

# **ISSA Proceedings 2014 -**

## **Argumentation In Hierarchical And Non-Hierarchical Communication**

*Abstract:* There are two major patterns of communication – hierarchical and non-hierarchical, depending on the communicative intention of the speakers. Hierarchical communication is a monologue or a pseudo-dialogue while intrinsic dialogism is a feature of non-hierarchical communication. Some argumentative strategies are characteristic to either hierarchical or non-hierarchical pattern. A line can be drawn between dialogue as an aim and dialogue as a form of communication. Both verbal and non-verbal arguments are considered.

*Keywords:* communicative intention, hierarchy, non-hierarchical, monologue, pseudo-dialogue.

### *1. ‘Vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ rhetoric*

Rhetoric is an art of using arguments, that is, an art of using language to achieve certain goals. There have been many studies of argumentative strategies, rhetoric devices, kinds of pathos. The effectiveness of these strategies and devices can be evaluated with regards to various kinds of addressees. The task of my report is to specify two principally different strategies – “vertical” or hierarchical and “horizontal” or non-hierarchical.

These two major patterns of communication depend on the communicative intention of the speakers. Intentions can be very different, and if we approach language as a set of tools, we choose the instrument according to the job we want to do. Another question to ask is how we want the job to be done and what social costs we are prepared to bear.

However important communication may be in our life, it is not an end in itself, we communicate with other people to solve certain tasks. When we follow the “vertical” pattern we either want to use power to achieve our goals or power is the goal in itself. In any case, other people are considered as an enemy force which we need to neutralize. In case of the “horizontal” pattern we aim at

cooperation with other people. In this latter case each participant of the communicative act is free to use the information they receive in their own cognitive pursuits.

A modern Chilean philosopher and biologist H. Marturana writes about two possible ways of interaction between systems. The first case is the so called initialization – the behavior of the first organism rigidly determines consequent behavior of the second organism. Thus a chain is established, in which the second organism has no freedom of choice. In human society the possibilities of this model are limited. The aim of human communication is establishing a consensual area of behavior by means of developing cooperation (Marturana, 1996, p. 119). According to Marturana, we can only do something together if we do not deny each other in the process of doing. This second model is not based on power and it cannot be imposed on people without being destroyed. People can only establish it spontaneously in the life process.

The speaker's intentions (achieving a consensus or winning the case) influence the choice of argumentative strategies. Intrinsic dialogism is a feature of non-hierarchical communication. As M. Bakhtin wrote, understanding is already a response, it always provokes response in this or that form (Bakhtin, 1970, p. 254). This is why, the main means of influencing the addressee here is convincing them. To convince the addressee it is necessary to make them understand and accept the message. So, explanations and other rhetoric devices aimed at achieving understanding are so important in the “horizontal” pattern.

## *2. Hierarchy as a monologue*

Hierarchical communication is a monologue or a pseudo-dialogue. Of course, this does not mean that hierarchical discourse does not need explanations. The more authority the person has the less arguments they need. Sometimes, it is enough if it is understood that what the person says is an order and that the speaker has non-verbal means at their disposal to enforce it.

Yet, power is seldom absolute, authority is permanently challenged, it cannot only rely on power. Typical arguments used in a “vertical” discourse include:

- expressing an order in the form of a request,
- use of such notions as “duty”, “honor” or “disgrace”,
- promising material and idealistic rewards for obedience and punishment for

failing to execute the order,

- presenting the order as given directly by the people, motherland, etc.

As an example, we can quote here the famous order by Admiral Nelson before the Trafalgar battle: *England expects that every man will do his duty or the Soviet poster of the WWII time "Motherland calls".*

In real life it is difficult to find an example of purely monologue “vertical” communication, as even those, who have very much power have to engage in dialogue with their subordinates and listen to their objections. For an example we may turn to literary fairy tales where hierarchy is given from the very beginning by the opposition of humans and super-human beings, here we can clearly observe the strategies which are not so obvious in real life. The dialogue here is not an aim but only the form of communication, these can be called dialogued monologues. This can happen in two situations:

- a. The character who has power does not care about others and pursues the aims that contradict the aims of other characters;
- b. This character “knows better” what others need and does not consider their possible objections serious enough.

The example from the book about Marry Poppins demonstrates the second scenario:

(1)

*“Is that your medicine?” inquired Michel, looking very interested. “No, yours” said Mary Poppins, holding out the spoon for him. Michel stared. He wrinkled up his nose. He began to protest. “I don’t want it. I don’t need it. I won’t!” But Mary Poppins’s eyes were fixed on him and Michel suddenly discovered that you could not look at Mary Poppins and disobey her - something that was frightening and at the same time most exciting. The spoon came nearer. He held his breath, shut his eyes and gulped... He swallowed and a happy smile came round his face.*

*... But when she saw Mary Poppins moving towards the twins with the bottle Jane rushed at her. “Oh, no – please. They are too young. It would not be good for them. Please!” Mary Poppins, however, took no notice, but with a warning terrible glance at Jane, tipped the spoon towards John’s mouth. (Travers L. P. Mary Poppins. Moscow, 1979, p. 7)*

The analyses of argumentation in vertical discourse enables us to specify two

groups of lexical, grammatical and extra-linguistic means:

- a. Means to achieve “lack of understanding” (avoiding questions and objections, using language or words that the addressee does not know, voluntary starting and checking the conversation, etc.);
- b. means to achieve “ agreeing without understanding” (mentioned above linguistic ones well as extralinguistic – glance, posture, gestures, “special effects” aimed at psychological influence).

In the above example we see means from both groups: brief, formal answer to the question putting the interlocutor to a standstill, the absence of any response to the request, “fixed eyes”, “warning terrible glance”, “something that was frightening and at the same time most exciting”.

The power does not necessarily rely on institutionalized authority, we can speak about the use of power in all cases when the interests of the other part are being ignored. The speaker then may tend to disguise the monologue. A form of this disguised monologue is the so-called pseudo-dialogue. This is a strategy used when the speaker wants the listener obey by making them believe that they are making a decision themselves, without an outside pressure. According to E. Vargina and E. Menschikova (Vargina & Menschikova, 2013, pp. 16 – 27), pseudo-dialogue structure has to contain one or more of the following components.

1.

Question that does not require an answer:

(2) *Miranda's face was a wooden mask. She plumped up her pillows and sat up straighter. 'But there's no question of that, is there?*

(Murdoch I. An unofficial rose. Random House, 2008, p.167)

2.

Question already containing an answer:

(3) *'Did he say anything then which— well, about going away for good? He must have let you know that he was. Ann was breathless.*

(Murdoch I. An unofficial rose. Random House, 2008, p. 167)

3.

Answer that does not logically match the question/statement of the first speaker:

(4) *D.B.: We're gonna keep Big Daddy as comfortable as we can.*

*B.M.: Yes, it's just a bad dream, that's all it is, it's just an awful dream.*

(Williams T. Cat on a hot tin roof. New Directions Publishing, 1954, p. 81)

4.

Absence of answer:

(5) "Look at that! Call that a signal fire? That's a cooking fire Now you'll eat and there'll be no smoke. Don't you understand? There may be a ship out there—" He paused, defeated by the silence and the painted anonymity of the group guarding the entry.

(Golding W. Lord of the flies. Putnam Publishing, 1954, p. 92).

Another example of a pseudo-dialogue is when the speakers are indifferent to each other and exchange meaningless remarks.

For a dialogue to take place it is not only the exchange of information that is important, but the fact of communication itself, the desire to cooperate, work on solutions together. Pseudo-dialogue is a forged communication.

Lewis Carroll in his "Alice" presents different communication models in a situation of absurd, that is of total lack of understanding. Those who give others riddles do not know the answer, explanations make things even more vague and stories end at the most interesting places. Yet, formally, the dialogue goes on and all recommended rules of politeness are observed:

(6)

"Well, then," The Gryphon went on, "if you don't know what to ugly is, you are a simpleton".

Alice did not feel encouraged to ask any more questions, so she turned to the Mock Turtle and said, "What else had you to learn?"

(Carroll L. Alice in Wonderland. Moscow, 1979, p. 141)

- "And how did you manage on the twelfth?, Alice went on eagerly.

"That's enough about lessons", The Gryphon interrupted in the most decided tone: "Tell her something about the games now".

(Carroll L. Alice in Wonderland. Moscow, 1979, p. 142)

Wonderland is hierarchical and the closer to the top of the pyramid the fewer dialogues and explanations. The Queen only gives orders, she does not attempt to understand others and does not care if others understand her. The only way of problem solving she knows is to behead. Queen's monologue continues until

"grown up" Alice starts objecting her - then the monologue is over and the whole kingdom of cards falls into pieces.

Since Bakhtin much has been said about dialogue nature of a formally monological discourse, much less has been written about the monologue nature of a formal dialogue. Yet, in all speech genres, be it formally dialogical ones, like a learned dispute, political debate or an everyday argument, we can find features of a monologue. These are all attempts to ignore the interests of the other part, to impose something on other people. Beside the strategies we have seen in "Mary Poppins" example, here also belong all sophistic and eristic devices, use of overcomplicated language to make a text concerning the interests of many only understood by the few. All these are manifestations of power and it is no surprise that the language of power itself - the language of laws and regulations is so difficult to understand. Often, people cannot understand them without specially trained professionals, lawyers. Bureaucratic, overcomplicated language of a legal document is supposed to avoid ambiguity of interpretation. Yet, what is achieved is not clarity but monologue, exclusion of those whom the law concerns from the circle of communicators. To make a text understandable one needs not these devices, one needs dialogue, one needs the intention to achieve mutual understanding. The power does not need response, when it cannot avoid it altogether, it wants to make as much delayed, indirect and disperse as possible.

In a situation of power and subordination communication is an unaffordable luxury. In a democratic society - largely because "time is money". A person engaged in earning a living cannot afford serious involvement in something that does not bring profit. Not so long ago, when we taught English to Russian students we had to explain that to a standard question *How are you?* One is supposed to answer *Fine, thanks* and not try to explain how things really are. Now this difference between Russian and English mentality is disappearing.

In a totalitarian society there is another motivation - for freedom of being sincere and say what you think one has to pay a big price. It is not just the possibility of immediate repression, it is also the threat of not being the object of gift-giving any more. This might include certain privileges, good job, possibility to travel abroad. If the power wants it can donate it all to a person and it depends on the person whether it will want to or not.

### 3. *Gift-giving as non-verbal hierarchical communication*

Hierarchical and non-hierarchical arguments can also be non-verbal. There are two great anthropological models of how to deal with the other - communication and gift-giving (Pelicci, 1986, pp. 85-89). If we transfer these models from anthropology to linguistics, we can say that communication is dialogue, equality of participants, while gift-giving is a monologue by nature. The difference between a monologue and a turn of a dialogue is that the first is directed not to cooperation but to ignoring the other. To present means to establish a vertical, execute power, impose something on the partner. Power does not imply equal exchange, power is about gift-giving.

A material present may be accompanied by an idealistic substance - one can give friendship, love, patronage. There can also be a gift without a material part. The other side of a gift is a threat (verbalized or not) to seize giving. The principal here is that it is impossible to give something in return, which puts the receiver of the gift in a subordinate position. As soon as this possibility appears the gift turns into exchange. What is a gift then, which we have just associated with a monologue and authority? Does this notion need rehabilitation? Is there an unavoidable contradiction between gift-giving and cooperation?

If after giving a gift we expect a gift in return it makes gift a phenomenon of our culture. Culture evolves certain patterns of behavior, meaning is ascribed both to their observance and violation. In this sense all that we do can be treated as non-verbal arguments used to say something to our environment and as long as the people from our environment belong to the same culture as we do can understand our message and reply to it.

J. Derrida said that everything that we tend to call a present is in fact an indirect form of exchange (Derrida, 1991, p.55). The gift-giving we have been discussing does not imply communication on equal turns. Let us consider an example of a gift as an argument in "vertical" communication.

A short documentary has been widely discussed in Russia recently. A well-known businessman throws five-thousand notes from the window of his Petersburg office and watches people pushing each other to get hold of the money. The people in the street have two possibilities in this situation - to accept the unexpected present or to reject it. The only thing they cannot do is to as easily give something equal in return. That is they do not have the right for their turn in the dialogue. If they had the act of the businessman would have been senseless. It only had a

sense within a certain culture (including the memory of previous gift of this kind), certain social relationship and value system.

The fact of the recording and publishing this act transforms it from an action into an utterance having its own pragmatic task. Such presents always imply hierarchy and division into “us” and “them”. The businessman and his friends on top, the people they experiment on – below. The utterance is not directed to them, having been published in the Internet it has other pragmatic tasks. We can only suppose what these tasks are.

It is this demonstrative establishing of a hierarchy between the donator and the public led made a lot of people who saw the video feel offended. They even discussed plans for revenge. Here are the ideas suggested: wait till the businessman leaves the office and throw small coins into his face, leave coins at the entrance to the office and even shoot coins into his window from a catapult. For us it is interesting that all these suggestions are in fact attempts of a reply, their aim is to make if only a symbolic return present, that is to make the donator accept those who are below as his equals, get him involved in communication on equal terms.

A gift can only be part of horizontal communication if it is not a ritual, if it is not meant to symbolize anything, if the person who gives it does not want anything in return. Then it stops being part of the hierarchy-based culture. For a non-hierarchical rhetoric the necessary prerequisite is separate individuals – subjects of communication, each with their own aims, interests and demands. It is only in this case that a dialogue between them is possible.

#### *4. Conclusion*

Although we live in a hierarchical world we can observe non-hierarchical communication in many instances. Let us specify the main features which let us distinguish “horizontal” argumentation from “vertical”. First, we shall note that although there may be whole texts written in either this or that manner, particular arguments belonging to “horizontal” or “vertical” type can be found in the same text. We can base the analysis on consideration of the speaker’s values, which are used as the basis for choosing the arguments. Appealing to the so called “universal” values, which have very abstract nature and have a different meaning for different people, can be manifestation of an attempt of manipulation. This is especially so when appealing to these values is connected with dubious

positions: "You are a good boy, you love your Mum, don't you? Why did you, then, get a bad mark at the music lesson?!". "Universal" value good son thus gets a dubious attribute - necessity to do well in music.

Another example of this kind is the notorious referendum on preservation of the USSR in 1991. The question the people had to answer was the following: *Do you believe it is necessary to preserve the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which rights and freedoms of people of all nationalities will be fully guaranteed?*. "Universal" value rights and freedoms becomes rigidly connected with a highly controversial position - the necessity to preserve the USSR.

The conclusion we can make is that the division of rhetoric into "vertical" and "horizontal" mainly belongs to the sphere of methodology. It enables us to relate the aims of the speaker to the strategies used for their realization. Thus, analysis of language phenomena (arguments) becomes determined by non-linguistic phenomena. To be successful argumentation not only helps the speaker realize the goals they declare but it also helps realize the interests of the addressee and the society as a whole

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