



Teaching Communicative Strategies to ESP Students

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Abstract

The article suggests a method of applying authentic political dialogues and other samples of political speeches for practical purposes. The dialogues are classified according to their status and referred to political discourse through the opposition of marked/unmarked types. The author bases his findings on a practical analysis of recordings of different types of dialogues, conducted by ESP students of MGIMO University (Moscow, Russia) in terms of a project work. The author pays special attention to the type of turn transitions as in a politically marked dialogue smooth/non-smooth transition of a speaker can be viewed as an example of the participants' communicative strategies. Special attention is also paid to the communicative strategies of the participants, changes in the dialogue status as well as the benefits of conducting this type of project work with students.

Keywords: *political dialogue, TV debates, communicative strategy, turn-taking, smooth/non-smooth transition;*

1. Introduction

The terms *a political dialogue* and *political discourse* have long since become a cliché in the speech of experts and journalists. They appear in the media every time there is news on a compromise or a deadlock. Although speakers of English often understand the meaning of these phrases in a general way, the exact linguistic properties of a political dialogue are still undefined.

The analysis of the content of various dialogues with ESP students of English majoring in diplomacy and international relations based on the concept of the semantic structure of the word "politics", as well as the communicative-pragmatic perspective on a dialogue can establish a broad approach in teaching and understanding political discourse.

In modern applied linguistics and political science political discourse is often understood as a set of discursive practices, identifying participants and forming a specific subject of political communication. T.A. van Dijk uses this definition of a political discourse in his work "Discourse and Context" [3]. According to this work, a political discourse can only be conducted by professional politicians. It is frequently realized in the form of governmental documents, parliamentary debates, party programmes and speeches of politicians. Restricting political discourse to a political activity, that is to a professional framework, the scientist emphasizes its status and its role in the creation of official documents and speeches.

The Russian scientist E. Sheygal, on the other hand, offers a broader approach to defining a political discourse. In her research "Semiotics of Political Discourse" [1] she considers a dialogue to be political in character, if at least one of the three components is connected with politics: the speaker, the listener, or the content of the speech. Taking this broad definition as a basis, we can conclude that a dialogue within the framework of a political discourse may generally include the following varieties: *status* and *non-status* dialogues.

The *status political dialogue* is the one in which the text is produced directly by politicians and used in political communication (parliamentary debates, answers to questions of colleagues at the public hearings, interviews of political leaders). Speech acts that are performed by politicians in circumstances alike almost always have the status of official statements and are equal in importance to the official documents. This type of communication may also include the so-called "direct phone-in lines" performed by top politicians in Russia, Vladimir Putin for instance. This is a kind of specific interaction of political leaders with rank-and-file citizens, who seldom participate in political communication of status character. We tend to attribute dialogues of such type to the status category because answers to citizens' questions are often interpreted by media as a kind of political statements [2]. These responses are subsequently quoted and often acquire a character of programme political statements. It is necessary to admit though that this is not a dialogue in its pure form, since such contacts are in fact asymmetrical.

The non-status political dialogue is the one with a very general reference to politics, such as discussions of political issues. In fact, this category includes texts of various reactions to a political stimulus. This may be a household dispute about politics, discussion of various political events, and

others. The scope of this category also includes semi-spontaneous dialogues, reenacted in the productions of political detective series, "The House of Cards" being a good example here.

2. Material and methods

ESP course books for students majoring in politics and international relations often include just texts of speeches of famous politicians and reviews of certain political phenomena, while the tasks developing skills of professional oral communication are often overlooked. To deal with this challenge it is advisable to include into the curriculum a number of projects that are to bridge this gap, the following example being just a case in point.

The purpose of a small-scale linguistic experiment that was carried out with the help of fourth-year MGIMO University students was to compare the politically marked and unmarked dialogues. The project was scheduled for December 2017 (3 weeks, 6 academic hours) as a course paper in ESP Classes.

At the first stage of the project we had a task for students to collect a number of various samples of politically marked and unmarked texts from the media materials with the total duration of 30 minutes. The aim of this stage was to promote teamwork in eliciting reliable criteria for dialogue classification as well as subjecting students to an unlimited number of recorded materials on political issues. The students were asked to find dialogues (no older than 5 years) on political issues that included (in their opinion) overt examples of strategic behavior.

