

# The discourse of persuasion: An analysis of students' communicative tasks

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## Abstract

This discourse analysis aimed to investigate the different propaganda techniques used by students in their communicative tasks. This study utilized qualitative method with discourse analysis as an approach to identify and understand the discourse of persuasion manifested by students in their speaking performance. The researcher analysed the linguistic corpora using the theory of Gambriel on propaganda techniques. Data revealed that students exhibited different propaganda techniques such as transfer, testimonial, glittering generalities and bandwagon. These communicative tasks in the language classroom focusing on the discourse of persuasion allow the non-native Speakers of English language to acquire communicative competence on the use of the target language. Having exposed to various communicative activities provides students an opportunity to explore the different use of language specifically in persuading other people. The activities provided by the teacher enable students to evaluate what specific area of language they have to improve and practice in order for them to acquire the target language with native like proficiency and sophistication.

Keywords: discourse, persuasion, analysis, communicative tasks

## 1. Introduction

Communicating messages necessitate sociolinguistic norms widely known and observed by speech communities. The paradigm of understanding should always be in accordance to the established symbols and rules of communication. People's choice and interests are also affected with what language shows and do to them. Similarly, this is also evident on the discourse of persuasion used in advertisements where target consumers have only one choice which is to purchase the product (Cook, 2001 as cited by Kaur, 2016).

In various settings, the notion that children can easily be persuaded and more vulnerable than adults to the effects of advertisement is taken for granted. In London, United Kingdom, empirical researches accentuate that learners' competence in responding to the discourse of persuasion and advertisement is not the focus of academic discussions. Since they are the most vulnerable audience and easily be persuaded or manipulated, children's capacity to filter and evaluate facts and opinions in persuasive discourse of advertisements should be the focus of the academe. (Gunter, 2014 and Banjali, 2016). There is strong evidence claiming that students of all ages are affected by the language of persuasion, thus, teachers, in using advertisements as communicative tasks should scrutinize deeply and seriously on how learners perceived the discourse of advertisements and how it effects on their personal choices and understanding (Livingstone & Helsper, 2015).

In the Philippines, the language of advertisement relies heavily on the semiotically mediated face the advertisers present in the public. Signs, syntagmatic and paradigmatic and rhetorical functions are prevalent in the promotion of the product. Anchorage textual concepts are used in print TV broadcast and internet ads. Poetic, referential and emotive functions are the observed technique employed. Problems identified were embedded through indirect appeal to target audience such as use of emotive and persuasive languages that manipulate people's decision making.

Considering its effect to society as a whole, language of persuasion, as it used in different advertisements, essentially shape and affect people's way of thinking towards a certain product. Different persuasive techniques used by the advertisers in the promotion of products somehow mislead due to different deceptive appeals that might influence their choice as consumers and the target market. Truly, the power of persuasion is exemplified when the advertisement give people the supremacy in the ideology of status when product is consumed. Different rhetorical and propaganda techniques influence my personal taste of buying the product.

Though this is a widespread linguistic phenomenon, this exploitation of language, especially the mixture of verbal and non-verbal signs, makes discourse of advertisements an interesting subject to explore and analyze. Currently, no can be found regarding the discursive techniques employed by students in their communicative tasks. As one of target consumers, there must be a compelling need to explore and investigate the discourse of persuasion if framed to influence and manipulate.

### **1.1 Literature Review**

This study is gleaned on the seven propaganda techniques of Gambрил (1937). Seven propaganda devices are invented to educate people regarding the indistinguishable and significant effect to people's way of thinking. They are name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folk, card stacking, and bandwagon.

The first technique, name-calling'', assists propagandists in creating hatred or fear with the employment of negative labels (such as heretic) to depict their disliked individuals, groups, nations, races, policies or practices. The second technique, glittering generalities, creates views associated with virtue words such as truth, freedom, liberty, social justice or progress. This technique is employed to appeal to emotions, especially the encouragement of thoughtless judgment. The third technique, transfer, is likely to be significantly effective. It is often associated with some favored causes or celebrities. The technique also includes practices such as buying lunches and offering gifts to professionals with the purpose of encouraging certain application and purchase of products such as medications, cosmetics and much more.

