

A study of the use of persuasive strategies in Religious Oratory

(This paper was presented at the International Conference of the Linguistic Society of India at CIIL, Mysore in Nov. 2013)

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For Reference:

Mohan, Braj (2014), A Study of the Use of Persuasive Strategies in Religious Oratory, *International Journal of Research (IJR)*, Volume-1, Issue-1.

Keywords:

Strategic Communication, Persuasion, Pragmatics, Rhetoric, Communication

Abstract:

This paper aims at identifying the persuasive strategies that religious orators use to persuade their audience and win huge following. Language is not an innocent and objective tool for communicating meaning. Language is also used for persuading, dissuading, manipulating others, and forming various ideologies of power and politics. Various users of language, such as, politicians, advocates, business professionals, and religious preachers, gain immense power, influence and wealth by using language strategically. Religious oratory of the orators like Ashram and such other godmen as Nirmal Baba, Baba Jaigurudev, Shri Ravishankar, etc., in India have been found capable of winning a huge number of followers, who do not hesitate in accepting these religious orators as incarnation of God. The power of these orators lies not only in forging acceptable religious ideologies but also in strategic use of paralinguistic strategies such as pitch, pause, and pace in their oratory. In addition to this, like politicians, they use certain sociodrama to attract and grasp public attention.

Introduction

It may be interesting to research how these religious orators use linguistic and paralinguistic strategies for forging and supporting certain ideologies and persuading public to follow them. In my paper I propose to analyze the speeches of Asaram in order to get some insight into his persuasive techniques that he practiced in his religious oratory for influencing people and winning huge public following.

In my paper I propose to use discourse dissection model (DDM) that takes care of both linguistic and paralinguistic factors simultaneously (Mohan 2013). This paper aims at finding the answer to these questions:

1. What are various characteristics of religious oratory?
2. What are the persuasive strategies used in religious oratory?
3. How do the linguistic factors and the paralinguistic factors work in forging his religious ideology?
4. How is religious rhetoric different from political oratory?

This work may sensitize people about the persuasive use of language and attract the attention of the fraternity of linguists towards this area of persuasive discourse, where linguistics and social psychology seem to interact.

Analysis and Discussion

Observation technique based upon Aristotelian method coupled with Discourse Dissection Method (DDM) has been used to identify the characteristics of religious rhetoric. In Aristotelian method, speeches

are analyzed in terms of three persuasive tools namely *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. I referred to these tools of persuasion for getting a general understanding of religious oratory. I selected a sample speech of Asaram Bapu and analyzed it using DDM. In this method, a speech is divided into several parts called Minimal Utterance Unit (MUU), and then each unit is studied in terms of Pitch, Pause, Intensity, and rhetorical strategies. This method is justified as it takes into consideration both the linguistic content and the paralinguistic cues. This technique is justified as spoken discourse is essentially different from written discourse as spoken discourse has the benefit of paralinguistic factors such as pitch, pause, pace, and intensity, which influence the meaning and effect of a speech.

Religious oratory is essentially persuasive in nature as it aims at persuading the audience to believe that whatever is being told by the religious preacher is true. For this purpose, religious oratory uses all the three tools of persuasion namely *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* as given by Aristotle in his *On Rhetoric* (). Let us understand these tools in some detail.

Ethos

Ethos has been defined as the trustworthiness and character of the speaker. It deals with "the effect or appeal of the speaker's character" (Foss 1996: 29). *Ethos* is determined by three characteristics: moral character or integrity, intelligence and good will. The orator should speak in such a way that he should establish his trustworthiness as we believe fair-minded and trustworthy people readily and quickly (Kennedy 2007: 38-39). He can do this by referring to his past good actions and appealing to authority.

When we examine religious oratory we find that the religious orators use the following strategies for establishing their trustworthiness:

1. The religious wear such clothes as they look gentle and saintly according to the popular unsaid norms of dress code of the culture of the audience. No Muslim religious preacher ever preaches without cap. Similarly the Hindu preachers usually wear one colour clothes. They usually wear *kurta* and *dhoti* of yellow, ochre, or white colour for this purpose. They may also adjust their looks to popular norms of religiosity and spirituality by growing beard or shaving head whatever is applicable in their sect. Other paraphernalia like rosaries and *kamandals* also strengthen their image of 'holiness' and enhance their trustworthiness.

