

PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES IN TED LECTURES ON ENVIRONMENT

ALEXANDRINE LAZURKINA,
EKATERINA CHEBOTAREVA
Polotsk State University, Belarus

The article explores persuasive techniques employed in TED lectures on the topic of environment and ecology. Persuasive techniques are viewed as features of rhetoric used for expressing logos, ethos and pathos. A detailed description of the persuasive techniques identified in the course of the research is provided and the corresponding linguistic devices are singled out. Awareness of persuasive techniques improves rhetorical competence.

Persuasive discourse is becoming increasingly important. More than ever we are concerned with being able to influence others. To influence others requires more than stating arguments. When you deliver a persuasive speech, your goal is to modify the thoughts, feelings, or actions of your audience. You hope that your listeners will change attitudes or behaviours you do not approve of and adopt attitudes or behaviours which are compatible with your interests and the way you see the world.

Some of the best examples of persuasive speeches today are presented on TED.com platform. TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today TED talks cover almost all topics – from science to business to global issues.

The genre peculiarities of TED talks were studied by professor E. Yu. Viktorova [1]. Her research showed that a TED talk is a separate speech rhetorical genre which is different from other spoken popular science genres and other types of lectures. It is realised as a primary genre in real communication and as a secondary one in the Internet communication. TED talks are characterized by rigid chronotopos and elaborate preparation process. As a result, they have compact composition, deliberate structural and logical transparency and preciseness, strong orientation to the addressee's needs, dialogue nature and persuasiveness. TED speakers have high rhetoric competence which enables them to get their listeners' attention, inspire conviction and provoke action.

This study aims to identify and describe the most common persuasive techniques used in TED lectures on the topic of environment and ecology, classify these techniques in accordance with the principles of argumentation, and analyse the corresponding linguistic devices yielding the most efficient results. The corpus for the analysis comprises 11 TED lectures (approximately 18,500 words) with a total duration of 122 minutes.

This study views persuasive techniques as features of rhetoric used for expressing logos, ethos and pathos. Depending on the principle of argumentation employed, the techniques are classified into three groups: those pertaining to logical reasoning (logos), those presenting the speaker as a trustworthy person and based on moral argumentation (ethos), and those involving the emotional component (pathos). Although the division seems clear on the surface, it proved difficult to establish the boundaries between logos, ethos and pathos as in the course of persuasive interaction they overlap and co-exist.

Reliance on the researchers (A.V. Zaitseva [2], Z.V. Mankovskaya [3]) allowed us to single out persuasive techniques specific for ecological discourse. We worked out classification of persuasive techniques in ecological discourse in the genre of TED lectures that is presented in table 1:

Table 1. – Persuasive techniques in TED lectures on ecology

Argumentation principle	Technique
Logos	<i>Appeal to rationality</i> , i.e. rational argumentation, environmental assessment, forecast of possible risks and dangers to human life
Ethos	<i>Appeal to authority</i> , i.e. outstanding scientists, environmentalists <i>Self-representation</i> , proficiency and confidence in working with ecosystem
Pathos	<i>Appeal to fear</i> (of daunting prospects of ecological disasters) <i>Appeal to time awareness</i> (an urgent call for ecological conversion) <i>Appeal to benefit</i> (of eco-friendly behavior) <i>Over exaggeration of negative characteristics</i>

Let us analyse how these techniques work.

Logos corresponds to the use of rational argumentation as a way of reasoning that the receiver might accept. In the example below, facts and figures provide the audience with evidence in favour of the idea that we are to blame for ocean pollution, parallel constructions are used to emphatically highlight the part of the statement containing statistical data:

In the last five years we've added 70 million tons of CO2 every 24 hours – 25 million tons every day to the oceans [4].

Ethos is responsible for the moral aspect of the process of persuasion. Appeal to authority, for instance, is found when proper names referring to outstanding scientists are used:

This is called "praedicta", because Charles Darwin predicted that it must exist [5].

Pathos is responsible for listeners' emotional involvement. Overexaggeration of negative characteristics and appeal to fear are used in the examples below:

*Changes in biomass burning, in smoke, in aerosol particles, all of those things change the climate. The **ozone hole** changed the climate. **Deforestation** changes the climate by changing the surface properties and how water is evaporated and moved around in the system. **Contrails** change the climate by creating clouds where there were none before, and of course **greenhouse gases** change the system [6].*

Insects are declining, declining, declining [5].

