

# **The Dialogical Identity of Pragmatic Markers in Political Argumentation**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this discussion is to test the hypothesis that politicians attempt to construct their own political identity in argumentation by dint of some strategic maneuvering and as a part of their verbal interaction with their audience. Pragmatic markers seem to assist in this entire communicative process. Empirical findings are based on the one-million-word Corpus of English Argumentation (CEA). The data analysis provides important illustrations, in which pragmatic markers contribute to the dialogical sphere of argumentative discourse and to the political identity construction in interpersonal communication.

Research into the relation between language and politics is not new. Various works on such connection have attracted the attention of linguists as well as scholars working in other fields, such as sociology, philosophy, psychology and so on. Obviously, the frameworks for these studies have been shaped according to the interests of these scientists, who have attempted to enlighten many of the amazing features of political language.

This paper is an attempt to argue that political discourse, in particular argumentation, is dominated by the political identity construction by dint of some strategic maneuvering and as a part of politicians verbal interaction with their audience. It is thought to be a cumulative process, in which specific steps are taken until various objectives are or seem to be accomplished. Rather than analyzing the concrete individualistic aspects of politicians' speech in argumentation, the paper aims at providing an analysis based on the theory of dialogism, which offers a multidimensional interpretation of speech and communication and seeks the duality of voices in discourse.

Since such an analysis will be too broad for the scope of this paper, although very rich in elements, we wish to consider and weight the importance of only pragmatic markers. Our research and discussion has been restricted to their interactional relevance, (meta)pragmatic and (meta)communicative effects and political identity allocation in argumentation. Other aspects of pragmatic markers, such as semantic, cohesive or coherent values have been left out in this paper.

Our analysis is based on the one-million-word Corpus of English Argumentation (CEA)<sup>1</sup>, which is composed of oral and written argumentative texts. The research discussed in this paper has been narrowed down to only political texts, which make up about 64 % of the total corpus.

The principles I will mention below are central to Bakhtin's dialogism, and they best suit my argumentative needs in this paper. Bakhtin insists that dialogue is at the heart of humans interacting with each other and all meaning of this interaction is relative to the relation between interlocutors. Dialogue and dialogical aspects are the starting point of the interaction and not subsequent to that. The speaker's own voice is made up of the voices of others, but it still remains powerful in the dialogical sphere. In this respect, even language is seen as a dialogue, out of which it is hard to be perceived. Speaker's own words are uttered in a dialogue with the other interlocutor and have an impact on them and within a particular dialogue. Bakhtin (1981:280) notes that "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Such is the situation in any living dialogue".

Example 1 helps us to see how the dialogic aspects are applied to political speech through pragmatic markers. To be noted is the interactional relevance of them.

- (1)
- a. This is an enemy without conscience,
  - b. **and** they cannot be appeased.
  - c. **If** we're not fighting and destroying this enemy in Iraq, they would not be idle.
  - d. They would be plotting and killing Americans across the world and within our own borders.

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<sup>1</sup> Supported by the TextSTAT (Simple Text Analysis Tool) Software (<http://neon.niederlandistik.fu-berlin.de/en/textstat/>).

(George Bush, *War on terrorism*. 2005)

Mr. Bush has delivered several speeches, in which he has supported and justified his and his administration choice for the war that America started in Iraq. This short passage highlights the necessity of fighting and destroying terrorists. It is interesting to see how the pragmatic markers used in (b) and (c), that is *and* and *if*, structure the interaction between the speaker and the audience. The semantic relation between (a) and (b) can be established even without the use of the coordinating conjunction *and*, but the speaker intends to display his position on the issues and also to make the other voice heard in his utterance. The cause-result relation established by *and* (in the meaning of *so*) demonstrates the speaker tentative to have an impact on his interlocutor (either present or absent, real or imaginary) by interacting with them within the dialogical sphere of silent conversation. In (b), *and* Mr. Bush anticipates a reaction a response from the interlocutor and consequently make apparent the pragmatic meaning of it. It does not seem to me that the proposition in (b) is just the result for the cause stated in (a). Rather, it is the inclusion of the both voices of the interlocutors, who attempt to solve divergences of opinions and contrary stances.

Mr. Bush dialogue with the interlocutor continues in (c), which appears to be a way of argument progression on the issue of war. *If* does not offer much in terms of meaning but it certainly creates the environment, in which different voices and position between interlocutors could be confronted and evaluated. The interactional relevance of both *and* and *if* is displayed throughout the short structured passage. Their major role is to informationally and interactionally function in discourse structuring and progression. Mr. Bush argument for his choice is not simply a justification of this action but also a confrontation with the silent interlocutor.

Argumentation involves not only social or political interactional value but also pragmatic and communicative effects. Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Kruiger (1987:7) have defined argumentation as "a social, intellectual, verbal activity serving to justify or refute an opinion, consisting of a constellation of statements and directed toward obtaining the approbation of an audience". Thus, speakers present arguments and seek

support for a disputable position or issue. Their speech is audience-oriented, constructed and based on their linguistic and metalinguistic repertoire of persuasive and manipulative strategies. This is achieved by forwarding to the audience the information needed for creating and the desired pragmacommunicative effects. However, their underlying discourse structure comprises an asymmetric distribution of information and knowledge with the audience, although the divergences of opinions and stances dominate after all the core part of argumentation.

