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Linguistic Aspects of Political Discourse with Reference to English and Arabic Languages

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Politics and Language

Spoken words are salient features of various political activities. Politicians, political parties and agencies use professional speech writers and tend to rely on special publicists whose task is to monitor and design their political language i.e., words and phrasings. The relationship between politics and language is described by Chilton and Schäffner (2002), “What is clear is that political activity does not exist without the use of language. It is true that other behaviors are involved: for instance, physical coercion, but the doing of politics is predominantly constituted in language” (p. 3).

A successful politician is endowed with many characteristics, one of which is being a good orator, having the ability of convincing the audience and getting their support, presenting a vision of a better future and being able to lead the people. Chilton (2004) contends that, “Man is by nature a political animal” (p. 5).

Normally, parts of the speech rather than the whole text are broadcasted and published. These parts are called sound bites which are described by Beard (2000) as, “A short extract from a recorded speech or interview which is chosen because of its impact” (p. 119). Many cases of parallelism can be found in these sound bites as they are short configurations which share the same structure, rhyme and in many cases a range of semantic relations. This makes them very appealing to recipients, draws their attention and has a stronger impact on them. Beard (2000) stated, “Sound bites require economy of expression: they need to be brief yet using language structures which encourage them to be often repeated and easily remembered” (p. 43). It is a favoured strategy used by the former Prime Minister Tony Blair and characterises his speeches. Blair’s (2005) speech stated the following:

And we have been told how to do it. The Kok report in 2004 shows the way. Investment in knowledge, in skills, in active labour market policies, in science parks and innovation, in higher education, in urban regeneration, in help for small businesses. This is modern social policy, not regulation and job protection that may save some jobs for a time at the expense of many jobs in the future. (pp. 4-5)



Political Discourse and Legitimacy

A distinctive feature that characterises political discourse is rhetoric which is an essential means of persuasion. The word *rhetoric* is described by Beard (2000) as, “The art of persuasive discourse” (p. 35). A further definition presented by Beard (2000) states, “Rhetoric refers to persuasive writing or speaking” (p. 118). In debates and public speaking, rhetorical skills, which reinforce the value of a speech, are very important if the audience is to be persuaded.

As political discourse is based on persuasion, rhetoric is also the art of persuading people. Persuasion and rhetoric are inseparable since the majority of writers equate these two concepts together (as shown earlier by Beard, 2000; Charteris-Black, 2011; Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 1992; Metcalfe, 1998 O’Donnell & Jowett, 1992 among others). Therefore, whenever there is persuasion there is rhetoric and vice-versa (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 9). According to Metcalfe (1998, p. 398), persuasive speeches are convincing, stimulating, and actuating. Normally, persuasion intends either to confirm beliefs, attitudes or behaviors, or to challenge them, though they never present completely new ones.

From the above definition, Metcalfe (1998, p. 399) distinguishes between three functions of persuasion. The first of which is a speech that aims at convincing an audience, where the speaker has to convince the audience that there is a problem, that the solution suggested by the speaker is plausible and that a future action may be needed. The second is a speech that aims at stimulating the recipients. In such cases, there is a close agreement between the speaker and the audience on certain beliefs and feelings. The speaker, however, seeks to focus and reinforce these feelings. The third is a speech that aims at actuating an audience. This is achieved when a speaker identifies a problem and a solution and motivates the audience to undertake a specific action.

Rhetorical tactics are classified into four main categories, namely, listing three elements, using contrastive elements, reminiscing, and referring to personal memories and using pronouns (Mazraani, 2003, p. 9). Consider the following example on listing three elements:

“فهب الفلسطينيون العزل يدافعون عن الأمانة –قدس الأقداس- ينتصرون فيها للأمة ولحقها التاريخي ويؤكدون وجودهم و هويتهم و حقهم في الحياة بحرية و كرامة فكانت صور البطولة و التضحية و الشهادة.”

According to (King Abdullah II, 2000a), “Defenseless Palestinians sprang to defend the trusteeship, to the holiest of the holiest of the holy, by advocating their Arab nation, and its historical rights, thus asserting further their identity and right to a free and dignified life. They personified images of heroism, and martyrdom” (p. 1).

These tactics are not culture-bound; on the contrary, they are found in Arabic and in English political oratory, among others. The impact of listing three elements in English and Arabic is manifested in strengthening an argument, creating a rhythmic poetical effect, and arousing the audience’s feelings through the repetition of structure which elicits positive feedback from them. Fairclough (2002, p. 100) describes Tony Blair’s style in listing three elements as, “Three of the assertions are delivered in a slow, emphatic way in which he stresses each word separately [...]. Each assertion is accompanied with sharp emphatic vertical movements of the head and/or hand.”

