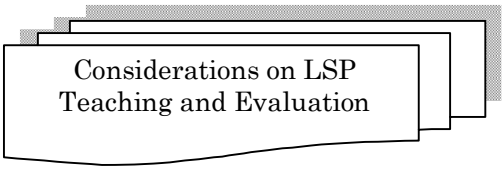

PERSUASIVE SPEAKING - TYPES, STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES (a topic for class activities)

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Abstract

Persuasion is of utmost importance in business and the students who are going to become businesspersons deserve a special training in this respect. The topic could be introduced for study during the language classes, when communication skills are taken into consideration; the results obtained could make the attempt worthwhile.

***Keywords**:* Persuasion, persuasion strategy, persuasion outcome, persuasive appeals

Persuasion and business

"Persuasion is the act of convincing someone, through communication, to change a particular belief, attitude, or behaviour" (Bradley, 1991) or to make a person act / react in a desired way. Some individuals might be reluctant to the idea of "persuasion" considering this ability "dangerous" in itself, and even some students might be uncomfortable with the idea of using persuasive speaking or being influenced by it.

From the very beginning such possible apprehensions must be driven away by organizing a group debate in which three points should be suggested for discussion: 1) the differences between coercion and persuasion and the benefits of the latter; 2) the fact that persuasion can / cannot be worthwhile; 3) the fact that persuasion can / cannot be ethical. In the end some conclusions must be drawn.

As regards the first aspect, while coercion, besides being illegal would probably be ineffective (students performing from fear of some threats would rarely appreciate the trainer or the subject, or the employees working for abusive employers are less productive, etc.), persuasion would make the listener of the message want to think / act in the directed / guided way. And anyway, would our life be better without some individuals' ability to persuade us?

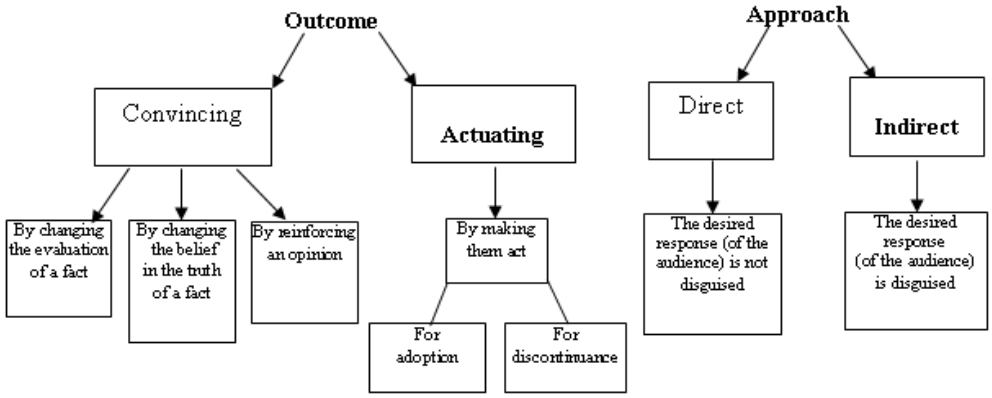
It depends, of course, on what direction persuasion goes; ethical persuasion can play a worthwhile role in anyone's life; many good things can be accomplished through persuasion, making it worthwhile. Using "Brainstorming" the students can be asked to make up lists of beneficial outcomes of persuasive speaking for the community, family life, student life, personal life, etc.

On the other hand the problem of ethical / non-ethical persuasion raises important questions. According to some scholars "ethical persuasion is communication that does not depend on false or misleading information to induce attitude change in an audience. Unfortunately not all persuasion is ethical, even by this simple standard" (Bradley, 1991). There are examples of unethical messages; some of them "can border on deception", others can be absolutely false.

An interesting activity is to ask students to discriminate among advertisements, commercials, editorials, the sales pitch, the ones that have an ethical message from the others with a partially or totally unethical one. These messages can be presented and analysed by the group of students who will then decide if they correspond or not to the definition given to ethical persuasion. It is important for the students to be able to make the distinction between the different types of persuasion.