Example 2 illustrates how the speaker provides information to the audience and at the same time attempt to align the asymmetric distribution of it. And coming to our point, how pragmatic markers function (meta)pragmacommunicatively in the progression of the politicians argumentative discourse.

- (2)
- a. **If** anyone had told me when I walked into 10 Downing Street in May 1997 that before I left Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness would be sharing power in Northern Ireland, I would have thought they were mad.
  - b. **But** I never believed the problem of Northern Ireland was insoluble.
  - c. When people told me I was crazy to be spending so much time on the issue, I told them I was convinced that **if** we worked at it, **if** we kept going, in the end we would be able to find a solution acceptable to both sides.
  - d. **I admit** that at times I came close to losing hope,
  - e. **but** I knew above all else the importance of having a process.
  - f. The talking **had to** go on, we **had to** keep it moving forward and prevent a vacuum developing that would have soon been filled by violence.

(Tony Blair, *Together, we took some risks for peace. I believe they were worth it.* 2008)

In (a) Mr. Blair presents the audience with an imaginary situation, part of his meta knowledge of the audience not shared knowledge, to achieve pragmatic effect and to reply to those potential voices that seemed skeptical about finding a solution to the case. This becomes even clearer in (b), which contradicts the previous situation. In fact it is not a contraction *per se*, but a strategic move to present his belief in finding a solution to the problem, which, undoubtedly, could have been presented as a proposition on its own right

at the beginning of the passage. The presence of other positions and opinions (either in (a) or (b)) strengthen his stance. *But* in (b) plays an important role in this.

The pragmatic effect achieved sets the environment for the speaker to metacommunicate with the audience through language and by means of the codification of the message (in proposition (c)) and the relationship between interlocutors, he and the audience who do not necessarily share the same opinion. The pragmatic effect and the metacommunication are achieved owing to the pragmatic marker *if* in (c), which has been used twice and strategically, instead of, say, *should*, to involve the abovementioned effects.

The second part of the passage is similar to the first but only that the argument is progressing even more. In (d) the performative verb *I admit* introduces the proposition, which as in (a) is Mr. Blair's meta knowledge of the audience not shared knowledge. In (e) Mr. Blair presents shared knowledge with the audience and the same time dialogizes the proposition and neutralizes the effect of the proposition in (d). The last statement, unlike (c) is more definite because discourse has progressed to a desired point in argumentation and because the asymmetric distribution of knowledge and information has been aligned. The uses of *had to* in (f) are certainly indicative of the speaker firm position but at the same time sign of the author attempt to exclude the presence of voices in the proposition, which would be more apparent with *if*.

Political identity allocation is a third aspect that pragmatic markers display in argumentation. As it was shown in Example (2), the use of meta knowledge of the audience not shared knowledge or background information by the politician was exploited to his advantage. Pragmatic markers both in Example 1 and 2, marked the modifications of both propositional information and above all of the speaker's intention. Thus, the speaker intends to display and negotiate his position and orientation. By directing their utterance to the audience, politicians also display themselves to others. Their orientation has interactional relevance but also causes pragmacommunicative effects and allocates to them a certain type of identity, say, different from that of the other interlocutor. Example 3 illustrates such strategic move.

- (3) a. **I believe** every Senator on the other side of the aisle,  
b. **if** they were honest,

- c. would acknowledge that the same unyielding, unbending, dogmatic approach to judicial confirmation has in large part been responsible for the kind of poisonous atmosphere that exists in this Chamber regarding judicial nominations.
- d. It is tempting, **then**, for us on this side of the aisle to go tit for tat.

(Barack Obama, *Confirmation of Judge John Roberts*. 2009)

Mr. Obama main concern in this extracted passage is not to argue in favour or against a certain issue, but to display his authoritative self and to show his position in relation to other Senators. His authoritative self appearance comes out as a dual picture, which includes the self of his political opponents. His linguistic choices intervene and thus affect the outcome of his political speech by displaying a certain identity compared to the opponents. The performative verb *I believe* in (a) introduces the proposition expressed in (a) and (c) as a belief of Mr. Obama. However, its effect or role is greatly diminished by the presence of the parenthetical clause in (b), which, to me, is the main proposition that the speaker wishes to convey to the audience. Such a statement would have been hard to stand alone as a separate utterance. The strategic use of *if* is in good part a move to express Mr. Obama's opinion about the other silent interlocutors, which comes as a dialogic coexistence with its counterpart. In (d) the speaker displays his final and authoritative decision about further political actions. Then in (d) shows his progression to the decision reached and serves as a linguistic and, of course, political threatening device. It seems that the author develops and displays a self in dialogue with others by sending and displaying his own intentions and identity as well.

In sum, language and politics are in mutual interaction and feed on each other. Politician's intentions and their interlocutors' expected interpretation coexist within the same utterance or discourse and their linguistic elements appear to be dialogical in the dialogic sphere of exchanges, whether real or imaginary. The presence of different voices enriches every aspect of language use and the main purpose of this paper was to tentatively demonstrate this fact with pragmatic markers, which displayed interactional relevance, metapragmatic effects and political identity allocation. Further studies, however, have to demonstrate their importance in the dialogical sphere of

discourse in comparison to other lexical devices and many other issues related to their status and as part of the overall linguistic system.

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