

## **Empathy As Speech Manipulation Target In Pre-election Discourse Of Great Britain**

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### **Abstract**

Nowadays much attention in linguistics is paid to the study of manipulative kinds of texts which function within the political discourse. This paper deals with the linguistic means that the British political leaders use to actualize empathy and compassion. Despite the basic statements of Darwin's theory these manipulation targets are considered to be the important mechanisms of tribal human behavior by many ethologists. The pre-election speeches of the British political leaders taken as linguistic data are regarded in the article with the help of intentional analysis and the analysis of stylistic means and vocabulary which are used by the producers. These methods let us understand how the producers of manipulative messages which consist of manipulative speech acts apply to the recipients' empathy and compassion. The results of such analysis show that the most frequently used linguistic means of realization of this manipulative strategy are nominating lexemes, associative lexemes and some stylistic means (anaphora, simile and some others). These results also let us conclude that using of ethological data in linguistics helps the researchers understand the mechanisms of linguistic manipulation in the British political discourse.

**Keywords:** speech manipulation, mutual aid instinct, altruism, empathy, speech producer.

### **Introduction**

According to Darwin's Theory of Evolution survival is possible only for those individuals who possess the greatest degree of egoism, stamina and strength which are necessary in the struggle for existence (Darwin, 1859). However, some ethologists, biologists, psychologists and other specialists in human behaviour cast doubt on the idea of our existence being "the struggle of everybody against everybody". Thus, there are quite cogent theories that prove the fact of altruism and empathy being the most important motive forces of our evolution. Such scientists as Jansen & Gehlen (1975) and Kropotkin (1902) gave start to the theories of compassion and mutual aid instinct which are now successfully proved with the discovery and study of genes of altruism and empathy. Numerous examples from the animal behavioural patterns also stand for the fact that empathy and compassion are not the product of human culture and civilization but the necessary condition of the species survival. This fact is also proved by the regulations of tribal morals which still exist in some primitive tribes and can be described as follows:

- any member of the tribe should take part in the protection of the tribe;
- any member of the tribe should participate in the collective labour of the tribe;
- any member of the tribe should share his loot, bag and catch with the tribe without hiding them according to special rules and regulations (Fet, 2005, p.89).

That means that any display of egoism is inappropriate and punishable in primitive societies which is conditioned by the fact that survival of any tribe member is the result of not his individual efforts but that of empathy and mutual aid.

All this lets us make a conclusion about the instinctive nature of empathy and compassion which, in its turn, makes empathy one of the most productive speech manipulation targets in pre-election discourse together with basic emotions, instincts, and peculiarities of human proprioceptive, interoreceptive and exteroceptive sensation. Nowadays, empathy and compassion as phenomena which have deep genetic roots is studied by many groups of researchers (Goetz, Keltner & Simon-Thomas, 2010; Hawk, 2010; Singer, 2006; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin & Schroeder, 2005; Keltner, 2004).

It can be noticed that even in our age of individualism the regulations of tribal morals are actual and some of their modifications are fixed in laws. No wonder that moral make-up of politicians is also judged by their following or not following these regulations based on the instinct of mutual aid and empathy. According to this fact the most effective speech manipulation strategy while producing pre-election messages will be that of showing the message producer and his party as people who are capable of empathy and compassion and cultivating these features in the society. On the contrary, the opponents of the party are shown as a group of people who don't demonstrate compassion and don't follow the regulations of tribal moral code. The pre-planned perlocutionary effect of such manipulative messages is the respect and trust of the collective recipient to the pre-election speech producer and disrespect and disapproval of the producer's opponents.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the way the British politicians use empathy as speech manipulation target in their pre-election propaganda speeches which function within the pre-election discourse of the country. Although nowadays much attention is paid to the study of political communication (Trent & Friedenberg, 2007; Norris, 2000; Price, 1991), the linguistic means of actualizing empathy by politicians in manipulative discourse is not studied completely.

The main peculiarity of pre-election discourse is that it contains mostly those text types which have manipulative intention as a prevailing one. Among the political text types of a manipulative kind we can see political interviews, slogans, announcements, articles in special party papers and certain messages in electronic mass media. Nevertheless, the most remarkable type of manipulative messages which function within pre-election discourse is the text type of pre-election propaganda speeches.