Monarch butterfly numbers are going down, down, down [5].

The audience cannot but feel gloomy and heartbroken about the speed and scale of changes that human beings are inflicting on the planet. The effect is intensified by repetition.

Sample analysis also demonstrates that in the course of persuasive interaction it is difficult to put clear-cut lines between logos-, ethos- and pathos-based techniques. In the passage below they overlap and co-exist:

But now there is a bold new solution to get us out of this mess. Repower America with 100 percent clean electricity within 10 years. A plan to put America back to work, make us more secure, and help stop global warming. Finally, a solution that's big enough to solve our problems. Repower America. Find out more [4].

Here appeal to rationality is explicated through tripling. Tripling introduces information in three-point lists, which assumes that all items are of equivalent value. Tripling equally contributes to the expression of the idea as well as to preserving grammatical and structural integrity. Tripling is used to give reasons while describing the advantages of eco-friendly behaviour or the disadvantages of eco-unfriendly behaviour. Three arguments have proved to sound more persuasive than two or one. In the passage in question tripling is employed to describe the benefits of sustainable development that clean electricity could give to the country. Motivating utterances sound persuasive because they are arranged in three-item lists: *put America back to work, make us more secure, help stop global warming*.

Furthermore, rational argumentation is consolidated with self-representation technique (ethos): consider the use of lexis referring to the speaker's experience and proficiency as well as expressive means that contribute to the positive evaluation of the described concept: *a bold new solution, a solution that's big enough to solve our problems, a plan to make us secure, 100 percent clean*. Besides imperative forms (*Repower, Find out*) and the personal pronoun *we (us)* or the possessive pronoun *our* are used to establish the contact with the audience and emphasise the main idea that social responsibility, economic efficiency and environment protection should work hand in hand.

Moreover, the above-mentioned techniques co-exists with pathos-based appeal to time awareness technique. Appeal to time awareness points out that there is a reason for acting without delay. As for lexical tools, this persuasive technique is achieved through the use of deictic marker of time (*now*) and words referring to time (*within 10 years*). Appeal to benefit technique is also used to indicate that taking the proposed course of action is in the recipient's best interest, which increases their emotional involvement: *to get us out of this mess, to put America back to work, to make us more secure, and to help stop global warming, to solve our problems*.

The set of techniques used by the speaker are the pathways to persuasion. The speaker wins over the audience by strong arguments, by "inoculating" the listeners against opposing ideas, by building personal credibility, and by using stylistic devices to leave a vivid impression of what he is advocating. Finally, the speaker calls for continued action to change one's behaviour to improve sustainability.

Research shows that refutation, forewarning, and example-based arguments seem best in making your listeners resistant to later counter-persuasion. In addition, citing facts and specifics, emphasizing your experience helps build credibility that supports persuasion. Finally, persuasion means walking a thin line between appropriate and inappropriate fear appeals and intense language.

REFERENCES

1. Викторова, Е. Ю. Дискурсивно-прагматическая специфика жанра лекции TED talk (сквозь призму функционирования в ней дискурсивов) / Е.Ю. Викторова // Жанры речи. – 2019. – № 4 (24). – С. 254–266.
2. Зайцева, А. В. Коммуникативные стратегии экологического дискурса ФРГ / А.В. Зайцева // Вестник ИГЛУ. – Иркутск, 2013. – С. 244–250.
3. Маньковская, З. В. Стратегии воздействия в экологическом дискурсе (на примере англоязычной публичной речи) / З.В. Маньковская // Проблемы современной науки и образования – 2018. – №03 (123). – С. 44–49.
4. Gore, A. What comes after an inconvenient truth / A. Gore // TED [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access : https://www.ted.com/talks/al_gore_what_comes_after_an_inconvenient_truth. – Date of access : 04.06.2020.
5. Hannibal, M. E. How you can help save the monarch butterfly – and the planet / M.E. Hannibal // TED [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access : https://www.ted.com/talks/mary_ellen_hannibal_how_you_can_help_save_the_monarch_butterfly_and_the_planet. – Date of access : 04.06.2020.
6. Schmidt, G. The emergent patterns of climate change / G. Schmidt // TED [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access : https://www.ted.com/talks/gavin_schmidt_the_emergent_patterns_of_climate_change/up-next. – Date of access : 04.06.2020.7.
7. Siddons, S. Presentation Skills / S. Siddons. – Trowbridge : The Cromwell Press, 2003. – 64 p.