

Aggressive Rhetoric: Prosodic and Kinetic Means

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Abstract

This paper deals with the definition of aggressive rhetoric as the persuasive method in political communication, the transformation of the concept 'speech aggression' towards its positive semantic, the complex of aggressive speech means on the verbal and paraverbal levels. Verbal means of an aggressive rhetoric are the rhetorical figures, such as the antithesis that creates the greatest emotional stress due to its underlying semantic contrast. Paraverbal means of aggressive rhetoric are the prosody and co-speech gestures of the antitheses.

Index Terms: political communication, aggressive rhetoric, rhetorical figures, antithesis, verbal, prosodic, kinetic.

1. Introduction

This article attempts to define the concept of 'aggressive rhetoric' and describe its components on the verbal and paraverbal levels. The object of this study is German political discourse. The subject under analysis is the integral unit combining verbal, prosodic and kinetic means that add aggressiveness to political speech. The material for analysis was provided by the public speeches of Gregor Gysi and Joschka Fischer.

2. Aggressive rhetoric: the prosodic and kinetic aspect

Political communication is under the constant scrutiny of both ordinary citizens who themselves are parties to it, and researchers who study its mechanisms, types, and implementation methods. Political communication is of pronounced rhetorical nature. Rhetorical competence helps speakers convey their views to a wider audience, make contact, position themselves in a favorable light, convince the audience of the correctness of their views and encourage specific action. The more resolute, confident and aggressive a politician, the more persuasive his speech.

2.1. Verbal aggression

Initially verbal aggression was understood as a form of verbal behavior aimed at insulting or deliberately harming an individual or a group of people. It was accompanied by a highly emotional state of the speaker and the use of invective language. At the same time, it was noted that an essential feature of verbal aggression is its expressive and emotive coloration, which increases the persuasiveness of speech. Now researchers note the transformation of the concepts of 'aggression', 'aggressive' towards positive semantic content. Aggressiveness is becoming increasingly associated with persistent, ambitious, and charismatic. It should also be noted that these changes are caused by the propagandizing influence of the media, which specifically affect the formation of associative fields of various phenomena and provide them with the necessary focus. This

means that the media tend to stereotype the word 'aggressive' and give its meaning a positive connotation. Thus, based on the current trend in interpreting verbal aggression, we can speak of aggressive rhetoric as the art of persistently, resolutely implementing speech impact in order to convince the public of the correctness of one's decisions and actions. It is particularly relevant in the context of political communication. Politicians should be aggressive as each party seeks to win. If a politician is not aggressive, he will simply be replaced by another one. What's more, the public likes aggressive politicians. Such politicians inspire admiration, trust, a sense of stability and security. Charismatic politicians have always been characterized by sharp statements, categorical views, and aggressive speech [1]. Aggressive rhetoric is inherent in politicians, whose position is contrary to the majority of the public, the opinion of their political allies, members of Parliament. We see its manifestations in acute crisis moments in political life.

2.2. Verbal means of aggressive rhetoric

Aggressive rhetoric is verbally implemented with rhetorical figures, which are markers of the *rhetorical force* of political speech.

As a stylistic device, antithesis is used to create contrasting characteristics of the described phenomenon and is widely used in the speeches of Gregor Gysi and Joschka Fischer. Antithesis is a rhetorical device in which an opposition or contrast of ideas is expressed [2]. Politicians use rhetorical figures in order to urge the audience adhere to his ideas and proceed to action. The antithesis is the prevalent rhetorical device, being meant to point to a strong conceptual opposition, with the ultimate goal to shock the audience. In this respect, the antithesis proves its rhetorical strength since it allows the orator the choice to point to those aspects that suit him best in positively and, respectively, negatively qualifying either term of the opposition. The force of the antithesis resides in the choice of the elements brought forth by the orator and in the way the latter constructs the oppositional relationship between them. Its persuasive effect is therefore measured in the "visibility" it provides a term of the opposition with, thus urging the audience to take action [3]