As a rule, the texts of such speeches have some structural and intentional characteristic features which make it possible to consider the whole bulk of these speeches as a definite text type. All speeches contain special etiquette phrases (greetings and words of appreciation), they have prognostic character, the main communicative intention of such speeches is that of promise. In addition to that, pre-election propaganda speeches have one more interesting peculiarity: the collective recipient of the speech is fully or partly aware of the manipulative character of the message. In other words, recipients guess or understand which perlocutionary effect is planned to be achieved by the producers of pre-election propaganda speeches before the election. In this the discourse of politics has much in common with the manipulative discourse of advertising as it also has some tools to attain the specific goal of getting information stored in the recipients' mind (Vivanco, 2006, p.32).

Voting for the speech producer and his party – this is the pre-planned perlocutionary effect of pre-election propaganda speeches – is the kind of some *distant* perlocutionary effect of a manipulative message. It is achieved (or not achieved) in some period of time after speech being delivered and in the speech producer's absence. In order to make the collective recipient of the message vote for his party, the producer of the speech should achieve the series of some *contact* perlocutionary effects via actualizing the most productive speech manipulation targets. In our consideration, such targets are the collective recipients' instincts, peculiarities of human sensation and basic emotions (Izard, 1977). Exactly these speech manipulation targets can be regarded as most effective as they have such essential properties as *universality* (which makes the speech recipients' reaction similar) and *collectivity* (the targets are significant for all the representatives of the collective recipient).

At that the main task of the speech producer is the formation of right associative links which are made as the following opposition: we and our party – comfort (positive emotions, empathy, compassion, instincts' satisfaction guarantee) versus opponents and their party – discomfort (negative emotions, inability to satisfy the recipients' needs).

The analysis of pre-election propaganda speeches in Great Britain shows that the intentionally integral texts of the speeches consist of certain pragmatic subunits which we call *microtexts*. We define *microtext* as an intentional subunit of a manipulative message which is used to achieve certain *contact* perlocutionary effect (Austin, 1962, p.56) that is to form one definite manipulative association.

Nowadays the phenomenon of speech manipulation in pre-election discourse is studied not enough. However, this phenomenon is quite widespread and becomes one of the most powerful means of persuasion. The roots of speech manipulation lay deep in our genes and instincts which is proved by many facts of our language use. The purpose of this study is to show how politicians use empathy and compassion as speech manipulation targets.

## Methods and data

As manipulation is a kind of speech activity which has definite intentions and aims, the most suitable method of study of manipulative messages is intentional analysis (in terms of speech act theory) together with stylistic analysis of the texts.

The study of pre-election discourse in Great Britain shows that the manipulative strategy based upon empathy and compassion is widely used in pre-election speeches. Some political leaders declare compassion being one of the basic values which direct the activity of the party. For example:

### (1) VALUES

*The first and most important reason why we won't walk on by is our values. For me the most important values of Conservatism are responsibility and compassion. Responsibility is what this party is all about. That's the belief that people must take responsibility for making their own life choices. It's also our personal, civic and corporate responsibility to each other.*

*But the emotional agent that activates real social responsibility is compassion, a profound reaction to injury, injustice, pain or hardship.*

*It's compassion that makes us want to go beyond our normal responsibilities to each other.*

*It's compassion that led a hundred Conservative politicians and activists to Rwanda this summer, where they worked under the African sun to build a community centre for families affected by the genocide.*

*It's compassion that has prompted hundreds more Conservatives up and down the country to start their own social action projects, doing their bit for the local community.*

*So the authentic Conservative response to the pain of mass unemployment is a fusion of this compassion with responsibility. Not just throwing money at the problem – because that would be irresponsible. But not just standing by either – because that would be uncompassionate. We have a moral obligation to help those who have lost their job through no fault of their own, or are in danger of doing so. Because being out of work can seem like the hardest work in the world. The workplace offers more than a pay-packet. It's where we see ourselves through the eyes of others, where we seek to define ourselves, where we socialize, where we go to get started on living a better life.*