Another rhetorical tactic is Contrastive pairs of words, clauses, or phrases, which is based on discussing a point and challenging it by bringing the opposite position to the argument. This tactic strengthens an argument, as the point of discussion is discussed fully and is presented in a more vivid way. Consider the following example:

“فالجماهير التي عبرت عن طموحها للعزة و السؤدد من جهة، و عن شعورها بالسخط و الغضب من جهة أخرى فعلت ذلك بسبب ما عانتها أمتنا من الضعف و الفرقة في الوقت الذي خطت فيه أمم أخرى خطوات جادة على طريق التقدم و الرقي.”

King Abdullah II (2000a) stated that, “The Arab masses expressed their aspirations to regain their pride and honor on one front and their rage and frustration on the other owing to the weakness and disparities

witnessed by our Arab nation, while other nations were taking serious strides on the path of advancement and progress” (p. 2).

Recounting personal memories is another tactic manifested in Arabic and English political speeches. In this case, the speaker may switch to the dialect level to show personal involvement and that s/he is willing to share her/his experiences with the people. The impact of this strategy lies in strengthening an argument and showing the speaker’s involvement with the audience, as it works at the personal level and away from formality. Consider the following example taken from Mazraani (2003, p. 208) where the low level of formality might be more prevalent in American political discourse. Jesse Jackson (1988) says:

I wasn’t born in the hospital. Mama didn’t have insurance. I was born in the bed, at house. I really do understand. Born in a three room house, bathroom in the back yard, slop jar by the bed, no hot and cold running water, I understand. Wallpaper used for decoration? No, for a wind breaker. (p. 11)

The final tactic used by politicians is the use of the reference “us”. This is achieved when the speaker involves the audience in his/her speech and addresses them directly with the pronouns (we/us). This strategy strengthens solidarity between the speaker and the audience. Consider the following example:

“فنحن في الأردن نؤمن أننا أسرة واحدة يتساوى أفرادها في جميع الحقوق والواجبات بغض النظر عن الأصول و المنابت، و نحن نؤمن أيضا أن الإنتماء الحقيقي الصادق للأردن و ترجمة هذا الإنتماء إلى عمل و أداء للواجبات، هو مقياس المواطنة الصالحة.”

According to (King Abdullah II, 1999a), “We in Jordan believe that we are one family in which all its members are equal in rights and duties, regardless of origins and birthplaces. We also believe that a true sense of belonging to Jordan, and demonstrating this through work and carrying out duties, is the measure of good citizenship” (p. 2).

Generally, meanings associated with pronouns reflect the speaker’s ideology. Thus, when talking about the others, negative meanings are emphasized, while when a speaker talks about himself/herself s/he tends to use a positive description. Van Dijk (2002) explains this view by highlighting the contrasting pronouns Us and Them. Van Dijk (2002, pp. 230-231) argues that politicians tend to use positive description when they talk about Us to provide a ‘positive self-presentation’ for the speaker and his/her followers, and a negative description for Them as they are normally the opposition. To sum up, it is the style of political language that underpins a speech and presents it in an appealing and persuading manner that enables its speaker to achieve his/her ends.

Style

Style is one of the prominent components of language that is not to be neglected or seen as secondary to meaning. Van Dijk (2002) states that:

Semantic representations are expressed in variable a surface structure, which is through specific lexicalization, syntactic structures and specific features of sound, printing or images, as well as by rhetorical devices that are geared towards the emphasis or de-emphasis of underlying meanings. (p. 231)

It can be argued that political speeches are written to be delivered orally. Therefore, sound plays a significant role in political speeches and has a noticeable effect on the oral message and on the addressee, though its importance varies depending on the text type. For instance, Politicians use repetition and sound bites in their speeches to achieve assertion, emphasis, and greater impact on the audience not only semantically and structurally but also phonologically.

Repetition of sound can be classified into alliteration (*Al Jinas al Istihlaly*) which is defined by (Dickins et al., 2016, p. 81) as “The recurrence of the same sound or sound-cluster at the beginning of

words, as in ‘two tired toads’” and assonance which refers to “the recurrence, within words, of the same sound or sound-cluster, as in ‘a great day painting’” Dickins, Hervey, and Higgins (2016, p. 81). It is important to know that it is the sound and not the spelling that is taken into account when looking at alliteration, assonance and rhyme (*Al Kafiyah*) which is used to describe “two words rhyme where the last stressed vowel, and all the sounds that follow it, are identical and occur in the same order, as in “bream/seem” (Dickins et al., 2016, p. 81). As for the metrical foot (*Al Wazn Al Sarfy*) it can be described by referring to metre which is defined in the Collins Dictionary by Crozier (2006) as, “Prosody, the rhythmic arrangement of syllables in verse, usually according to the number and kind of feet in a line, Or music” for instance (قرأ، كتب، درس) have the same metrical foot recognized in the pattern (فعل). These rhetorical features which function at the phonological level are conceived as persuasive devices which are “special structures at all discourse levels that attract attention” (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 12).