The fourth technique is testimonial, which is employed along with the utilization of an idea or program with experience of a person or institution to convince message recipients of another idea. Its effectiveness relies on who or what the quote is, and why this individual, organization or publication should be trusted as a source of expert knowledge. The fifth technique, plain folk, involves the means that propagandists present themselves with the clear identity as part of ordinary people and communicate a favorable impression about their ideas and proposals. In other words, propagandists act as just plain folks

The sixth technique, card stacking, is employed with the purpose of over- and under-emphasis of information in order to distort the ideas of proposals. This technique of omissions and distortions advocates ignorance among the message recipients of inconvenient information. The last technique is called bandwagon, encouraging people to follow a majority crowd or to opt for or accept the ideas or plans that everyone accepts. This may be associated with the groups of individuals who share the same nationality, religion, race, region, sex, or even profession.

## 1.2. Research Questions

1. What are the propaganda techniques used by students in their communicative tasks?
2. How do students use the different propaganda techniques in their communicative tasks?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

In this study, qualitative design employing discourse analysis is used. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative design is being employed since the process of inquiry flows from philosophical assumptions, to interpretive lens and on to the procedures involved in studying social or human problems. Further, linguistic corpora were collected from natural settings which were subjected to both inductive and deductive analysis in order to establish patterns or themes. As applied in this study, this is being used to describe and analyze the different propaganda techniques used by the students in their communicative tasks focusing on the discourse of persuasion.

This was qualitative by nature since the focus was illuminating and implicating the reason behind the use of language in its authentic and actual use as it serves its social and rhetorical function. The collected data of this study were analyzed based on the seven propaganda techniques of Gambрил. It was intended to elucidate the complexities and power of language as it was used different propaganda techniques in the advertising classroom-based performances of the students. Discourse analysis seek to understand how such language is used in human communication to produce a meaning the speaker intends and the listener understand given their knowledge of the social and situational context of the different propaganda techniques used by the students. DA further recognizes that the intended meaning is not always the one that is received by the listener, or reader and is interested in the way of multiple interpretations.

Importantly, Discourse Analysis on the propaganda techniques identifies and investigates how language is used to influence and manipulate people's way of thinking regarding their personal choice on different goods and services from broadcast advertisements. Different language of persuasion and propaganda techniques through their communicative tasks will be examined and exemplified.

### 2.2 Sample/ Participants

In discourse analysis, research materials were of great importance and relevance in achieving the purpose of this study. As such, the broadcast advertisement as communicative tasks are linguistic corpora of the study. These were the actual performances in the English class of high school students from Datu Balong national High School, San Isidro, Davao del Norte. Students in their class were grouped comprising five to ten members each group. The performance lasted for 30 seconds with open contents or students should have the freedom to choose their topic of interest as content of their presentation. These 10 linguistic corpora were examined as to what propaganda techniques were employed by the students. The different language of persuasion and propaganda techniques found in their outputs shall be the focus of analysis as to how it affects the viewers' perception towards certain or good. Moreover, its social implications shall also be explored.

### 2.3 Data Collection Procedure

In order to comprehensively gather the necessary corpora of the study, the following procedures were undertaken:

Asking permission is the prior step to the actual data gathering; permission from the school principal was sought to conduct the study regarding the discourse of persuasion as communicative tasks of students in their English class. With the approval of the principal, nature of the undertaking were discussed to the participants as well as the benefits the study that can contribute towards pedagogical competence of language teachers and the critical awareness of the students towards deciphering the language of persuasion in classroom-based performances and even broadcast and print advertisements beyond the scope of the school. Identified research participants were asked to fill out the informed consent indicating that they fully support and totally understand the research endeavor. With this consent, research materials or students' presentation were recorded within the research locale the month of September to October 2022.

Then, analysis of the linguistic corpora was followed after the data collection utilizing Discourse Analysis as the method. In assessing the propaganda techniques, the first step is to identify the techniques used in advertising-classroom based performances. Then, social and pedagogical implications of these advertisement discourses were identified. Lastly was the peer-review debriefing, in which the outcomes of the analysis were tabulated to draw conclusions and recommendations for future researchers on the same topic. The results were validated and reviewed by experts in the field of Applied Linguistics. This was to uncover taken for granted biases, perspectives and assumptions on the researcher's part.

### Data Analysis

Content and thematic analysis of data were employed in which the data during the conduct of study were grouped according to the emerging themes. These identified themes from the propaganda techniques were interpreted and analyzed based on the objective of the study. Analysis of these linguistic corpora was according to Gambрил's Propaganda techniques. Horizontalization of data was applied in which each of the propaganda techniques found in the performances of the students were listed. Equal value was given to these transcribed corpora for explicating its social and pedagogical significance. In exemplifying this, relevant topics were grouped into units of meaning to identify the specific theme which would be the basis for social implications. In order to validate my analysis towards the linguistic corpora, expertise of peer validator is sought whose competence in applied linguistics and language pedagogy is relentlessly exceptional.