Being considered a brilliant figure of speech, the use of the antithesis is to be carefully pondered since, in case it is not artful, its effect fades away [4]. The lexical basis of this device is formed by antonyms, e.g.: *Und dann werden wir das Gegenteil von Frieden haben, sondern wir werden dauerhaft Instabilität, dauerhaft Krieg, dauerhaft Unterdrückung in dieser Region bekommen noch mit ganz anderen Konsequenzen (And then we will have the opposite of peace and we will get permanent instability, permanent war, permanent suppression in this region with absolutely different consequences)*. [5]. This use of antithesis in the 'pure' form can be compared with the 'verbal game' used by a speaker to enhance the emotional and psychological impact of the opposition, e.g.: *Fragen Sie doch einmal einen Richter, ob ein Diebstahl aus edlerem Motiv im*

Vergleich zu einem Diebstahl aus unedlerem Motiv kein Diebstahl ist? (Just ask a judge whether a crime committed for a noble cause is not a crime if it is compared to a crime committed for a less noble cause) [6]. Often, instead of the classical antithesis built on the contrast of parallel structures and antonyms, speakers use emotional opposition. In this case, it is not antonyms in the proper sense that are opposed, but words, utterances, phrases, to which positive or negative appraisal is attributed in the context, e.g.: *Wir setzen darauf, und das, bitte ich euch, ist der Kern des Ganzen, nicht ob wir mit einem guten Gewissen nach Hause gehen, nicht ob wir uns mit Farbbeuteln beschmissen haben, sondern ob wir politische Entscheidungen treffen* (We insist, and that, please note, is the core of everything, not that we go home with a clear conscience or paint bombs are thrown at us, but that we take political decisions) [5]. This conceptual antithesis is used to highlight the importance of political decision-making, rather than protesting with cans of paint. We also see emotional contextual opposition in the antithesis used in G. Gysi's speech: *Die USA wollen mehr Einfluss gewinnen und vorhandenen verteidigen, und Russland will mehr Einfluss gewinnen und vorhandenen verteidigen* (The US wants to gain more influence and defend the one it already has, and Russia wants to gain more influence and defend the one it already has) [6]. The stress created by the opposition "die USA" and "Russland" is further reinforced through repetition. While evaluations are made by the speaker based on the arbitrary interpretation of the phenomena, realities, and facts. Emotional opposition serves to foreground substantive and axiological speech elements thus intensifying the effect of 'psychological pressure'. The use of emotional opposition, which we consider a kind of antithesis, contributes to establishing such a notional flow of the speech that does not allow the audience to make its own conclusions, since the candidates have already decided to foreground the axiological components. This speech structure allows 'imposing' one's views and expressing one's position on a particular issue, as well as establishing oneself as a 'reliable' politician, bearer of 'positive' qualities. In most cases, an antithesis is created not only by the semantics of the lexical units, but also the syntactic constructions [7]. Additional axiological and expressive functions of syntactic constructions were noted by T.A. van Dijk, who wrote that syntax reflects the distribution of the semantic roles of event participants: either through word order, or correlation of various functional elements (subject, object), or the use of active or passive forms, modality, modes [8]. In the antithesis *Ich bleibe aber der Meinung, dass die Abtrennung der Krim völkerrechtswidrig wäre, genauso wie die Abtrennung des Kosovo völkerrechtswidrig war* (I remain of the opinion that the annexation of the Crimea would be contrary to international law, just as the secession of Kosovo was contrary to international law) [6] the opposition is made on the level of changing mode and tense forms.

2.3. Paraverbal means of aggressive rhetoric

At the paraverbal level, the aggressiveness of rhetoric is created with certain phonatory and kinetic means. *Prosodic specifics* of political discourse are characterized by intensification of all its components (dynamic, tonal, and temporal). In experimental phonetics, this acoustic effect is referred to as 'prosodic intensity' [9], 'prosodic highlighting' (*prosodische Hervorhebung*) [10], 'prosodic emphasis' (*prosodische Emphase*) [11; 12]. This paper uses the term 'prosodic intensity' understanding it as abrupt changes in pitch, loudness, tempo variations, and pauses in certain speech sections. High prosodic intensity in certain sections as compared to others is an indicator of heightened emotionality, the speaker's involvement, an emphatic speech style [13].