This aesthetic component, i.e., the phonological component that is considered as part of meaning has to be given extra care when translating political speeches. Special care should be taken in order not only to transfer meaning and structure, but also to transfer sound effects as closely as possible as they have emotional impact on receivers, though sometimes grammatical and stylistic changes are needed in terms of word class, word order and collocations to achieve rhythm and rhyme and produce a close replicate to the SL text.

Style as Semantic and Structural Devices

Style can be realized using semantic and structural devices. It can be argued that the use of these semantic and structural stylistic devices can vary in Arabic and English.

Semantic stylistic devices

This section will highlight the semantic relations found in parallel configurations in the corpus of this study, i.e., in the Arabic political speeches investigated in this paper which includes such semantic relations as synonymy, collocations and contrasting pairs. Looking at synonymy, it is described by Abdul-Raof (2001) as:

Words which signify the same meanings are synonyms. Synonymy does not mean identical meaning between two words but the two words can be used in different contexts giving a similar meaning; for instance, علم = to teach = غدى بأفكار = لفن = فهم = درس. (p. 50)

Synonymy can be classified into two types: absolute or full synonymy which represents the strongest form of semantic equivalence, and close or near synonymy. It can be argued that absolute synonyms are very rare, in contrast to near synonymy which occurs more frequently. A lexical item can have many synonyms that all share the core meaning with a slight variation among them. These synonymous words are called a ‘lexical set’ or a ‘lexical field’. This lexical set can be problematic in translation because an extra effort has to be done by the translator to provide a corresponding counterpart that renders the same function and semantic relation in the TL. Another problem arises with synonyms is the translation of familiar alternatives. These are expressions or phrases that have culturally bound implications, their meanings cannot be understood by non-native speakers, and it is hard to find their meanings in dictionaries, examples include الجهاد، القوامه، الرحمة which are culture-bound lexical items. Hence, the best way of translating these familiar alternatives is to give a literal translation or provide an explanation for them in brackets to make them comprehensible for non-native readers.

In general, synonymous couplets where synonymy is absolute or near manifest parallelism, as synonymous lexical items tend to repeat the same structure with semantic similarities between them.

Another feature that political discourse is characterized with is the use of contrasting elements, which is based on the use of two or more lexical items, phrases, clauses, or sentences, which express an opposite meaning in a given context. The main function of using such opposition in meaning is to challenge a point of discussion by bringing its contrast to the argument and covering the discussed point from all its aspects which strengthens an argument and makes it more solid and vivid as the point of discussion is investigated fully. Consider the following examples according to their availability in the corpus:

“إن الوحدة الوطنية هي إحدى المقومات الأساسية التي تعطي الوطن القوة وتمنحه المنعة، وتحول دون التفنيت والاختراق، لقد كان الأردن على الدوام وطنًا لكل العرب ونموذجًا لمجتمع الأسرة الواحدة المتلاحمة في السراء والضراء، الجميع فيه شركاء في العمل والبناء وحماية الوطن والالتزام بمصالحه.”

King Abdullah II (1999b) claimed that, “National unity is a basic component of national empowerment. It fortifies the country against interference. Jordan has always served as a home for all Arabs, a model society, a cohesive and united family in good and bad times, a country where all people are partners in work and construction and committed to protecting the homeland and its interests.” (p. 1).

The above paragraph includes two contrasting pairs, the first of which is achieved through the use of contrasting verb phrases (that give the Homeland its strength and fortitude and prevent the fragmentation and infiltration). As for the second pair, it consists of opposing lexical items manifested in (prosperity and adversity). This use of contrasting pairs challenges the argument in hand as it brings its contrast to the discussion.

Collocation which refers to an occurrence of two or more lexical items that are always used in close proximity with each other in a language and it is another semantic feature of political discourse. Collocation can occur as a noun compound, adjective plus noun, verb plus object or adverbials. Consider the following example on collocation:

“فانه ليسرني غايه السرور أن أتوجه اليكم اليوم، بتحية عربية هاشمية، ملؤها المودة والاعتزاز بكم ، فانتم الأهل والعزوة، ورفاق المسيرة، الأوفى عهدا و الأصدق انتماء، و الأنبيل هدفا.”

According to (King Abdullah II, 2000b), “It is with great pleasure that I address you, and extend to you an Arab Hashemite salute, filled with pride in you. You are the kins and cohorts, the comrades, the most faithful and truthful in their pledge, the noblest in their” (p. 309).