Guided by the aim, the students chose to analyze a number of extracts from the US presidential political debates and UK parliamentary debates. It was considered the best option as the debates provided a range of pressing topics for discussion as well as well-considered ways of sending the message to the listeners.

The difficulty lay in the fact that students failed to find unmarked political dialogue as almost all the material for the experiment available on the Internet, radio and television perfectly fitted the framework of a political discourse. A dialogue on everyday topics, however, is rarely recorded. It never gets in the field of public attention because of its purely personal situational values. The exceptions are the quasi-spontaneous dialogues, imitating personal communication in popular TV series and talk shows. As a result, we believe that a bigger share of dialogues available in the media can be referred to a political discourse category [2].

The second stage of the linguistic experiment was the analysis of the dialogues collected. A smooth transition of speakers was recorded after 85% of turns. The smooth transition excluded interruption of a speaker or long pauses between the end of one and the beginning of another turn. Non-smooth transitions included overlaps, interruptions and simultaneous starts. All these phenomena were seen by students as strategies of communicative behaviour, when a speaker used such methods to impose his ideas on the listener.

3. Conclusions

An important conclusion made was the fact that the dialogues in which one or both parties were involved in politics, namely the dialogues of political scientists, experts in politics or social sciences as well as talks of ordinary people on political topics were the examples of political discourse. Against this background, it turned out quite difficult to find an unmarked dialogical speech, which is in fact quite understandable, because the primary aim of any communication act is to impose or refute a certain point of view. As a result, if the media channel does not aim at entertaining the audience, the broadcast such as an interview, debate or a discussion usually has a political background, where each participant in his speech uses structures and language forms typical of a political discourse. For this reason, political communication and political discourse in particular require in-depth studying and practicing.

Secondly, the students also learned that speech behavior of communicants, though infinitely varied, can in general be reduced to an opposition of smooth (cooperative) and non-smooth (conflict) turn-taking. Not claiming the exclusive use of this typology, the proposed classification proved to be convenient and practical in use, because it reflects the basic parameters of different points relevant to this study: changing / keeping the communicative initiative, expressing the intention of choosing a strategy of turn taking by a particular speaker.

Thirdly, a huge role in choosing a technique of turn taking is played by the status of speakers, which is especially noticeable in interviews of politicians. The higher the status of the participants is, the higher the incidence of smooth transitions. Participants of formal political dialogues strictly observe the etiquette of speech (even the most heated debates are always strictly regulated). Pauses in this



debate do not become a place of seizing the initiative. Communicants always wait until the statement of a previous speaker is completed. Non-institutional political discourse, in contrast, is closer in terms of turn-taking to unmarked dialogues. It is characterized by a larger number of interruptions and overlapping. Speakers in dialogues of this type use simultaneous starts as a strategy to overtake communicative initiatives.

Finally, talking about the particular highlight of the project, US presidential debate 2016, a conclusion was made that in contrast to parliamentary debates in most legislative bodies where the whole procedure is strictly regulated and, in fact, participants rarely come into direct impromptu conversation without the mediation of a chairman or the Speaker of the House, whose responsibility is to give the floor to the participants or provide the audience with an opportunity to ask questions, the Trump – Clinton debate overlooked the traditional rules. The number of interruptions and non-smooth transitions was about 10% higher than average, which at times seemed to have reduced the particular occasion to a mere scandal. Thus, if the debate moves into an active stage, this communication can scarcely be called cooperative. It loses its high status, the formality of discourse sometimes disappearing altogether.

All in all, it should be noted that students should be aware of the distinctive patterns of a political dialogue and possible communicative strategies acceptable in the language and culture they study as certain types of non-verbal behaviour or some ways of interrupting a partner may be unacceptable and even rude. Ignorance in such issues may hinder mutual understanding or even ruin effective communication process. The best way of instilling such knowledge and skills seems to be by projects and case studies. The experiment mentioned above conducted in terms of a case study or a project work may form good understanding of a foreign political culture and provide classes with vivid examples of up-to-date political discourse.

References

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