2. These preachers name people and quote from the sources that are trustworthy in the eye of the audience. Their choice of 'holy' language also plays a role in establishing their trustworthiness. In this way the religious preachers borrow trustworthiness from these trustworthy things. Preachers quote long quotations from Arabic or Sanskrit scriptures before the audience innocent of these languages. However, this strategy helps them in establishing their religious and trustworthy image.

3. Religious orators generally use low pitch and slow pace in their oratory, especially in the beginning of their discourse. This low pitch and slow pace indicate that the speaker is in complete self control and has gravity and authority.

Pathos

"Pathos concerns appeals designed to generate emotions in the audience"

(Foss 1996: 29). Emotions affect the judgment of the audience (Kennedy 2007: 39). In anger, people's reaction is not the same as when they are happy. If a speaker wants to put the audience in a particular frame of mind by arousing a particular emotion, he needs to know all the three aspects of that particular emotion — the state of mind when people are in a particular emotion, object of emotion and the reasons that produce that particular emotion. For example, if the speaker wants to make the audience angry as required for persuading them to do something, he needs to know what their state of mind will be when they are angry. He also needs to know against whom people are generally angry and what reasons make people angry. If he knows these things, he will choose particular techniques to make the audience angry, attributing the things causing anger to the object of anger (Kennedy 2007: 113).

The basic emotions of the religious oratory are fear and compassion. Description of the life after death and description of hell fills the audience with fear. Now an expert religious preacher offers them very easy and effective remedy of these fears in the form of his religious ideology. Compassion which is mostly described as a divine emotion is also given a lot of importance in religious preaching. However, the interpretation of this compassion may not always be neutral and it may have certain clauses and conditions. The main motto of the attendees of these religious discourses is bliss and peace. For these emotive effects religious orators use of emotive metaphors. They may also play with the emotive cords of the audience by mentioning emotive incidents. The use of emotionally charged words also created a wonderful persuasive effect. Most

of the religious preachers try to forge the ideology that the life after death is more important than this life. They sometimes claim that all the uses of this life are 'unreal' and meaningless.

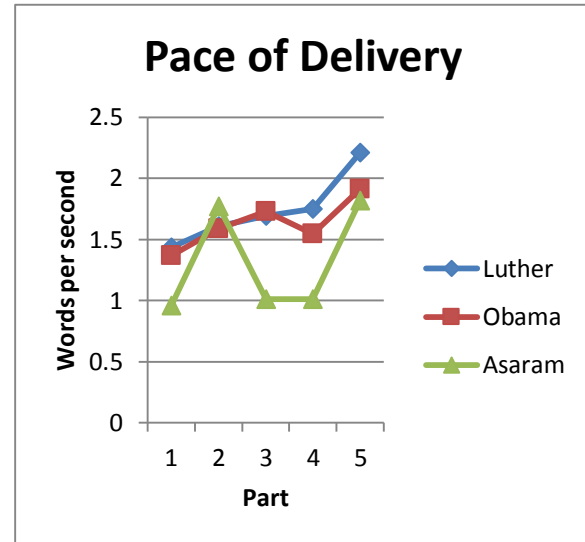
Logos

Generally appeal to logic is a powerful tool of persuasion as man is rational creature and wants some proof before believing in something. A speech without logical data and proofs looks insincere and this diminishes trustworthiness of the speaker. But religious oratory may not always follow this principle. In fact they are often found questioning the audience's ability of logical perception. In religious discourses, quite often the audience are presented as 'ignorant'. Their ignorance can be removed only when they believe in what the preacher says without raising any question. Any effort of logical argumentation will be treated as 'heresy' or *'kufra'*. Faith is given highest importance in religious oratory, hence there is no place for logical argumentation. However, religious orators use some stories and examples as paradigms for supporting their ideologies. The innocent audience use these examples and allusions for their spiritual deductions. However, Dr. Zakir Naik, relies on logic for persuasion in his discourse. He is known for his volley of references to the authentic sources before an audience innocent of these sources. Interestingly, Dr Naik does not know Sanskrit and his references are mostly ill presented and have contradictions.

Paralinguistic strategies

Pace or tempo of speech is an important part of speech delivery style. Pace of delivery of a religious speech of Asaram has

been studied with a view to getting an insight into the role of pace in religious oratory in general and in Asaram's oratory in particular.