Aggressive rhetoric is also formed by the *kinetic* (gesture) component that is in functional unity with the prosodic representation of speech making communication more effective. The gesture is the action or movement of the body through which one individual signals another individual about his presence, his intentions regarding objects [17]. Three main classes of *gestures* or *kinemes* can be singled out: (a) kinemes of independent lexical value capable of conveying meaning regardless of the verbal context, (b) co-speech kinemes accompanying verbal fragments, and (c) kinemes controlling the communicative process, i.e. establishing, maintaining and terminating communication [14]. The co-speech gestures of certain utterances are functionally deterministic, and the relationship between gesture and speech is of a twofold nature. Ensuring, on the one hand, the self-regulation of the communicative act, prominent (emphasizing) gestures accompany speech while simultaneously performing a communicative function; they are communicatively significant [15]. Prominent gestures accompany speech, so they are the markers of functional or meaningful components of spoken text and can serve as a tool for analyzing the structure of the text and its typological features [16].

Public political communications are characterized primarily by accentuating or illustrating gestures that represent movements of the body, especially the arms/hands, by which the speaker explains, complements his words, highlights the key points, emphasizes or amplifies a verbal utterance [17]. Aggressive rhetoric is also characterized by 'kinetic intensity'. Gestures make the speaker 'visible' increasing his image. The gesture is perceived by the addressee as a 'kinematic' form of verbal appeal through which he exercises his influence on his followers and/or opponents, encouraging them to actions aimed at achieving a particular goal.

2.4. The integral Verbal+Tone+Gesture Model of aggressive rhetoric

Consider the integrated model of aggressive rhetoric, which includes verbal, intonational and kinetic levels (verbal + ton + gesture / V+T+G). The antithesis of G. Gysi's speech *Entweder Zollunion mit Russland | oder Verträge mit uns!* (Either customs union with Russia | or contracts with us) [6] is characterized by particular prosodic and kinetic emphasis. The opposed parts of the antithesis are divided by a pause lasting 393 msec (see Figure 1), while in the beginning of the speech figure there is a sharp pitch increase F_{max} up to 400 Hz F_{min} 100 Hz and F_{mean} 240 Hz. This figure is also characterized by high intensity I_{mean} 70 dB, and an increase on the word *entweder* up to I_{max} 79 dB. With regard to kinetic emphasis, in the first part of the antithesis in the word *entweder* the main pitch accent [ʔent], which is generally unstressed in German, is accompanied by an o-form gesture of the left hand; in the second part of the figure the main pitch accent [o:] is highlighted by a gesture of the right hand with a raised index finger (index finger gesture). Thus, we also observe the contrast characteristic of an antithesis on the gesture level using oppositional gestures (left : right, o-form : index finger). It is also worth noting that the phrase components containing information about Russia and the Customs Union are accompanied by an o-form gesture of the left hand, while the utterance about the EU agreement – by an index finger gesture of the right hand, which can be considered as approval.

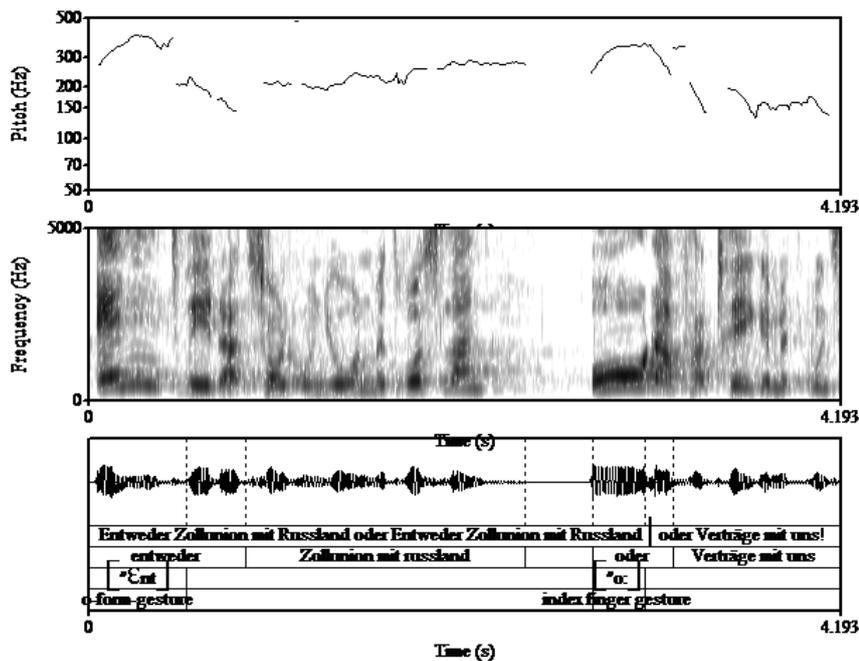


Figure1: Antithesis example from G.Gysi's speech.

