

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The ways people communicate with one another can be generally grouped into verbal and non-verbal types of communication (body language, gesture, etc). The simplest realization of the former type is text. Text, which can be oral or written, has many genres, such as narration, argumentation, recount, description, persuasion, etc. The basic reason for those many genres is that there are variations of the communicator's purposes to be conveyed to the audience.

The text genre that is specifically interesting for me is persuasive text, which is defined as "text that is designed to move or sway the reader through the use of argument and/or entreaty, whether to change the reader's opinion or to rally support for a cause or belief" ("Persuasive Text"). Persuasive text acts as a mediator of the communicator's motive to make the audience believe what he/she conveys. This genre is very challenging because the communicator must arrange

his/her words in such a way to attract the audience to his/her side. Thus, a persuasive text can be categorized “successful” if it manages to sway the audience’s thought to be the same as the communicator’s.

To accomplish the purpose, a communicator is expected to select wisely the strategies to present his/her topic because some might suit the purpose and some others might not. Therefore, by analyzing a persuasive text, we can pay attention to these strategies and decide whether or not the communicator is capable of delivering the message effectively.

Although there are numerous variations of persuasive texts, one of them, namely a debate, is the most attractive for me to discuss as it provides the two sides’ opinions and how each side tries to present different ideas to be more acceptable for the audience. This contrasts with another type of persuasive text, namely a persuasive speech text, which displays either a single opinion with no contra-argument or two contrasting arguments in a biased way. In the latter type, the communicator supports an argument and points out the weaknesses of the opposite argument.

When the audience are presented with a single piece of thought, most probably they can be easily persuaded to think like the communicator does. Yet, if there are two at the same time, the audience will not naively accept a certain opinion because another party will try to provide logical rebuttals to show that their opinion is better than the opponent’s. This means that the audience may agree to some extent to one group’s argument, but after given the contra-arguments by the other, they can probably change their mind, thinking that the latter is more assuring.

Consequently, a communicator must select certain methods carefully to ensure the audience that his/her thought is better than the opponent's. The more powerful the selected strategies are, the more superior a certain side's representation is in the audience's eyes. For me, all those reasons show that a debate deserves extra energy to scrutinize.

In this thesis, I would like to analyze the scripted first presidential debate between Barack Obama and John McCain from the perspective of Discourse Analysis to know what strategies used by both of them and why Obama's strategies are better than McCain's. I choose this particular data source because the scope of the people to have been influenced by the debate is extremely large as it covers the whole country of the United States of America. Moreover, those people have various backgrounds in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, education, etc., which surely forces the debating candidates to choose the most appropriate strategies that can embrace all kinds of people when presenting themselves.

Another not less important reason for choosing the debate is the result of the surveys conducted in the US, which shows the citizens' sentiment tendency to choose Obama after watching the debate. The information is presented in an online article as follows.

This survey shows that 63% of the swing voters, who are still doubtful which candidate to choose and still have not made up their mind, gave a positive feedback concerning Obama's performance while only 54% did so for McCain. The former group said that Obama would settle the economic problems and brought the necessary reformation for the United States of America. Furthermore, Obama's performance is much favoured over McCain's across several

demographic groups. Overall, the ratings given to both Obama and McCain on the issue of taxes are 52% and 37%, respectively (“Obama Boosts Leadership Image and Regains Lead over McCain”).

The result of the surveys implies that Obama must have performed better than McCain in this first presidential debate as he has succeeded in convincing more voters, especially the swing ones. Therefore, the topic of this thesis becomes very significant to discuss as people can find out what has specifically caused Obama to be more assuring. This will in turn enable them to practise the knowledge and theories to get across their ideas better to others, especially if there are some conflicting ideas presented at the same time.

The main theory used to unveil the persuasive strategies used by the candidates is van Dijk’s theory called “Ideology and Discourse.” This is considered a suitable device as the positive-self presentation and negative-other presentation are basically all the debate is about. However, this thesis only focuses on the strategies used to build these two representations and to analyze the factors that make Obama succeed in capturing the Americans' hearts.

(894 words)

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is formulated in the following questions:

1. What kinds of strategies are used by McCain and Obama to show positive-self presentation and negative-other presentation?
2. Why are Obama’s strategies more appealing to the Americans?

Purpose of the Study

This study has the following purposes:

1. To identify the strategies used by McCain and Obama to show positive-self presentation and negative-other's presentation.
2. To analyze the reasons why Obama's strategies are more appealing to the Americans

Method of Research

The first step I took before writing the thesis was choosing the area of Linguistics to be discussed, which is Discourse Analysis. After considering the types of data source available, I decided to analyze a scripted presidential debate. Then, I tried to relate the theory of Discourse Analysis to the contents of the debate. The next thing I did was to formulate the statement of the problem found in the selected presidential debate. I analyzed the discourse based on the theory used subsequently. Finally, I wrote the research report.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis consists of four chapters. It starts with Chapter One, the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. In Chapter Two, there is the Theoretical Framework, which explains the theories used to analyze the data. Afterwards, in Chapter Three, the data analysis is presented with the corresponding theory and in the fourth chapter, the Conclusion, this thesis presents my personal opinion and comments on the

analysis findings. Finally, the thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices.