

# ISSA Proceedings 2014 - Conflict And Tension: The Discursive Dissonance At The UN

*Abstract:* We aim at examining the governmental political marketing and its rhetorical strategies of maintenance, which also has the task of projecting an innovative image, so that the government survive and perpetuate. Among these strategies, it is included the dialogue with others governments in the international community and the engagement with common causes to the globalized world. This scenario requires an interdisciplinary field, mediated by the theories of argumentation, which constitute the core of all efforts of political nature. Speeches taken from the UN Assembly on September 23rd 2013, pronounced in a moment of great tension, not softened by diplomatic diligences, will be examined. The study of actio, the performance of political actors, is included.

*Keywords:* Actio, conflict, image, interdisciplinarity, negotiation, political speeches, stasis, strategies, tension, United Nation.

## 1. Introduction

The confrontation of speeches or *stasis* is frequent in contemporary political speeches, in a world that grows more complex and where it is increasingly more difficult to understand the various focuses of the questions. When one thinks of the deliberative discourse as it was conceived in the Greek-Latin world, it is possible to notice that the clash of discourses then was also heated, with the raise of discordant voices against what was being proposed. However, the transition from the Greek *polis* to the modern concept of State has introduced significant changes. In the latter, the political discourse is a conflictive setting in which the many manifestations are exacerbated, modulated, and softened by the norms of courtesy and diplomatic mediation necessary for modern life to work. New genres and formats arise, aiming at diverse audiences and media outlets. Although the concept of politics remains the same as in its origin - that which preserves the Common Good and what is useful and necessary to the collectivity (deliberative), what is fair (judiciary), and the cohesion of society (epideictic) - the process of institutionalization that was gradually taking place gave it new configurations. Conversely, the media, in its role as an agent that presents different angles of a

story or fact, exaggerates some aspects more than one can imagine. It is up for the citizen to disentangle the questions and form an opinion about the different situations.

In the political life, the official voice also has an important role when taking a stand on controversial situations or when communicating serious pieces of news which affect the lives of citizens. This is, many times, carried out by immediate advisors or spokespersons, in order to protect the figure of the Chief of State.

The UN is a privileged environment to observe the aforementioned confrontations, given the circumstances that gather people of distinct origins and cultures, who meet in assemblies, either as members of the permanent Council or as observers.

Created in 1945, following the two World Wars, one of its main roles is to mitigate the world tensions and help the conflicting nations establish dialogue. Lately, however, there have been talks of its weakened performance in this role.

## *2. A analyzing two presidential speeches*

In this study we look into two presidential speeches delivered on the 24th of September 2013, during the 68th edition of the General Assembly, when the President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, was the opening speaker. By tradition, Brazil is the first country to speak at the opening for having been the first country to join this organization. It is the third time, since 2011, that she participates in this event.

Immediately afterwards, it was the turn of the President of the United States, Barack Obama. The situation was considerably tense once there had been indiscriminate collection, by the United States, of government data and even personal information of Brazilian citizens, including espionage targeted on the Brazilian president's private mail and government entities, such as Petrobrás. It is worth mentioning that two months prior to this Assembly, the episode related to the revelations of Edward Snowden, former CIA member, was very much alive in the collective memory.

The speech from the Brazilian leader proved to be harsh in rejecting this kind of attitude, characterizing it as espionage, taking the opportunity to outline the principles that underpin her government and what is expected from the UN: multilateral mechanisms that ensure freedom of expression, privacy of the

individual and respect for human rights, without prejudice of political, commercial, religious or of any other nature; democratic governance, carried out with transparency; universality that ensures human development and the construction of inclusive and non-discriminatory societies; respect to cultural diversity, without the imposition of beliefs, customs, and values.

There was no immediate reaction on the part of the American president to the remarks about the interventions mentioned by the Brazilian president. As usual, he presented an overview of the U.S. politics, with emphasis on its weak points in the world panorama: integration of the world economy in a time of crisis, limitation of the use of drones, the work to close the Guantánamo Bay prison; the pacification of regions in turmoil, such as Kenya, Pakistan, the north of Africa and the Middle East, especially Syria, with the elimination of chemical weapons, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It is, evidently, what the pragma-dialectics characterizes as a critical discussion, based on certain norms that govern the rules and codes of conduct and by which concrete practices of argumentation are evaluated to attain a critical evaluation of the maneuvers in play.