*Losing a job means losing all this, and it hurts and our Conservative values mean we won't stand by and do nothing while people suffer like this.*

*(David Cameron: We will not walk on by while people lose their jobs,  
<http://www.conservatives.com>)*

As a matter of fact, this segment of the pre-election speech is a detailed explanation of empathy phenomenon – a mechanism which secures mutual aid instinct. Compassion as a special kind of empathy is a feeling of pity for the suffering of another. The idea that empathy is an evolutionary pre-historic feature of human beings is proved by the fact that many species of herd mammals are capable of being compassionate. The tests carried out

by Russian neurophysiologist Pavel Simonov over the population of rats showed that more than two thirds of rats are capable of empathy (Simonov, 1997, p.48). Supposing this fact is relevant for human beings one can definitely say that empathy and compassion as speech manipulation targets are rather effective with the collective recipient of pre-election speeches.

So, the key nominating lexeme (*compassion*) is repeated in segment a) six times. Three times - in the anaphoric beginnings of parallel constructions which adds to some rhythmical pattern of the message and attracts the attention of the recipient to its main idea: compassion is the motive force of the producer's party, and helping the recipient is his duty (*We have a moral obligation to help*). Besides, the segment contains lexemes which nominate the reasons according to which empathy and compassion can arise (*injury, injustice, pain, hardship, genocide, unemployment, in danger, it hurts, people suffer*).

The important role in this manipulative microtext is played by the so-called determiner (*this compassion*). The determiner *this* (Khazriyati Salehuddin, Tan Kim Hua & Marlyna Maros, 2006, p.22) emphasizes the meaning of the word compassion like the speech producer understands it and tries to convey to the recipient.

The enumeration of factors which cause the producer's empathy is aimed at proving his being capable of it. So, it shows that the producer is not indifferent to the recipient's problems among which unemployment is (*being out of work can seem like the hardest work in the world*).

It is necessary to mention the fact that the Conservative Party of Great Britain is not the only one to chose compassion as one of its most important values. The leaders of other leading parties speak about compassion as well. For example:

(2) *My grandmother was a Russian exile.*

*She fled the Russian revolution as a child, escaping through Europe and finally settling here in Britain.*

*My mother spent part of her childhood in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Indonesia.*

*My mother and my grandmother – their lives torn and reshaped by the great wars and upheavals of the twentieth century.*

*And they found a home in Britain because ours is a nation of tolerance, of freedom, and of compassion.*

*And what my mother and grandmother endured taught me the extraordinary, precious value of those beliefs.*

*They understood that beliefs matter. They make all the difference between war and peace. Beliefs shape our world, for better and for worse.*

(Nick Clegg: Liverpool 2008,  
<http://www.libdems.org.uk>)

In this example the speech producer tells the story of his family which is to prove that such basic value as compassion is absorbed by him not only as a national trait but as a

family value as well. This fact is to support the idea of the speech producer being adherent to compassion. His personal example arouses recipients' trust and belief.

In general, manipulation strategy based on empathy and compassion is realized in three possible variations:

- Meta-representation (verbal interpretation of intentional and emotional state of a person spoke about) of the opponent's attitude to the situations which are possible to cause empathy (usually opponent's egoism is shown to create his negative image);

*(3) The Government knows that growth stalled in the last quarter and that the pressure is on to find a plan to get growth back. But instead of looking at the evidence and getting a real plan for growth and jobs they are taking it out on hard working parents and families. They aren't the reason growth has stalled, it's the government's decision to cut too far and too fast.*

(John Denham MP, Labour's Shadow Business Secretary:  
Tory-led Government has broken Cameron's promise,  
<http://www.labour.org.uk>)

In example (3) the producer shows that the Government has no empathy to the people who work hard and instead of helping them it makes the decision *to cut too far and too fast.*

*(4) Families and communities consigned to the scrap heap because of the government's indifference to the human suffering their policies caused.*

(Kirsty Williams:  
Speech to the Liberal Democrats' spring conference  
<http://www.labour.org.uk>)

In example (4) the accent is made on the indifference of the Government to the people. That is to prove the absence of empathy.

