

IN SEARCH OF BALANCED RELATION IN COMMUNICATION. DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES THAT CREATE THE RESONANCE

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Abstract: Communication, direct or mediated by some of the new technologies (television, internet), is a form of interaction in which the presence of non-linguistic elements is explicit. Indices of enunciation exercise their function of setting the communication framework and of guiding the reasoning of the interlocutor, thus instituting a specific type of relationship. Starting from this premise, we propose to address public discourse trying to highlight how the transmitter builds the message and frames it so as to create and manage a positive relationship, one that is close to the receiver. We shall focus on the structure and expression of the discourse in order to emphasize several verbal and nonverbal strategies that the transmitter can use on purpose to create a message to resonate with his/her audience by developing and preserving the balance of the relationship. The terms of our approach of the discourse are the discourse analysis and, broadly speaking, the communication theory.

Keywords: face-to-face interaction, discourse, relationship, resonance, transmitter legitimacy

Introduction

Face-to-face interaction was the centre of interest for many studies from different areas, which revealed various angles of approaching it. Understanding and constructing communication as discourse, based on adjustment to the frame of exchanges and of organization of interactions (J. Lohisse, 2002: 170), the insertion of the social aspect of the inter-individual relationships established through language and, therefore, a whole series of rules and non-linguistic theories, confer an interdisciplinary character to this type of interaction. This acceptance allows us to consider discourse as intentional activity, as *entireness of the spoken event*.

Whatever the purpose of communication - informative or persuasive - the transmitter is in a position to create and send a message being fully legitimized to do so. As long as there is an audience, supposedly, the sender/transmitter has the knowledge, skills, vocation, experience etc. to perform this activity. Anyone who poses speaker transmits, implicitly, along with the content of the message, the idea that they are entitled to be there and to speak and have the legitimacy to give expression to their feelings and thoughts.

Theoretical framework

In terms of discourse dichotomy *upstream linguistic legitimacy* and *downstream linguistic legitimacy*, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that the communication upstream creates the circumstances that give the possibility of sending a discourse (apud Pascale Weil, 1990: 198). Bourdieu believes that the magic effectiveness of the word can only work if social conditions external to the linguistic logic of the statement are met. In other words, the power of

communication is, in fact, the power / authority / status of the person who communicates; the word itself has no strength of its own, it is the instrument for the manifestation of a force. From this perspective, the verbal activity is one of the various means available to a subject to exert power, according to their social status.

The principle of legitimacy, one of the main discursive principles of pragmatics corresponds to the communication upstream: for a statement to be accredited and trustworthy and therefore followed by effect, someone entitled to do so, an authority, should express it (L. Suci, 2005: 210-213).

In one of our previous research projects, we have shown that the principle of legitimacy works with ethos value in persuading the interlocutor (L. Suci, 2005, Chapter 5). We have shown there that the superior position of the sender/transmitter, which underlies the principle of legitimacy, leads to ideas of responsibility, seriousness, trust, authority entitled to demand obedience and therefore the sender ought to be listened to. Omnipotence, special vocation and power become arguments of the transmitter's legitimacy.

Furthermore, in a study of reference for communication sciences, *The Bases of Social Power*, J. French, and B. Reaven, consider that the position of sender/transmitter is intrinsically marked by certain emblems of the power that the transmitter can exercise in the interaction: legitimate, coercive, gratifying, referential and expert's power (J. French, B. Reaven <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f00c/7fd21a9774865ef7a3ddf871aa731c84e295.pdf>). Therefore, the position of transmitter (speaker or orator, in face-to-face interaction) produces an effect on the receiver, notably by the ethos, which reveals the authority in the field, the power, superiority, strength, even if the purpose of the communication is not a persuasive one. Thus, the interaction acquires a sense derived from social psychology, namely the desire to influence the other.

Positioning actors in interaction generates a certain kind of relationship between them. Consequently, in a communication situation where the sender/transmitter is legitimate to address and holds the position of authority that is superior in interaction, the relationship created between the participants would be, logically, a relationship marked by distance. The effect, the influence occurs primarily as a result of the manifestation of the ethos. Yet, we have seen and heard people addressing an audience, fulfilling the principle of legitimacy, even exerting the expert's power and the referential power, but without inducing a social distance. Instead, the effect was familiarity, closeness.

The analysis

To demonstrate how the speaker in this type of interaction constructs a positive relationship with her/his audience, conveyed by the message, we will analyse a talk entitled *Every kid needs a champion* and delivered by Rita Pierson¹ (https://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion?language=ro, Posted May 2013) [accessed August 2016, January 2017].