In Chapter 3 of *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation*, this situation is well described when the authors, Eemeren and Grootendorst affirm:

*Argumentation is not just the expression of an individual assessment, but a contribution to a communication process between persons or groups who exchange ideas with one another in order to resolve a difference of opinion.*

*(...) In pragma-dialectics, argumentative discourse and texts are conceived as basically social activities and the way in which the argumentation is analyzed depends on the kind of verbal interaction that takes place between the participants in this communication process (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 55).*

In this presentation, the theoretical presupposition we adopt is one of an interactional view of argumentation, which encompasses the conjunction of a descriptive view and a normative perspective, considering the presence of a counter-discourse, even if implicit. In case of a debate, it is necessary to focus on the collision points and reflect on the influence each of these projects on its interlocutor or the audience. It is necessary, thus, to know exactly what type of

manifestation is in question.

Just as there is not a single and exclusive view on argumentation comprising these various approaches, likewise the concepts which argumentation deals with are not homogeneous, depending on the adopted points of view and the choices made when constructing its analyses. This is what happens with the concept of rationality and fallacy, among others. In the first case, it is preferred to work with reasonableness, with several nuances, but when fallacies are concerned, they are either seen as reasoning flaws or interaction mechanisms, making part of social convenience depending on the interpersonal relationships, such as white lies, affected modesty, and other forms of interaction in which the affective element is present.

The samples under our consideration are excerpts from the address from the Brazilian president, which is 25 minutes long (equivalent to 08 pages) and the address from the President of the United States, which is 44 minutes long (equivalent to 11 pages). Following the argumentation phases proposed by Eemeren and Grootendorst, we will cover the moment of confrontation, the opening, the argumentation and the conclusion, and we will analyze them according to the chosen argumentative techniques, as well as the figures present within, according to the classification of Perelman and Tyteca, in *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation*. We will pay special attention to the concluding phase, the peroration, based on Chapter 8 of *Argumentative Indicators in Discourse* (Van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Henkemans, 2007, pp.223-230).

The confrontation happens from the problems that motivate the speech, opening to the description that constitutes the grounds for argumentation itself, leading to the conclusion, when appeals to the UN and the international community are made.

In Dilma Rousseff's speech there is, initially, the exordium, with its habitual salutations, followed by the opening for considerations about recent problems of international repercussion, that is, the terrorist attack in Nairobi:

*Allow me initially to express my satisfaction in having a renowned representative of Antigua and Barbuda - a country that is part of the Caribbean, which is so cherished in Brazil and in our region - to conduct the work of this session of the*

*General Assembly. You can count, Excellency, on the permanent support of my Government.*

*Allow me also, at the beginning of my intervention, to express the repudiation of the Brazilian Government and people to the terrorist attack that took place in Nairobi. I express our condolences and our solidarity to the families of the victims, the people and the Government of Kenya.*

*Terrorism, wherever it may occur and regardless of its origin, will always deserve our unequivocal condemnation and our firm resolve to fight against it. We will never give way to barbarity.*

President Obama, in a concise way, salutes the President of the Assembly as well as his General Secretary, the delegates, and remaining attendees and, in three sentences, makes considerations about the institution, the UN, briefly outlining the history of its foundation, which constitutes an act of *captatio benevolentiae*.

*Each year we come together to reaffirm the founding vision of this institution. For most of recorded history, individual aspirations were subject to whims of tyrants and empires. Divisions of race and religion and tribe were settled through the sword and the clash of armies. The idea that nations and peoples could come together in Peace to solve their disputes and advance a common prosperity seemed unimaginable.*

*It took the awful carnage of two world wars to shift our thinking.*

*For decades, the United Nations has in fact made a difference - from helping to eradicate disease, to educating children, to brokering Peace.*

These movements are made by means of figures of presence, which bring back to memory past facts, contrasting them with the present situation and presenting them as a stimulus for further progress.

