Part 6

Key directions and characteristics of research organization in contemporary world

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TOWARD EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: THE PRAGMATICS OF TROPES IN MASS MEDIA DISCOURSE

Abstract

The paper looks at the communicative aspect of tropes and the use to which mass media discourse puts it. Necessity to study tropes in discourse boils down to the fact that metaphoric patterns prove to be effective in helping language users be cooperative in communication. Attention to the pragmatics of tropes functioning in mass media discourse as well as to the cognitive aspect may shed much light on the numerous strategies that mass media discourse can implement with their help in its search for language means which could solve multiple communicative tasks: from wording the reality and conveying ideologies to entertaining and making subjective viewpoints accessible to broad target audiences.

Introduction

As effective communication, which is, in the first place, an integral characteristic of the language, is at the same time a factor that ultimately determines the extent to which both the entire communicative ability of an individual and all types of verbal interaction, as well as all language mechanisms can be attributed, its study helps to deal with any fact of the language, and thus describing any such fact we basically regard it as a constituent of everyday social interaction.

Irrespectively of the fact that all forms of communication including mass media one have been the focus of scholars' attention for quite a while, despite the effort taken to search for effective linguistic means and tools which could assist in overcoming various barriers hampering all forms of verbal communication, that is the exchange of messages or meanings on personal, professional, cross-cultural or any other level, the problem seems yet to be solved. There are numerous reasons for that. Primarily it is that communication 'involves a complex, multilayered, dynamic process through which we exchange meaning' (Adler, 1991). Secondly the tasks that any communicative act is set to solve are manifold: it aims to 'not only inform but form common images; not only entertain but create publics, not only reflect but shape attitudes, tastes, preferences'. It helps to 'provide the boundary conditions and overall patterns within which the processes of personal and group-mediated selection, interpretation and interaction go on' (Gerbner, 1985).

An incessant interest in mass mediated discourse studies in its turn may be attributed to the common assumption that by studying mass media discourse strategies one can reveal the mechanisms that make it possible for an individual evaluation to overtake facts, and for the emotional, subjective and phatic to overshadow the rational component; the latter can be accounted for by the fact that mass media discourse is generally characterized by features common to other kinds of discourse. But unlike everyday discourse or the so called "face-to-face communication" mass media discourse 'is addressed to an absent mass audience and not to a group of co-present participants'. Besides it is the type of communication which cannot be intervened with "comprehensive questions" (Fetzer & Lauerbach, 2007). Thus the analysis of linguistic patterns, both conventional and novel, the search for the language units, that can not only represent events but help to achieve various pragmatic effects and contribute to the coherence of the communicated message in mass media discourse, may help to get a better understanding of some questions such as along what lines modern mass media discourse is organized. Further in the article we will attempt to discuss how various rhetorical means, namely metaphors and other tropes that function in mass media discourse can contribute to molding and construction of this form of communication. We will also look upon the importance of communicative approach to the studies of mass media discourse in stylistics and pragmatics.

Discussion

Mass media language and tropes which function in mass media discourse have repeatedly been objects of interest for both stylistics and pragmatics. It goes without saying that initially stylists were much interested in the tropes proper disregarding in a way their ability to impose certain ideology or impose a certain way of thinking of something in terms of something else. Yet current studies in stylistics are predominantly focused on the effect that tropes have on language users and the aims that the latter want to achieve resorting to these stylistic means. Studying tropes in stylistics one cannot disregard the ever present (explicitly or implicitly) pragmatics, that is the addresser and the addressee's involvement in the act of communication.

Thus focusing on the stylistic and pragmatic aspect of tropes in various genres and types of discourse (namely newspaper or publicistic ones), we characterize these language units as communicative bringing together stylistic, pragmatic and communicative approach.

When it comes to tropes in discourse including that of mass media it is mostly metaphor that the scholars pay attention to, though we may argue that similar approaches, such as the Cognitive Metaphor Theory can be fairly well attributed to other stylistic means and that is metonymy, simile, irony, hyperbole, pun and so on since they are often overshadowed by metaphor.