First of all, we identify the type of communication situation: talk as face-to-face interaction where the speaker transmits information that pertains to the field of education to an audience. Noteworthy is that Rita Pierson's speech is motivational – argumentative.

¹ Rita Pierson was a professional educator since 1972, taught elementary school, junior high and special education. For the past decade, Pierson conducted professional development workshops and seminars for thousands of educators. Focusing on the students who are too often under-served, she lectured on topics like "Helping Under-Resourced Learners," "Meeting the Educational Needs of African American Boys" and "Engage and Graduate your Secondary Students: Preventing Dropouts." Pierson passed away in June 2013. (https://www.ted.com/speakers/rita_f_pierson).

Discourse construction

Rita Pierson is the speaker who delivers a speech on a topic that she controls. She is the specialist, the expert who introduces the subject then develops it by announcing some key ideas that are introduced one after the other coherently and finally a conclusion is present. Rita Pierson explicitly expresses legitimacy in two aspects: the vocation for educating children (a lifetime devoted to education) and the inheritance (her parents and grandparents were dedicated to the same cause).

The argumentative organization of Rita Pierson's discourse is achieved based on the examples with the value of argument from her professional activity, even from her personal life or with quotations (*James Comer says ...; George Washington Carver says ...*). The presentation manner of most of the examples is the dialogue, Pierson rendering relevant and colourful life episodes, dialogues she had with colleagues or pupils to substantiate ideas. This method gives authenticity, veracity to the presentation.

The speaker uses verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to maintain the audience's attention and their engagement in the presentation: formulation of questions, either to mark the introduction of a new idea or to involve the audience, mimicry (eye language and smiling), gestures, poise, posture, changing intonation, rhythm of speech, accent, etc. Rita Pierson makes ample gestures with her arms and uses her hands to emphasize an idea or a word.

Pierson concludes her speech according to the topic and purpose of the presentation. She sums up by an explicit urge addressed to educators to be committed to their mission of guiding children.

The relationship

Social distance defines the type of relationship existing between the protagonists of a verbal exchange, and it emerges in relation to their status, the frequency of interpellation and the cultural gap between them, being likely to be mitigated or, conversely, increased. The communication situation under consideration is characterized by a relationship of social distance between interlocutors, as a result of their positions in interaction: The speaker – the specialist - is the one who has the information (knowledge), which she transmits to the audience, on the one hand, and the audience, on the other hand.

The speaker occupies a superior position conferred by the status and the possession of information, enjoying the legitimacy that recommends her as an authority able to express herself. The authority is mirrored in the verbal and nonverbal behaviour.

Rita Pierson's speech contains explicit references to her teacher and educator status, as well as examples from her professional life:

I told all my students...

I have had classes that were so low...

I gave a quiz, 20 questions. A student missed...

The nonverbal elements accompanying the message, i.e. gestures, highly mobile and expressive mimics, accent, changing of intonation to mimic a student in the reproduction of a dialogue, integrate into the didactic register. They are used by a dedicated teacher to make herself understood by the students. Their role is to explain and clarify the contents transmitted in the message, to make the receiver understand. The nonverbal repertoire used by Pierson, as the

one used by an actor, is consistent, expressive, with substance and is intended to supplement or enhance the transmitted information to ensure that the audience understands and retains it.

The logical consequence of the speaker's superior position at cognitive level is the establishment of a social distance in the relationship to the audience. This situation would indicate adjacently the suppression of affective vein. The authority of the transmitter, expressed verbally and nonverbally, as noted above, would generate a power relationship that disturbs the relationship balance in her/his favour. Even if the audience understands and adheres to the content transmitted by the speaker, this would happen because of the manifestation of a power relationship that would imprint an autistic character to communication. We note, however, that the audience applaud, laugh, approve, are moved, are present, feel the speech. These are signs of a connection, of an agreement between the speaker and the audience. Despite the reported discursive elements, referring to the legitimacy and authority of the orator, we advance the idea that the relationship created in the two interactions is not one of distance, from top to bottom, but one of the proximity, peer –to – peer.

We start from the following assumption: in this situation, the cognitive superiority of the speaker ought to be compensated by including an emotional component of communication in order to rebalance the relationship between interlocutors and hence the success of the communication process. The inclusion of the affective dimension should not be understood as affectivisation of the relationship, a circumstance where communication would not be adapted to the context in which it takes place, but rather as an adjustment of the circulation of affections (Ph. Meirieu, 2010: 199). We believe that, in the communication situation under discussion, marked by the social distance between the interlocutors, due to the authority of the speaker, the message ought to be built and sent based on strategies that influence the relationship directly. The creation of the message by inserting verbal and nonverbal strategies, relative to the affective dimension that should regulate the circulation of emotions can also institute the relational equilibrium that should facilitate the transmission, understanding and even adhesion to the transmitted content.