Next, reports of his actions in the presidency follow, describing them as a result from collective attitudes, by means of figures of communion, which involve the audience, constituted by the representatives of the countries attending the meeting. When talking about the economic crisis, which he highlights first, he thanks the efforts of all and points to what is still left to be done:

*Now, five years after the global economy collapsed, and thanks to coordinated efforts by the countries here today, Jobs are being created, global financial systems have stabilized, and people are once again being lift out of poverty. But*

*progress is fragile and unequal, and we still have work to do together to assure that our citizens can access the opportunities that they need to thrive in 21st century.*

The central part of the argumentation of the President of Brazil is developed in three movements:

a. *The global network of electronic espionage*

In reference to it, she expresses indignation and repudiation on the part of large sectors of public opinion around the world. She dislocates and projects beyond her the evoked sentiments, which softens the possibility of an *ad hominem* that would make the continuation of her speech impossible. Next, she anticipates possible arguments from a counter-discourse, by means of a prolepsis figure, in order to refute them:

*The arguments that the illegal interception of information and data aims at protecting nations against terrorism cannot be sustained.*

When addressing the president, she refers to the president of the Assembly and, at that moment, establishes a tripolar argumentation, in which there is a proponent, an opponent and the question itself, the *ad rem*, before an audience which is also part of the proposal, once she refers to the International Human Rights, the *ad humanitatem*.

*Friendly governments and societies that seek to build a true strategic partnership, as in our case, cannot allow recurring illegal actions to take place as if they were normal. They are unacceptable.*

b. *Post 2015 Development Agenda*

After enumerating the feats from her government and showing the changes that happened in the country in the social and educational scenario, - after the Rio-20 meeting on poverty and environment, - she sums up her thought in an attempt to make the spirit that governs the 2015 agenda clear:

*The meaning of the Post-2015 Agenda is the development of a world in which it is possible to grow, include and protect. Citizens with new hopes, new desires and new demands.*

The figure of *repetition*, with which greater stress is associated, besides being

deliberate, thus rhetorical, adds the presence effect to what she has proposed and considers feasible within the presented conditions.

### *c. The June 2013 demonstrations*

The theme of change is the keynote and, with it, the maintenance of democracy, presenting what she calls pacts, another technique of the figure of communion, once the pact presupposes an agreement, consent:

*We were educated day to day by the great struggles of Brazil. The street is our ground, our base.*

*We cannot just listen, we must act. We must transform this extraordinary energy into achievements for everyone.*

Pay attention to the *metaphor*, the street as the foundation, which appeared in posters carried in last June's demonstrations and the language used by the media, metonymically personified in the "voice from the streets," "listen to the streets" and other expressions that overran the news and other genres.

If in the first part the tone of the speech was that of irritation, present in the body language of the orator, projecting her body forward, her facial expression, the eyes fixed on the audience, with a defiant air, the second part is the tone of firm determination that she categorically assumes. All of this constitutes what the architectural system of rhetoric calls *actio*, composing the scenario of the enunciation, which includes all the items involved in the circumstances in which the pronunciation of the question is given: rhythm of speech, pauses, intonation, movement in the scene, body language and gestures and other elements that constitute the act of communication itself. Socially, it is a rite, once it happens in well determined circumstances, following pre-codified parameters with the possibility of predicting the sense effects it will produce. That can be clearly observed in the repercussions broadcasted by the international media on the same day of the event or even on the following day. It is possible to observe the thermometer of these reactions in news outlets such as *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, *BBC for World Latin America*; in Brazil, the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* and the magazines *Veja* and *Carta Capital*. Let's see some of them in important media outlets:

#### *The Guardian*

Brazil's president, Dilma Rousseff, has launched a blistering attack on US

espionage at the UN general assembly, accusing the NSA of violating international law by its indiscriminate collection of personal information of Brazilian citizens and economic espionage targeted on the country's strategic industries.

(...) the most serious diplomatic fallout over revelation of US spying.

(...) in a global rallying cry against what she portrayed as the overwhelming power of the US security apparatus.

(...) Brazil's new foreign minister, Luiz Alberto Figueiredo, will remain at the UN throughout the week and will meet his opposite number, John Kerry, Brazilian officials said, in an attempt to start mending the rift between the two countries.

### *O Estado de São Paulo*

In its electronic page, it published a summary of what had circulated in the international press:

For *The Guardian*, the Brazilian president has made a "harsh attack" against the US espionage and accused the American government of violating the international law when it performed an "indiscriminate collection" of information from Brazilians. It has deemed the tone of Dilma's discourse as "furious" and a "direct challenge to Obama," who was waiting to deliver his address immediately afterwards.