In this example collocation occurs in three pairs (الأصدق انتماء) ، (الأوفى عهدا) and (الأنبيل هدفا). The lexical items in these collocational pairs always come together, and when one lexical item is mentioned, the other collocating lexical item comes to mind directly. Moreover, parallelism is manifested in the collocated pairs as it consists of adjectives in the superlative degree (الأنبيل، الأوفى، الأصدق) followed by a noun in the accusative case (هدفا، عهدا، انتماء). Moreover, phonological parallelism is achieved via the use of alliteration in (ال) which is repeated in the first three lexical items and the use of rhyme by repeating the same inflection at the end of the second lexical items.

Structural stylistic devices

Political discourse and particularly political speeches are rich with structural stylistic devices which range from using repetition, formulas of address, parallelism, among others.

Repetition is one of the stylistic and rhetorical devices that characterizes Arabic political speeches and has a considerable effect on the meaning of a stretch of text. The major function of this device is to focus on and emphasize the repeated lexical item (Tannen, 2007). Moreover, repetition can be used to keep the flow of a speech without any interruption, though this could mean the use of unnecessary words or phrases. Consider the following examples:

“ومثلما كان الأردن بوابة الفتح في فجر الرسالة، فان الأردن اليوم بوابة الدعم في ليل المعاناة.”

King Abdullah II (2000a) stated, “Similar to Jordan’s role as a gateway for opening up the world, Jordan today is the gateway of support in the suffering darkness of night” (p. 1).

In this example, the lexical item (بوابة) is repeated twice in two parallel structures (بوابة الفتح في فجر) (الرسالة، بوابة الدعم في ليل المعاناة) to emphasize the important position Jordan plays now and back then. It can be argued that repetition is the highest level of parallelism. While parallelism refers to repeating the same structure, repetition, on the other hand, refers to repeating the same structure and meaning identically i.e., repeating the same lexical item(s). I believe this puts repetition on a higher level than parallelism in terms of correspondence.

As for formulas of address, they are speech openers which are standardized; they are repeated frequently in a speech to sustain the relationship between the speaker and the audience, in addition to their role in providing the speaker with ‘breathing space’ throughout the speech. Chilton and Schäffner (2002) found the following:

The function of non-idiomatic units like gambits and formulas of address can thus be described as helping to structure a spoken text, prevent the speaker from getting lost in the maze of their own wording and serve as a means of text cohesion and text rhetoric. (p. 87)

Consider the following example:

“سيادة الرئيس،
أصحاب الجلالة والسيادة و السمو،
أيها الأخوة الكرام،
أود في البداية أن أعرب عن بالغ التقدير لسيادة الأخ الرئيس محمد حسني مبارك.”

King Abdullah II, 2000a said:

“Your Excellency the President,

Majesties, Excellencies and Highnesses,
Brothers,

Allow me first to express my deep appreciation for His Excellency President Mohammad Husni Mubarak.” (p. 1)

A final stylistic feature is fronting which can be defined as “moving a word, a phrase or a clause from its original place in the middle or at the end of a sentence to the beginning (or the front position) of that sentence” Ghazala (1995, p. 230). Fronting can be used at both sentence and text levels and its function is to emphasize and draw attention to the fronted part (Enkvist, 1981). For instance, a declarative sentence in Arabic usually starts with a verb followed by a subject and ended by an object or complement. If this sentence starts with a nominal subject, this subject is fronted. Moreover, the normal clause order in English is the main clause followed by the subordinate clause; therefore, when the subordinate clause comes before the main clause, it is fronted. Fronting is not made by chance, and it is used for the purpose of emphasis. Consider the following example:

“إننا نؤمن بالسلام سبيلا للأمن والاستقرار والتنمية، وسنبقى نصر على مسيرته، جازمين بأن إرادة الشعوب وإصرارها على السلام سوف تنتصر في النهاية على سائر العقبات والعراقيل حتى يعم المنطقة بأسرها ويتيح لها مجالات التقدم والازدهار.”

King Abdullah II (1999b) claimed, “We believe in peace as a means for security, stability and development. We will continue to insist on peace, as we are quite certain that the will and persistence of peoples will eventually overcome all obstacles until peace prevails throughout our region and helps it achieve progress and prosperity” (p. 6).

In the above example, fronting occurs in (أننا نؤمن بشدة) as the sentence starts with the subject (أننا) and highlights the personal opinion of the speaker.

Conclusion

As politicians strive, first and foremost, to gain the trust and support of people, being persuasive is all that they need “Persuasiveness function of text or talk is not limited to its rhetoric but may also depend on style or meaning or coherence” Van Dijk (1997, p. 12).

The fact that politicians use an interwoven texture of rhetorical features, style, coherence and meaning to persuade an audience supports Dijk’s view. In conclusion, rhetoric and persuasion are the cornerstones of political genre and it is the semantic and the structural stylistic devices that empowers and enriches political discourse. Parallelism is one of the stylistic devices that operates at the semantic and structural levels, and it is a prominent stylistic device that is used regularly in Arabic political speeches and that is worth further analysis and investigation.

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