The manipulative message producer's attitude to the situations which are possible to cause empathy (usually is presented as compassionate to create a positive image of the producer);

*(5) The coalition government has always been clear that the detention of children for immigration purposes is unacceptable.*

*We are placing the welfare of children and families at the centre of a fairer and more compassionate system.*

*In recent years we have seen hundreds of children, who have committed no crime, locked up in detention centres. Today we show how we will ensure it never happens again.*

(Nick Clegg: End to child detention,  
<http://www.libdems.org.uk>)

In this example the producer shows his understanding of immigrants' problems. He uses the nominating lexeme *compassionate* to emphasize his empathy to children. That proves his being *compassionate* and adds to his positive image.

- *Meta-representation of the state of an object who causes empathy (is usually used to see the unity with the recipient through the demonstration of knowing tribal morals).*

(6) *But anyone reading this report needs to remember that the government has already pre-empted its findings by significantly increasing employee contributions. This is a second squeeze at a time when public sector workers already face a pay freeze and rising prices. The result is that public sector workers face making bigger contributions and working longer for smaller pensions – even before Lord Hutton's report has been published.*

*We will need to examine the proposals carefully alongside the government's detailed response. We all know we have to make tough choices across the private and public sector too. But it would be deeply unfair for public sector workers to disproportionately bear the brunt of a global financial crisis that was caused by the irresponsible actions of the banks, who are getting a tax cut from the Conservative-led Government this year.*

*(Angela Eagle: A second squeeze,  
<http://www.labour.org.uk>)*

The producer of the speech demonstrates his empathy to the public sector workers describing their problems.

(7) *You can't fix antisocial behaviour, or under performance at school, if children have nowhere to work or play.*

*It is no good having a great health service if the real cause of depression, chest disease, high blood pressure and goodness knows what else is actually the hideous stressful condition in which people are living.*

*This is fundamentally about fairness. Fairness for the poorest, fairness for our children, fairness for families.*

*(Sarah Teather: Speech to Liberal Democrat Spring Conference,  
<http://www.labour.org.uk>)*

As it is known, language and culture are interconnected and greatly influence each other (Lee Su Kim, 2003). Being the crucial elements of political verbal culture, all the variants of emphatic manipulative strategy are realized with the help of special lexemes which are plentiful.

All these variations can be realized within one and the same segment of a speech. For example:

(8) *And we must win the battle over education for another vital reason.*

*Parents with disabled children have to fight for everything.*

*Just imagine what it's like when the special school that gives their child the love they need, the care they need, the therapy they need, and yes, the education they need...*

*...when that special school is threatened with closure.*

*I've seen it, and it breaks my heart.*

*Labour's idea of compassion is to put every child in the same class in the same school - and call it equality and inclusion.*

*But I say that's not compassion ... it's heartless, it's gutless, and it's got to stop.*

*That's why a Conservative government will save special schools.*

*(David Cameron: Change to win, <http://www.conservatives.com>)*

In this segment we can observe all three variations of manipulation strategy based on empathy. Firstly, meta-representation of people's state which is possible to cause empathy is represented (*have to fight for everything*): the speech producer describes this state as something familiar to him which shows his personal capability of being compassionate and creates his positive image. Secondly, the producer's personal attitude to the situation is shown explicitly (*it breaks my heart*). And, finally, the meta-representation of the opponent's attitude to the situation is shown (*Labour's idea of compassion is to put every child in the same class in the same school - and call it equality and inclusion*), with the explicit negative evaluation of the producer (*But I say that's not compassion*) expressed with the help of epithets bearing negative connotation (*... it's heartless, it's gutless, and it's got to stop*).

(9) *Let's begin at the beginning. The day you find out your child has a disability you're not just deeply shocked, worried and upset - you're also incredibly confused. It feels like you're on the beginning of a journey you never planned to take, without a map or a clue which direction to go in..*

*When it comes to disability policy, that's got to be our starting point, how can we make a big positive difference to people's lives. We can't wave a magic wand to make everything better. If you or someone you love suffers from a disability, life is going to be hard a lot of the time. But I do believe there are moments of despair, helplessness and frustration that could be directly alleviated by the work of government.*

*The very painful thing about disability - whether your own or your loved one's - is the feeling that the situation is out of your control. When the system that surrounds you is very top-down, very bureaucratic, very inhuman that can only increase your feelings of helplessness.*