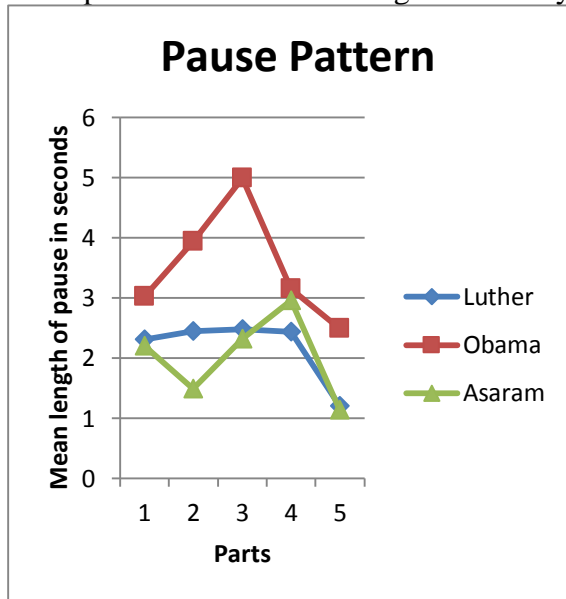


In the graph above it can be seen that Asaram's pace of delivery is quite slow in comparison to Martin Luther King Jr and Barack Obama. Slow pace indicates self-control, gravity and confidence hence enhances trustworthiness of the speaker (Mohan 2013: 201). In religious oratory, establishing trustworthiness and showing gravity are given very high importance hence the use of slow pace in Asaram's speech is quite justifiable. It is also noteworthy that political orators generally use slow pace in the beginning in order to connect to the audience and establish their trustworthiness. Once they feel connected they slowly raise their pace as per the need of the strategies used. (ibid: 187-89) Political orators accelerate their pace and raise their pitch particularly when they talk about anger and enthusiasm and lower their pitch and slow down their pace when they talk about sorrow and peace. Since religious oratory is about fear, compassion, love, and peace the use of low pace is justified.

Temporary rise in pace in the second unit can be attributed to the use of the strategy of repetition that the orator uses for enhancing the issue infusing an undertone of enthusiasm.

Pause Pattern

A close analysis of Asaram’s speech shows that the pause patterns in his speech are irregular and inconsistent. It is interesting to note that quite frequent and short pauses are used in religious oratory.

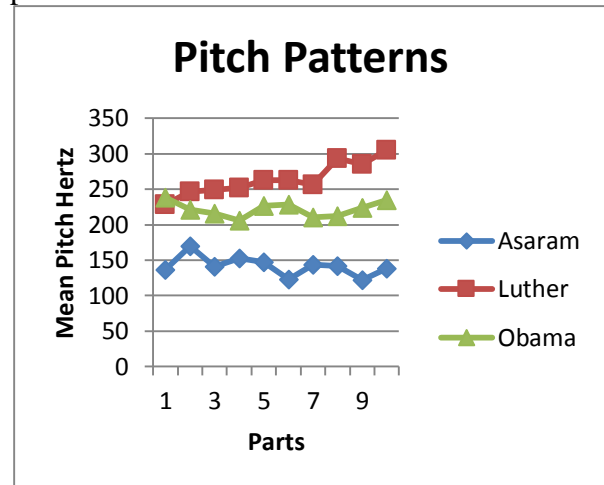


Since pauses not only punctuate but also accentuate tone groups, they contribute to the meaning of the utterance. As we see in the graph above, there is considerable similarity in pause patterns between the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr and Asaram. This fact can be interpreted in the light of the fact that King Jr was a Baptist minister and a religious orator of repute. In Obama’s speech the pauses are longer and less frequent.

Pitch

The analysis of pitch distribution in Asaram’s speech shows that he speaks with

a low pitch. He seldom adds energy to his speech by raising his pitch. High pitch has been found associated with the emotion of anger, enthusiasm, and the strategy of motivating the audience while low pitch is related to the emotions of pity, sorrow and peace.