We could spot three factors based on which the discursive strategies are built: language, style, and humour. These factors are related to the orator, to her ability to relate to the audience in preparing the discourse and to the manner in which she transmits it.

The verbal and nonverbal languages give rise to sympathy strategies, verbal and nonverbal. First, we must note that the speaker use the standard register of language, although the subject of each presentation falls within a certain scientific and professional field. The specialized, hermetic terms, which might hinder understanding, are not used; the current language is used in short, simple and clear sentences. Domain-specific reference information and profound issues are expressed in a transparent, unsophisticated manner, which, without diminishing their consistency, makes them accessible to the audience.

A language strategy that the speaker apply to her discourse is the pronominal glide from the second person, of the address, to the first person plural, for example:

R. Pierson: *Can we stand to have... We can do this. We're educators. We're born to make a difference.*

The replacement of the second person singular or plural (you / you) with first person plural (we) indicates the association of the transmitter with the receiver, reflects the intention of the transmitter to declare that s/he belongs to the same group as the receiver, the result being the diminished distance between them. Language is underpinning the discursive strategy of creating

a common territory, which helps to suggest or indicate to the receiver a relation to the same cultural reference system. By the pronominal gliding, the orator induces the idea of belonging to the same group and thus sharing the same values, beliefs etc. The consequence is the repositioning of the orator: he is no longer the authority in the field that transmits knowledge from a superior position, but a partner that shares some knowledge and information with the audience.

If we consider the address circumstances, we expect that the style of the speaker should be a formal one. The speaker's position of legitimacy, the address directed to a large audience, whose reactions are perceptible to her/him, the development of a discourse framed in a certain field and expressed by means of a varied lexical material, in the standard register of language, avoiding popular or argotic phrases, ellipses or truncated sentences could help us reach a conclusion concerning the formal character of style. However, we note that the style of the presentation is familiar, both by the use of the current language, of the direct address and of humour. Although theirs is not a proper consultative style, which involves dialogue, and, consequently, the active participation of the interlocutor, Pierson create the impression of a discussion of professional nature. Following her presentation, the tendency is to answer questions asked by the orator, to approve her, to enter into a dialogue with her, to express one's own opinion. The style of the presentation is marked by naturalness, is unaffected, and convincing style, which sensitizes the audience; Pierson impresses, appeals to the audience's emotions.

Alongside these elements related to the verbal aspect, a particular function in the manifestation of the style in the presentation discussed belongs to the sight. According to specialists, the eyes weave a kind of invisible thread between the individual who speaks and the listener (R. Charles, C. Williams, 1988).

It is important to note that by adopting the style resulted in the analysed verbal and nonverbal behaviours, the protagonist of the presentation manage to remove the cultural gap, which refers to cultural differences that can be found both in the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the actors (the way they express themselves, sit down, walk, etc.) and is susceptible of having negative ensuing consequences on their relationship. From this perspective, building up a mutual cultural background represents an essential role in the communication situation: the interlocutors need to share certain significances, a system of symbols, a social field of structures and practices, in a word, a mutual culture as reference system of the social group (Ph. Meirieu, 2010: 200). In this sense, we believe that the speaker is able to induce the receiver to the idea of belonging to the same social group. Pierson create that cultural background shared with the audience through her presentation, her discourse regarded as impartation.

The conclusion: the dominant of interaction is the relationship of proximity

The repositioning in the interaction is not to be confounded with the loss of status and legitimacy. The orator remains legitimated to speak, s/he is and continues to be the authority in the field. This time, by organizing the discourse based on communication strategies, s/he directs the perception and interpretation of the receiver, managing to engage the latter in a mainly emotional relationship.

The quality and position of sender ensures the transfer from the cognitive register, therefore the sender's authority and superiority are required. What we want to emphasize is that verbal and nonverbal behaviour strategies discussed here, without eliminating the social distance between the protagonists of the verbal exchange, contribute to creating a relationship between them that should enable them to achieve the purpose of communication. Legitimacy has the

important mission of lending credibility to the discourse, but the orator places it somewhere in the shadows, so that the footlights should be focused on the relationship, the contact from person to person, the impartation.

“*Creating common ground with an audience is like clearing a pathway from their heart to yours. By identifying and articulating shared experiences and goals, you build a path of trust so strong that they feel safe crossing to your side. You develop credibility without coming across as arrogant. Even your magnificent qualifications should be revealed in a humble and selfless way that connects with them.*” (N. Duarte, 2010: 68).

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