Consider the integrated model of aggressive rhetoric on the example of the antithesis in J. Fischer's speech *Milosevic würde dann nur gestärkt und nicht geschwächt* (*Milosevic would then only be strengthened and not weakened*) [5]. This phrase (see Figure 2) is characterized by high volume and tone. $I_{max} - 91$ dB with $I_{mean} - 86$ DB, and $F_{max} - 286$ Hz with $F_{min} - 164$ Hz and $F_{mean} - 244$ Hz. The prosodic intensity of the figure is complemented by the kinetic intensity in the prominent parts of the speech. For instance, components of the antithesis *gestärkt*,

main pitch accent [ʃtɛrkt] and *geschwächt*, main pitch accent [ʃvɛçt] are accompanied by o-form gestures of the left hand. Thus, our figures allow some interesting observations: as we can see from the peak pitch and intensity values, emphasis is put on the key words of the antithesis *gestärkt* (strong) and *geschwächt* (weak), which are accompanied by gestures. At the same time, words that are semantically dependent, in our case components of the double conjunction *entweder* (either) ... *oder* (or), are also highlighted. This shows that emphasis in this

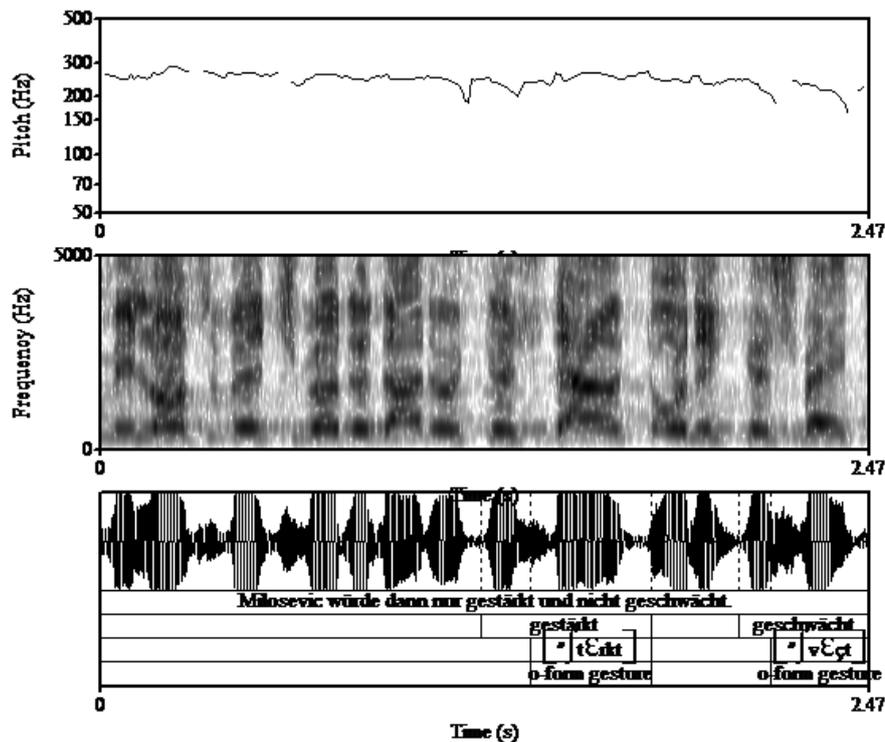


Figure 2: Antithesis example from J.Fischer's speech.

case is not content-related but its behavior is independent of this structure. This serves to justify the independence of what we call the aggressive rhetoric.

3. Conclusions

Thus, aggressive rhetoric is expressed in political communication in times of crisis and is characteristic of politicians, whose stand is not consistent with the majority position. This aggressiveness is created by using rhetorical figures, which are markers of the rhetorical force of speech, and their prosodic and gesture emphasis, which can be either content-related or not, indicating the independence of aggressive rhetoric. In addition, we observe the implementation of an integrated model of aggressive rhetoric on the verbal, prosodic and kinetic levels of speech.

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