*(David Cameron: Change to win, <http://www.conservatives.com>)*

In example (9) the state of the potential object of empathy is described. To create the effect of knowing the problem the producer describes the emotional state of disabled children's parents from the second person singular which shows his empathic condition. The effect is intensified with a certain number of epithets (*deeply shocked, worried, upset, incredibly confused, painful*) and simile based on the image of person who doesn't know his way (*It feels like you're on the beginning of a journey you never planned to*

take, without a map or a clue which direction to go in). With the help of this simile the producer realizes the manipulative strategy of meta-representation of the opponent's attitude to object of empathy (the object of empathy can feel in the society like a traveler without a map only in case of total indifference on the part of the Government which is to solve these problems). Then, in the next part of an extract from the speech the explicit realization of the strategy follows (*But I do believe there are moments of despair, helplessness and frustration that could be directly alleviated by the work of government*). The producer's opinion about the opponent (conditional mood *could be directly alleviated by the work of government* shows that the problem could be solved but still nobody works with it) is also expressed with the help of epithets with the intensifier *very* which add to the negative image of the opponent (*very top-down, very bureaucratic, very inhuman*).

(10) *Young people are bearing too much of the burden of this recession. Imagine how it must feel to have slogged your way through school, college or university, maybe racking up thousands of pounds in debt, only to find there isn't a job, any job, at the other end. This is supposed to be one of the most hopeful, optimistic moments in your life.*

*Imagine sitting at home day after day, no money, nothing to do but wait for your fortnightly appointment at the Job Centre. We used to worry about getting our children onto the property ladder. Now we have to worry whether they'll ever get a job. There can be nothing more dispiriting at this formative moment. It destroys your self-confidence, perhaps for good.*

*I want to say, to young people. I am sorry. I am sorry that you have been, already, let down so many times. I am sorry that you will spend your working lives burdened by the debts of a previous generation.*

*But sorry isn't good enough. Our job isn't to feel bad about problems, it's to fix them. My commitment to the next generation is simple. The Liberal Democrats will not fail you.*

(Nick Clegg: Liverpool 2008,  
<http://www.libdems.org.uk>)

In this example the state of the British young people as that of the potential object of empathy is described. The producer of the speech shows that he understands their feelings (*Imagine how it must feel...*). More than that, the speech producer expresses his empathic attitude to the object of compassion (*I am sorry. I am sorry that you have been, already, let down so many times. I am sorry that you will spend your working lives burdened by the debts of a previous generation*) which is emphasized with the help of repetition.

(11) *And it's especially when it comes to our social problems that people doubt whether change can really happen.*

*They see drug and alcohol abuse, but feel there's not much we can do about it.*

*They see the deep poverty in some of our communities, but feel it's here to stay.*

*They experience the crime, the abuse, the incivility on our streets, but feel it's just the way are going.*

*They see families falling apart, but expect that it's an irreversible fact of modern life. I despair at all these things too. But I don't accept them.*

*We should not accept them.*

(David Cameron: Our 'Big Society' plan,  
<http://www.conservatives.com>)

In the example above the speech producer describes the state of the collective recipient as the object of empathy. Parallel syntactic constructions with anaphoric repetition intensify the emotional effect of the message which implicitly characterize the opponent as indifferent and incapable of empathy.

## Conclusion

The study of pre-election speeches in Great Britain lets us make a conclusion that mutual aid instinct, altruism and empathy are very productive speech manipulation targets. New ethological data show that human instincts and pro-social reactions (to which empathy and compassion belong as well) can perform the role of perlocutionary effects which the producers of pre-election manipulative messages can plan to get from the recipient. Doing this they use a definite set of linguistic means which is interesting to study. So, new psychological and linguistic research can appear in the sphere which we regard in this work. More than that, research in this sphere can help the recipients in domestic, business and other kinds of discourse to clearly see if the producer tries to use their emotions and reactions as targets of manipulation.

The intentional strategy of using the targets under study are of three possible variants. The most frequently used linguistic means of their realization are nominating lexemes, associative lexemes and some stylistic means (anaphora, simile and some others).

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