Consequently, we agree with Fetzer & Lauerbach's view of metaphor and argue that just like metaphors can be viewed as a popular means of simplifying complex concepts so can other tropes. They can all 'enable us of making sense of abstract concepts by drawing parallels to concepts that are more easily accessible to us. Yet beyond achieving easy comprehension they suggest a certain view of things which addressees are invited to share (Fetzer & Lauerbach, 2007).

The fact that in this paper we view such tropes as metaphor, metonymy or simile not so much as rhetorical means characteristic of different genres, that is not as means to express something in an original, novel way, but primarily as instruments of cognition and consequently of communication can be accounted for by a few reasons. First and foremost it is worth mentioning that cognition and communication are the categories that cannot be analyzed in isolation since language and cognition are in constant interaction. Thus approaching the tropes analysis in terms of, for instance, Cognitive Metaphor Theory we will inevitably refer to the sphere of individual experience or different types of mental representation. Applying this theory to tropes analysis we deal with different kinds of scenarios or domains as well as various conceptual mappings within these kinds, which represent individual perception of the world and help to construct arguments in certain terms.

Unlike nonmetaphoric patterns and structures metaphors and other tropes can also be regarded as means which in some cases may be of more communicative and pragmatic value owing to the fact that 'the primary function of metaphoric expression is to represent our world through seeing and wording' (Mey, 2007). Besides they can express ideas which are 'difficult to convey using nonmetaphoric language' (Semino, 2008).

In other words, as tropes account for how we perceive reality and then share it with others, we take Semino's approach that they enable us 'to think and talk about abstract, complex, subjective and/or poorly delineated areas of experience in terms of concrete, simpler, physical and/or better delineated areas of experience' (Semino, 2008). This enables us to see tropes as 'means of dealing with the world' (Mey, 2007). Accordingly among the main functions of tropes in discourse there can be those of persuasion, reasoning, evaluation, explaining, offering new conceptualizations of reality and whatnot (Semino, 2008; Kovecses, 2002).

The pragmatic aspect of tropes is primarily embedded in their ability to be not only indicative of our thinking of reality but also in the ability to set and confirm it. It also puts forward such issues as, for instance, the problem of co-wording or, in other words, the ability of all language users to equally understand and decode tropes in various kinds of discourse or in a common social context (Sperber & Wilson, 1990). According to J. L. Mey, 'a pragmatic view of metaphoring serves to point the way to a better understanding of our fellow humans' thus showing what things or phenomena we attach certain weight to and prioritize in our interaction with other language users. On the whole we may argue that by referring to tropes as to indispensable units of communication which at the same time helps their users to achieve some pragmatic aims, we assume that it is there that one of the essential principles of pragmatics such as The Cooperative Principle goes together with another one that J. L. Mey terms as The Communicative Principle (Mey, 2007). The former accounts for the fact that tropes just like any other language means may signal our intention to communicate something to somebody, whereas the latter focuses on the users choice of tropes in order to communicate something in a certain way.

Apart from the mentioned we may assume that metaphors as well as other tropes may have some other functions to perform depending on the type of discourse

they occur in. That in part may account for the fact why mass media discourse is so persistent in resorting to tropes trying to reach large groups of people.

Modern research shows that the competition among the media for audiences reaches new levels of complexity. As R. Wimmer and J. Dominick put it, the media "survival kit" today includes information about consumers' changing values and tastes, developing trends in lifestyle, determines what the members of the audience think, how they use language (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). To get the competitive edge in this "battle" for the audiences mass media aims obviously not only at presenting news but also at imposing views; in doing so it wants both to hold the interest of the audience and to be a good interlocutor in this form of communication.

Besides it should be born in mind that mass media audience is very selective when it comes to facts and arguments they receive in communication, most assuredly focusing on those which concern them personally or match their own life experience or, in terms of linguistics, their schematic knowledge. Thus mass media men are supposed to be careful about choosing some skillfully designed communicative patterns or strategies, let alone they make sure these are the patterns on which certain ideologies must be superimposed. All this allows us to view such means as tropes quite powerful in assisting, for instance, print media 'to present facts in a way that is designed to arouse the reader interest and curiosity… in a way that will influence the reader's view of them' (Reah, 2003). What is more when it comes to print media, namely newspapers and magazines, they have to take into account one more challenge and that is that their reading audience is becoming more critical, demanding, sophisticated in a way that allows them to identify 'gaps and swings in the information they are given' (Reah, 2003). Tropes then come very helpful in reaching to the readers as they are always expressive, inevitably multi-faceted and are often built on the interaction of conventionality and novelty which makes them indispensable units of any communication and mass media communication in particular.