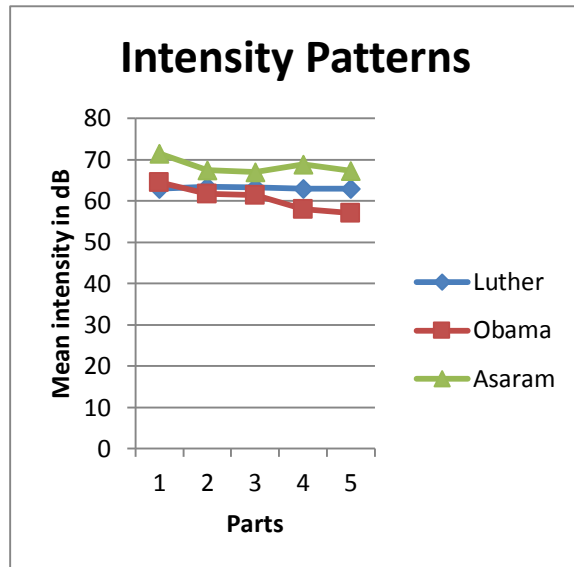


The use of low pitch in the religious oratory of Asaram can be attributed to the emotions that dominate religious oratory. Religious oratory has its foundation upon fear, compassion, and peace, hence the use of low pitch is justified. Furthermore, low pitch adds to the gravity and trustworthiness of the speaker. The religious orators enhance their trustworthiness by using low pitch coupled with slow pace.

Intensity

Intensity of speech is an important factor of paralinguistic strategies. With a view to getting an insight into Asaram’s oratory, the effect of intensity on persuasion has been studied. General observation of religious speeches indicates that most of the great religious orators prefer using high intensity of speech while maintaining low pitch. It’s one important reason may be the ample availability of time as religious speeches are long. In these long speeches the speakers get enough time to charge their

lungs with air at shorter intervals. As we see, in religious rhetoric, the length of MUUs is quite short and pauses are quite frequent



As we see in the graph above, intensity of the speech of Asaram is quite high. It is far higher than that of Obama and King Jr. This high intensity of voice shows the speaker calm and serious. It lends authority to the voice of the speaker. Martin Luther King Jr is slightly closer to Asaram in Intensity, which shows that King Jr was also religious orator and his political oratory also had some features of religious rhetoric.

Sociodrama

The word sociodrama is used to describe all those extra-rhetorical activities that the orators do to influence their audience. This sociodrama ranges from Mulayam Singh's wearing skull cap to Karseva and Rath-yatras of different political parties. Religious orators also creatively practice this sociodrama to influence their audience. Osho Rajneesh would wear very colourful frill-caps and gaudy robes. Asaram also wears quite

colourful robes, frills, colourful frill-bracelets, laced turbans, etc. His sociodrama also includes decorating himself sometimes like Lord Krishna with flute and sometimes like Lord Shiva with trident and *damru*. He play *Holi* with his disciples and dances on the stage in different styles.

There is a basic difference between the sociodrama of the politicians and that of the religious orators. Politicians' all sociodrama aims at showing them like the audience while religious orators mostly try to show themselves different from the audience. The political orators try to use this sociodrama as a part of the strategy of 'sharing goal and showing association' in order to fulfil the intention of connecting to the audience. With this purpose a Hindu politician may wear a skull cap while addressing the Muslim audience. Religious orators try to mystify themselves by using styles which look 'uncommon'. By showing themselves as 'uncommon' and different from the audience they claim certain type of superiority. This superiority helps them in forging and strengthening this belief that the orator is something like 'superhuman' having some special powers.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion we reach the following findings.

- Religious orators use low pitch, slow pace, high intensity, and frequent pauses in their religious discourse. This slow pace and low pitch lends gravity and seriousness to these orators which enhance their *Ethos* (trustworthiness). This is a prominent feature of Asaram's speech delivery style.
- Like politicians religious orators also use social drama for forging and strengthening their religious ideologies. This sociodrama extends from dress and decorum

to their actions. Mostly these activities are quite suggestive and well-intended for certain effect. But there is a significant difference in the sociodrama of politicians and that of religious orators—

Politicians try to associate themselves with the audience by using their sociodrama as a part of the strategy of ‘sharing goal and showing association’, while great religious orators try to show themselves different from the audience.

- Religious rhetoric relies more upon *Ethos* and *Pathos* than upon *Logos*. For creating positive persuasive *Ethos*

(trustworthiness), religious orators quote use the strategies like quoting from authentic sources, mentioning trustworthy people, and showing religiosity and saintliness through their clothes, voice and words.

- Since language is complex in its nature and the genre of public speech certainly has these complexities, there is always a possibility of using some subtler strategies for various purposes. Still, these findings can give some meaningful hints to the student of religious rhetoric and public speech.

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About Author

Braj Mohan is a professionally qualified trainer of the English language and communication. He is a PhD in English with a specialization in Linguistics and Phonetics from EFLU, Hyderabad (India). He has a decade long experience of teaching language and communication and has been widely published in the area of persuasive and strategic communication. Currently he is an Assistant Professor of English Language and Communication at Galgotias University, Greater Noida (India).