The scholars in communication divide the persuasive messages according to "outcome" and "approach". Thus according to its outcome persuasion can be divided into convincing and actuating messages, while approaches can be direct and indirect. A simple flow-chart, with some explanations reinforced by examples will be enough to introduce the subject into discussion.

Types of persuasion according to:



The persuasive strategy

In order to make their message persuasive the speakers should develop a certain strategy. As part of it, they should concentrate on three aspects: 1) to explain an existing situation in such a way that it might be considered "a problem", in other words to formulate a problem; 2) to come with a solution to this "problem" and explain it; 3) to explain the part which the members of the audience can and must play to put that solution into effect, to establish the desired audience behaviour. Therefore, each of the three steps requires special attention and good planning of the message.

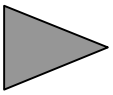
(1) Thus, when establishing a problem, the speaker is confronted with three basic questions: Does the problem relate to the respective audience? Can the situation be considered a problem from the audience's point of view? Does this situation / problem really need a change / something to be done?

(2) The next step is to offer the audience a solution / a plan proposed to correct the problem. Other three questions will have to be taken into consideration by the speaker: Will the solution/plan work? Will the solution/plan be practical? What will be the advantage/disadvantage of the plan?

(3) To establish the desired audience behaviour the speaker should answer three questions again: What part can the audience play in putting the plan into action? How do the audience members go about playing their part? And what are the direct rewards of this response?

As it can be seen, the delivery of a persuasive message represents a complex activity of which the students should be made aware by the trainer's clear presentation. It is only afterwards that the students should be asked to practise the strategy of persuasive massage by delivering speeches. The most common way is to suggest to the class topics such as: "Standardized tests should / should not be used as the main criteria for admission in universities"; "A university campus should / should not be located in the central area of a city"; "Presence at courses and seminars should / should not be compulsory", etc.

The students are asked to volunteer for delivering speeches with a well planned strategy, according to the steps previously presented. The rest of the group can analyse the speeches, decide about the performance and suggest improvements.



Persuasive appeals

Persuasion is achieved by means of communication and many researchers consider the two concepts synonymous. In its turn the persuasive strategy is put into effect through the use of persuasive appeals which supply the audience with reasons to accept the plan presented by the speaker; these appeals make the audience willing to adopt the plan and act / react according to it. These appeals are based on three devices the human being is endowed with: credibility, logic and emotions.

1) As regards the appeals based on credibility, "its most important aspects are "authoritativeness" and "trustworthiness" (Bradley, 1991) of the respective speaker. They refer to the competence, reputation and the capacity of the speaker to be believed" (Barry, 1986). What happens in case of a student? Is he/she credible? As long as the topic under discussion refers to academic life, he/she might be perceived positively and his message accepted on the grounds of credibility. But other types of topics might also be taken into consideration by a student for a speech; in this case there are two possibilities: (1) an expert in the topic can be quoted and (2) the students should be trained to establish their own credibility by introducing themselves truly and reasonably.

In conclusion the students should be explained that if an audience considers a speaker and his sources of information credible, they are ready to take into consideration his logical appeals as well.

2) As regards the logical appeals, they supply the audience with a series of statements that lead to the conclusion desired by the speaker. There are different forms of logical reasoning that the speakers use in their persuasive message. The most common are deduction and induction.

As well known, deduction is reasoning from a generality to a specific, being demonstrated in syllogisms, which are arguments made up of two premises and a conclusion. Unfortunately, a complete syllogism (which offers the audience the possibility to examine all parts) is not used in logical appeals, being replaced by enthymemes (a composed version of a syllogism where the underlying premise is concealed). According to Barry, "these enthymemes become dangerous when they disguise faulty premises; in every day life they take the form of illogical rules. In a public speech the audience might feel frustrated when subjected to arguments that do not supply valid reasons" (Barry, 1986). That is why the students should be advised to take a close look at the deductive reasoning – when they use it – and to make sure that the reasons they start from in deduction are sure, especially the underlying premise of the argument.