Besides we assume that as metaphors and other tropes may be viewed as 'mechanisms of regimes of truth, as they create the reality rather than describe it' (Goatly, 2007), so may be mass media discourse itself as it resorts to tropes in an attempt to get it all: to win over the target audience and what is even more important to present reality in a new, more enticing way when "how to tell about it" in fact becomes more important than "what to tell". In its turn reality then often becomes a backdrop against which media discourse pursues its own pragmatic goals and supports the view of tropes as language means which "are always charged with high pragmatic explosives" (Mey, 2007).

To illustrate both the pragmatic and the communicative usefulness of tropes in mass media discourse we can consider the following example which is an extract from an article published in The Economist on 8 June 2012:

Kid gloves
Small children *are a big headache* for the social network

ONE American in three aged 65 or older uses social networks says a new report by the Pew Research Centre, a think-tank. But it is *the small surfers, not the silver ones, who are currently making waves*. Facebook is examining ways to

allow children under the age of 13 to use its service, with some form of parental supervision. If this happens—and Facebook stresses that it has not yet decided whether to go ahead—it would be *a venture into uncharted territory* (The Economist, 2012).

The article is placed in the business section of the magazine and deals with problems that young children may cause as they can often get unlimited and unguided access to the social network content. Due to the character of the issues under discussion the language of the article is supposed to be matter-of-fact, business-like. Yet we can come across at least four cases of tropes such as pun in the headline, a conventional metaphor in the lead, allusion which then turns into one more conventional metaphor and finally one more novel metaphor at the end of the extract. Such clustering of tropes makes the article look more likely a good-humoured commentary to the reader which in its turn enables us to suppose that this effect is achieved due to purely pragmatic aims on the author's part and that is to catch the readers' eye and then to hold their attention by setting a friendly note communicating the message to them.

In fact the pun 'kid gloves' may at first glance seem a little bit misleading as in the readers' mind it can simultaneously refer to different kinds of reality such as gloves made of fine kid leather; a part of the expressions 'to use or wear kid gloves' or 'to handle with kid gloves' and that is to treat something or somebody delicately and gently or even to one of the dictionary meanings of 'kid', namely 'a child'. To help the readers chose right the author resorts to a conventional metaphor in the lead which creates the context necessary for the correct decoding of the pun and perceiving both the message and the author's attitude which is evidently a humourous one. The clustering metaphor 'small surfers making waves' and an allusion to a comics superhero Silver Waves top up the desired effect.

Within Cognitive Metaphor Theory all the metaphors in the extract: 'children are a big headache', 'surfers making waves', 'venture into an uncharted territory' are based on the scenarios or even broader conceptual domains such as 'DISEASE', 'MOVEMENT', 'JOURNEY' which are quite familiar to the reader. That factor does not only help to follow the author and grasp his/her use of tropes but makes it easier for the reader to see what weight is attached to certain things and why; in other words tropes are those indispensable constituents of effective communication as probably all other language means are. Besides tropes secure the pragmatic effect that mass media discourse aims to achieve and that is to convey humour, entertain, maintain a desired level of intimacy with the target audiences, express attitudes to things and phenomena.

Conclusion

Summing up, we may assume the given paper attempted to discuss the communicative aspect of tropes and the key pragmatic functions that they perform in communication; one of the aims was also to point out the importance of further, rigorous studies of both the communicative and pragmatic aspects of tropes in discourse as well as their textual functions. The language of mass media in its turn should be looked upon as a peculiar form of human thought existence and interpretation and as a means to word an individual perception of reality, to which

tropes can contribute to a considerable degree. In the course of the paper we also stressed the fact that tropes in discourse are apt to significantly affect our mindset and determine any goal-oriented communication.

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