The Internet page of the BBC published the headline "Brazil's president Rousseff attacks the US over spy claims" and draws attention to what the address classifies as "untenable," the argument given by Washington that the espionage in Brazil had the object of protecting nations from terrorists.

*El País*, the most important Spanish newspaper, brings the following headline: "Rousseff denounces espionage practices before the United Nations."

*El Clarín*, from Argentina, stressed the fact that the US espionage was an affront to Brazil and a lack of respect that cannot be justified by combat to terrorism. *La Nación* called attention to the accusation that the US breached the international right, violated the human rights and civil liberty.

It can be noticed that these do not constitute insult (*ad hominem*), because the argument is amply based on the fact (*ad rem*), confirmed by the media, even if in the speech of President Obama they appear to be diluted, a technique employed by him in order to minimize the question, presenting a highly impacting picture,



with considerations that *a fortiori* overshadow those of the opponent.

In his speech, President Obama shows confidence, with an apparently calm countenance, at moments looking to one side of the audience and then to the other side, with his habitual pauses, which confer certain weight to his affirmations, leaving long-lasting resonances with the intention of leading the audience to reflection. In order to attain that, the figure of communion is present at all times, such as when he affirms “all of us have a work to do”, “the interest of all”, “the international community”.

In this scenario, it is possible to visualize the hierarchy of offices, with the tribune of the leaders from the UN above, and the presidential representatives below. The cameras focus on the room and its amplexity, closing in some personalities such as Obama’s Secretary of State, John Kerry, and also the represented parties which are cited in speeches, such as Mali or Libya.

### 3. *Peroratio: both speeches*

When closing their speeches, the orators must present the results of their argumentation. That is what both do, presenting a follow-up of their programs and executions. We have highlighted the words and expressions that indicate the profiles and decisions, as well as the indicator of the phase of conclusion. Actually, there are two discussions and they do not reach a consensus once the question remains.

In Dilma’s speech, three expressions can be found:

*‘to reiterate’* (The general debate offers the opportunity to reiterate the fundamental principles which guide my country’s foreign policy and our position with regards to pressing international issues);

*‘I repeat’* (those arms. Their use, I repeat, is heinous and inadmissible under any circumstances).

*‘I renew’* (I renew thus, an appeal in favor of a wide and vigorous convergence of political wills to sustain and reinvigorate the multilateral system, which has in United Nations its main pillar).

In Obama’s speech, the conclusion is well characterized and marked by the expressions: *‘Finally’*, *‘To summarize’*, *‘final point’*, *‘Ultimately’*. He finished with a figure of example, citing Martin Luther King and Mandela.

It is worth noticing his propositional attitude with *I believe*, which he repeats several times. It is known that this phrase refers not to the knowledge or ideas, but to the belief in something, so he is, with it, expressing his optimistic stance:

*I Believe such disengagement would be a mistake. I believe America must remain engaged for our own security.*

*But I believe we can embrace a different future.*

In his last argument, with anaphoric value, he reaffirms everything he has said before in his start point and reinforces the idea of community with a figure of communion:

*And that's why we remain convinced that this community of nations can deliver a more peaceful, prosperous and just world to the next generation.*

Bringing them both together now, for a final consideration:

*Dilma:*

- a. She maintains her initial point of view, as antagonist in the question of privacy violation. The antagonist's criticism.
- b. She was successful, based on the reaction from the press.

*Obama:*

- a. As a protagonist, he did not retract. He did not withdraw his position.
- b. He did not have anything to say, to refute, he could not appeal to the argument *ad ignorantiam*.

The pragmatic consequences could be noticed immediately, since the official visit of President Rousseff, that should have taken place the following month (October), was cancelled due to the fact that President Obama did not retract, uttering generic words aimed at the international community.

#### *4. Conclusion*

Finally, some reflections can be made taking three points into consideration:

- a. Interests are always at play: it is possible to understand each other without being in agreement.
- b. Diplomatic efforts require negotiations that not always produce effective results in the short run. Democracy demands effort.
- c. The art of coexisting is part of the civilizatory movement that societies go

through.

In fact, there is an incessant movement of construction of identities in which the individual and collective *ethos* are being molded and project themselves into the circulating images, either in the maintenance and reinforcement work of what already exists, or by proposing new ways of behaving and living in the world. That is why we consider the argumentation as a dynamic and interactive fact.

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