of the Woman’s Tennis Association reads: ‘Muguruza digs deep to dodge Vekić upset in Madrid’ or ‘Suárez Navarro doesn’t stay down against Svitolina’ to highlight the comebacks of the home favorites or ‘Stephens storms past Stosur’ which takes advantage of the players’ names as well as the swiftness of that particular victory. A story on writer Amanda McKittrick Ros is headlined ‘Awful author addicted to alliteration achieves acclaim again’ (*The Telegraph*); the news on the results of the US presidential elections reads ‘Trump triumphs’ (*New York Times*); the engagement of the Britain’s Prince William is announced as ‘Prince picks Kate as mate’ (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*); and the measures taken by Canadian law enforcers are presented as ‘Police get proactive on protecting PINs’ (*New Westminster Record*). In addition to catchy headlines, mass media make use of verbal clichés which include phrases such as ‘super storm’, ‘wild weather’, ‘traffic trauma’, ‘trailer trouble’, ‘tantrum tactics’.

The documents leaked in 2015 from the Panamanian law firm and corporate service provider Mossack Fonseca have come to be known as the ‘Panama Papers’ and subsequently ‘Paradise Papers’ as they revealed financial details of corporations or individuals, politicians, public figures, celebrities, who tried to evade taxes or international sanctions. ‘Baby boom’ has a different ring to it than ‘sudden increase of birth rate’ although they both describe the same phenomenon, just as the ‘WorldWideWeb’ software improves on ‘web browser and editor’, a potential name for the first computer app meant to design websites and search for information, even though it later had to be changed so that this software would not be mistaken for the world wide web, the information space.

Many common phrases contain alliteration: ‘fit as a fiddle’, ‘down in the dumps’, ‘to turn the table’, ‘avoir du vent dans les voiles’, ‘pas de fumée sans feu’, ‘payer les pots casés’, ‘bello e buono’, ‘tosto o tardi’, ‘senza capo né coda’, ‘nitam-nisam’. Tongue twisters are a particular case of

alliteration whose difficulty in fast pronunciation ushers in humor: ‘A skunk sat on a stump and said the stump stunk, but the stump said the skunk stunk’, ‘Bucurã-te cum s-a bucurat Bucuroaia de bucuria lui Bucurel care s-a întors bucuros de la București’, ‘Pauvre petit pêcheur, prend patience pour pouvoir prendre plusieurs petits poissons’, ‘Il cuoco cuoce in cucina e dice che la cuoca giace e tace perchè sua cugina non dica che le piace cuocere in cucina col cuoco’.

In political discourse, alliteration figures prominently as the following examples aim to show. Of the last century’s US orators whose speeches inspired and persuaded large audiences, Martin Luther King, Jr. must be mentioned. The icon of the civil rights movement in the United States, reverend King delivered in 1963 the ‘I have a dream’ speech in front of 250.000 people, black and white alike, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. The speech draws on the ‘Gettysburg Address’ by President Abraham Lincoln, a hundred years earlier upon the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery, victims of the American Civil War. In addition, King’s speech is fraught with declamations and Bible and sermon rhythms in a purposeful archaic tone (Montefiore 2015: 174-5) and it also references other cornerstone documents from the US history – the “Preamble” of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

King depicts the inequalities between the races and the unfair conditions of the African-Americans, and contrasts these with his vision of racial equality in a land where one day ‘every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight’ (Gokadze 2013). The entire speech abounds in figures of speech, as can be seen from this short passage, and alliteration appears quite frequently: ‘a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the *Emancipation Proclamation*’, ‘we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check’, ‘[t]his sweltering summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent’, ‘a state sweltering with the heat of injustice’, ‘marvelous new militancy’, ‘trials and tribulations’ etc. Subsequently, his own speeches became a source of inspiration for public speakers including for the former US president Barack Obama, dubbed one of the most influential and noted statesmen of his time. Some of the alliterations which he uses in his speeches include: ‘Our celebration of initiative and enterprise; our insistence on hard work and personal responsibility, are constants in our character’, ‘the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall’, as rightly noticed in a blog posting by a Princeton University student (rhetoriciansnotebook.wordpress.com).

To sum up, figures of speech are present in our daily lives in many areas whether or not we are aware of them. This study has looked into the use of a sound figure, alliteration, and found that it occurs in various domains from politics to advertising, from news reporting to branding, from character naming to events and ideas. When communicators resort to alliteration, they aim to make their message memorable and especially brand names easy to recall. This device focusses the attention of the message receivers on the particular section where it appears, generates rhythm and engenders memorability. It is not restricted to a certain culture or language or to a certain period of time. This figure of speech is of concern to the art of rhetoric, but it is clearly also the object of common tongue and its sound-mimicking, rhythm-engendering and attention-getting features will ensure the use of alliteration in influence attempts in the future as well.

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