

Use of Voiceless and Voiced Consonants for the Emotional Coloring of Political Speeches during
Political Crises

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Abstract

In public speeches, politicians resort to numerous linguistic strategies and tactics, comprehending that appropriately selected and conflated words and sounds can exert a crucial impact on a target audience, successfully meeting speakers' expectations. Currently, a comprehensive range of scholars involved in the domain of linguistics have become especially interested in the use of voiceless and voiced consonants on the part of politicians. The point is that a proper selection and articulation of separate words enables speakers to invoke desired emotional responses on the part of listeners—especially at the time of crises—in such a way that it prompts the audience to perceive delivered information in beneficial ways for speakers and comprehend in a more positive or in a negative light.

Introduction of the Research Question

The correlation between the emotional coloring of particular speech patterns and the use of voiced and voiceless consonants in their composition have recently received considerable attention in phonological literature, stemming from an active utilizing of different means of psychological phonetics in political polemics. In fact, during a period of political crisis, the given tactic becomes more prevalent in political talks, being aimed at the creation of a more positive public opinion and aggrandizement of political legitimacy in the eyes of the electorate. With this being said, the use of voiceless and voiced consonants for the emotional coloring of political speeches during political crises is a highly relevant theme that requires a scrutinized analysis.

A Survey of Consonant-Emotion Correlation

A group of scholars from the Free University of Brussels has conducted a research study that elucidates on the specifics of sound intensity manipulation using both voiced (B, D, G, J, L, M, N, Ng, R, and Sz) and voiceless (Ch, F, K, P, S, Sh, and T) consonants (Colin et al., 2010). The experiment presupposed the involvement of a group of English speakers and five groups of Canadian-French speakers who were sitting in front of a computer and were listening to suggested speech patterns for ten minutes, subsequently being asked about the information they have perceived. The obtained results demonstrate that the usage of voiceless consonants tended to invoke more emotional responses among participants and produced more combinations as compared to the use of voiced consonants.

Thus, the scholars have inferred that voiceless consonants tend to have a greater perceptual weight and are more frequently used in political speeches, especially with the help of such a technique as alliteration. The latter tends to enhance the emotional coloring of speeches and manifests in the situation when a sentence begins with several words that have the same consonants. Such a tactic was used by Senator Kerry in his speech in 2004, criticizing the US invasion in Iraq: "I believe the future belongs to freedom, not to fear" (Uvehammar, 2005). The alliteration of voiceless consonant "f" was used to stress the main ideas and make listeners believe in their credibility. That political event has raised a lot of debates and public concerns; thus, the Senator resorted to the use of voiceless consonants to add stiffness to his speech's sound and make it more persuasive in nature.

It is important to denote that the use of voiced consonants presupposes the triggering of low tone spreading that helps to reduce aggression and deprive a particular word of a negative connotation. Moreover, it implies a calmer and more emotionally engaging effect of a particular

passage. In turn, the use of such harsh and voiceless consonants as K, P, T, and C in a political speech helps a speaker to elucidate accurately what is on his or her mind. For instance, former President Barack Obama in his Tucson speech used such voiceless consonants as T and P to convince people in the ideas that were expressed. In that way, he managed to elucidate what he had on his mind: "I want to tell you," "it's important for us to," "For the truth is," "Let's make sure it's not on the usual plane of politics and point-scoring and pettiness" ("Obama's Tucson speech transcript: Full text," 2011). To add more, the President used such voiced consonants as G and L to appeal to people's emotions: "Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let's [...] expand our moral imaginations," "we're doing right by our children," "heroism is found not only on the fields of battle" ("Obama's Tucson speech transcript: Full text", 2011).

The Tucson shooting has invoked public panic and raised concerns about the work of police forces and their effectiveness; thus, Obama's speech facilitated the President to ease anxiety in American society and increase public trust in the federal government and law enforcement forces.

Conclusions

Recent research studies prove that the comprehended emotional valence of particular phoneme combinations is affected by specific acoustic features of articulated consonants: voiced and voiceless ones. The given effect is widely used in political polemics, enabling speakers to regulate vocal fold stiffness through the usage of voiced and voiceless consonants. In fact, the use of voiced and voiceless consonants during the time of crisis facilitates politicians to convey their emotions to wide audiences, accurately rendering the main intent and meaning of expressed ideas and, in most cases, being aimed at the invoking of positive emotions in people. Thus, the given dissertation work approves of the fact that the voicing status of the consonant crucially affects the semantic decoding of speech; in addition, such a characteristic can help public speakers make listeners experience a particular spectrum of emotions, being congruent with the initial intention of a speaker.

References

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