As regards induction, it means reasoning from the specific evidence to a general conclusion; we observe that something is true for a specific sample and we consider that it is generally true. It could be recommended where the speaker is addressing a sceptical or hostile audience and it is better to avoid becoming unpopular from the beginning when making general, undesired statements.

Besides these two common types of logical reasoning there are some other forms which can also be used in persuasive speech. These are: reasoning by sign, casual reasoning, reasoning by analogy.

Sign reasoning is reasoning from specific evidence to a specific conclusion without explaining how the evidence and conclusion are related. It is recommended in a speech when the argument will be easily accepted by the audience. An example might be: "it is dark outside, it must be night".

Casual reasoning is reasoning from one specific to another specific, and when using it the speaker is going to prove that something happened / will happen because of another cause. In this case two types of reasoning are used, namely effect – to – cause reasoning (when the speaker is referring to events that have taken place) and cause – to – effect reasoning (when he is speaking about future ones). An example for the first situation could be a speaker claiming the students'

absences from class because of their being employed, while the second case should be the speaker who expreses the probability of more students being absent because most of them are employed.

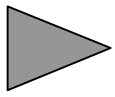
Reasoning by analogy is reasoning from specific evidence to a specific conclusion by claiming that something is like something else. There are two types of analogy – literal (two things that are really alike are compared) and figurative (two things that are essentially different are compared).

An example of reasoning by analogy could be a speaker encouraging the audience (students) saying that they can have good results at an exam in spite of the fact that a colleague has just failed; in this case he should argue that all the students are alike except in one respect – the student with a poor result missed the classes.

"Emotional appeals are psychological and that is why they are particularly powerful" (McConnel, 1992). Among them fear can be an effective persuader and it is used especially by modern advertising; as these appeals can be detrimental if they go too far, they should be used with moderation. As regards anger, the appeals based on it could be successful if the feeling is honest; pity is an especially powerful emotion by reminding the audience that somewhere, someone is suffering. The students should be told that sincerity is the key to an emotional appeal, and that most audience is able to identify false emotions, rejecting them.

In order to practise with the students the different types of persuasive appeals they could be asked to examine some "everyday appeals" which they select (the appeal might be one addressed by a student to a teacher, by a child to his parent, by a friend to another, by a politician to the voters etc). They have to decide which elements of the respective appeal are based on logic, emotion or credibility.

Another activity is to indicate the students some messages such as: teacher to student: "Come regularly to this course"; parent to children: "Don't go too close to fire"; charity organization to potential volunteers: "Join us with your money and time". The students should indicate the best type of appeal for each message and develop a short speech on each topic.



Techniques for persuasive speaking

These include some stages (5) that the speaker should cover: to set a clear persuasive purpose; to analyse and adapt it to his/her audience; to establish a common ground; to organize the material according to the expected response; to use a variety of appeals and supporting materials.

To train the students in these techniques the teacher should stress some ideas, namely: as regards the purpose, it should always be specific, attainable and worded from the audience's point of view, reflecting the response desired by the public; the speaker should know as much as possible about his audience and try to adapt to it, stressing those values that are considered most important by the members of the audience; it is important for the speaker to find and stress the similarities existing between him/her and the audience, by proving, in this way, that they have a common ground; a positive attitude towards a persuasive speech is easier to achieve if it has been preceded by a general agreement of the audience in some points; therefore the points in a speech should be carefully arranged to get the expected response; in organizing a persuasive speech no appeal shall be left aside and all of them should be taken into consideration and combined to get the best results.

The final activity suggested for this topic would be a thorough analysis, point by point, of a speech given by some important personalities; only afterwards a volunteer will present his own persuasive speech which should be analysed by the groups of students.

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