## 3. Results

### Propaganda Techniques Used by Students in their Communicative Tasks

Language in the context of purposeful communication has varied functions. It can be used to inform, to entertain and to persuade. In the context of classroom activities, the students are given the avenue to explore and perform the designated function of the medium of instruction used in the classroom setting. In this study, the language of persuasion is isolated in order to probe the techniques of conviction used by the students in their classroom-based advertise performance. Table 1 presents the language of persuasion used in the classroom-based advertising performance of the students. This exhibits the specified propaganda techniques along with the transcriptions lifted from the performances of the students.

Table 1: Propaganda Techniques Used by Students in their Communicative Tasks

Language Corpus	Propaganda Technique	Detailed Transcription
Corpus 1	Transfer	Roman's Power Bank makes your battery full!
Corpus 2	Glittering generalities	If I will be the next president of the Philippines, my advocacy will be to eliminate the illegal drugs because drugs are very rampant nowadays. Say No to Drugs!
Corpus 3	Transfer	Greatest White Caramel, Take a break, you will be swaying with the sweet taste of coffee, sweet flavor. Sweet flavour
Corpus 4	Testimonial	I am a mother of children. I don't have education My mother is jobless! Sometimes, we can only eat once in a day. I was forced to work at the very young age. We all experience poverty? The good thing, Shiela is there! We can have our food now! We can go to school! My mother has her job! We will no longer work! Check for a better world! Number one! Check for the better world! Excellent one!
Corpus 5	Transfer	Casino, Ethyl Alcohol Known to contain antioxidant, promote healthy skin cells leaving you with soft and smooth skin, it cleans not only a bad smell but also your dirty face! Try Ethyl alcohol, DOH approved!
Corpus 6	Transfer	Smelly underarm? Smelly Underarm? Use Rexona for zero odor and sweat underarm. Chamba Chamba Chamba, Use Rexona, Buy it!
Corpus 7	Glittering Generalities	If I will be the president of the Republic of the Philippines, I will ban the subject mathematics and Science. For me, If I will be voted as the president of the Republic of the Philippines, I will ban and remove homework all over the Philippines.
Corpus 8	Glittering Generalities	Good afternoon everyone, it is now the right time to vote for the right person in our society. Who will you vote? For me my friends, we need a leader who has the power to lead the people. And so, that is Miss Guadelito She is a perfect leader. She's great and she's needed for her country. The future of humanity is my top priority!
Corpus 9	Bandwagon	Lonely? Why don't you read stories on your phone?) Hey there? Are you jealous of them because you can't afford to buy books? Why don't you try watt pad in your phone? You can read unlimited stories there Watt pad! The more you read, the more you learn and the more you enjoy!
Corpus 10	Transfer	Why is it? I wash it, still no smoothness. Girl use Eskinol, it cleans and wipes five times than water, Try it! Check in Eskinol, Check for your face, All day long!! ESKINOL, try it to believe it!

## 4. Discussion

### Propaganda Techniques

#### A. Transfer

This is the most evident and frequent propaganda techniques used by the students in their advertising performances. As cited by Hamdani (2018) transfer is used to link the reputation and power of an appreciated thing to another thing to make the latter more cherished.

As supported by Propagandists often use the supremacy and power of something we respect to win our approval or sympathy. By using this technique, an attempt is made to convey the reputation of a certain symbol to an individual or an idea to make it more acceptable. Often highly visual, this technique repeatedly utilizes highly regarded symbols such as flags and emblems to transfer the respect people devote them to an event or an individual.

Transfer is a device by which the propagandist carries over the authority, sanction, and prestige of something we respect and revere to something he would have us accept (Gambriel, 2013)

#### Romans Power Bank

One of the most evident propaganda technique used by the grade 8 students on advertisement Roman Power Bank is transfer. In this advertisement, the students' accentuation focused more on the endorsing of a product for a certain application – a power bank as an immediate solution to the client's battery-empty phone. This connotes that the propaganda technique used by the students to persuade the audience is "Transfer". Furthermore, this exhibits a problem-solution scene highlighting the issue with the help of a device for the client's advantage. It is evident in this line from the advertisement:

Oh No! my phone battery dies, your phone?  
My phone battery dies too, how can we research our assignment?  
*Roman, let's give our power bank. Roman's Power Bank makes your battery full!*

#### Greatest White Coffee

In this classroom performance, the propaganda technique used by the students is "Transfer. As observed in the projected linguistic corpus, the advertisement revolves on the purchase of specific brand of coffee product. The encouragement of using a certain product and the relief it offers after a stressful day of work makes the performance an authentic example of Transfer. Appealing to a problem-solution scenario, highlighting how stressful a work can be and how stress can be alleviated, the technique is even made vivid in the following lines:

Greatest White Caramel, Take a break, you will be swaying with the sweet taste of coffee, sweet flavor. Sweet flavor

### **Ethyl Alcohol**

In this classroom performance, “Transfer” is being used as the propaganda technique. The corpus depicted by the students revolves on the promotion of personal hygiene through differentiating its effect with having no hygiene at all. “Transfer” is being used as the propaganda technique highlighting the solution it offers to the identified health concern which is proper hygiene. This is manifested in the following lines:

Casino, Ethyl Alcohol Known to contain antioxidant, promote healthy skin cells leaving you with soft and smooth skin, it cleans not only a bad smell but also your dirty face! Try Ethyl alcohol, DOH approved!

### **Rexona Deodorant**

In this corpus, the students’ language of persuasion is composed of “Transfer” as propaganda technique. The advertisement accentuates an odorous and sweaty underarms experienced by many who do not use underarm protection when defied by extreme heat. The projection of actors regarding the problem necessitates the target audience to use the product being endorsed to address the same problem. Since it focuses on the encouragement of the application of a certain brand of deodorant, the linguistic corpus is an example “Transfer” appealing to one’s logical reasoning highlighting its effect when applied as manifested in the following lines:

Smelly underarm? Smelly Underarm? Use Rexona for zero odor and sweat underarm. Chamba Chamba Chamba, Use Rexona, Buy it!

### **Eskinol Facial Cleanser**

In this classroom advertisement, the students’ language of persuasion is composed of “Transfer” as the propaganda technique. The linguistic corpus revolves on the need of women to stay smooth and flawless regardless of their situations. The expression of exaggerated disappointment of not having a flawless and blemish free face made the performance captivating as copied from the original advertisement is an exemplification of encouraging women as target audience and consumers to use the endorsed facial moisturizer, making it an example of “Transfer”. When noticed due to overwhelming effect, someone introduced the product and explain the benefit it gives once used. This is evident in this line:

Why is it? I wash it, still no smoothness)  
Girl use Eskinol, it cleans and wipes five times than water, Try it!  
Check in Eskinol, Check for your face, All day long!!  
ESKINOL, try it to believe it!)

### **B. Glittering Generalities**

A glittering generality is something linked to a virtue and it employed to make people acknowledge and accept an idea without questioning the proof (Lee & Lee 1939 as cited by Hamdanani, 2017). A glittering generality, Name Calling in reverse, makes use of words that we all support or believe in. A word like democracy, for example, usually carries a universal meaning that when we name a nation a democratic, we often glorify it. (Hamdanani, 2017)



Glittering generalities consists of words that are filled with praises. It's what patriotism is all about as it defines positiveness. Phrases such as "world-class food" are what glittering generalities are all about. This is often used by politicians as a way to inspire people to vote for them. Hans Bluedorn states that words which "stir up certain emotions" is what most advertisers use when promoting a product. These words often attract people as it sparks their curiosity. The help of sugar-coated words are truly powerful despite its simplicity in meaning, hence the reason why generalization is applied in the statements that your message talks about.

Audience can have a huge emotional impact if this type of propaganda was made during a stressful event such as an economic crisis. Some even label glittering generalities as the propaganda for opportunists.

Alert readers will recognize that glittering generalities are the mirror image of name-calling words. One technique encourages us to reject ideas or people without considering the evidence; the other hopes we will approve of ideas or people without considering the evidence. These feel-good words regularly surface in commercial taglines and political slogans.

### **Political advertisement 1**

In CAP\_02, the language of persuasion is composed of "Glittering Generalities" as propaganda technique. In the corpus provided, the endorsement revolves on a presidential candidate as a persona who can address the identified national concern-the rampant use of illegal drugs. This is a form of encouragement which specifies the progress the candidate can give to the public if voted as the president. This presupposes that the propaganda techniques used by the students in the process of persuasion is "Glittering Generalities". Moreover, the projected advertisement of the persona as presidential candidate appeals to the public emotion, specifying the recurring problem, delving on the emotional judgment of target audience who will make a decision regarding his candidacy. This is evident in the following lines:

If I will be the next president of the Philippines, my advocacy will be to eliminate the illegal drugs because drugs are very rampant nowadays. Say No to Drugs!

### **Political Advertisement 2**

In this classroom performance, the propaganda technique used is "Glittering Generalities". Though, the projected linguistic corpus is in the form of humor, it made use of encouragement with generalities on the benefit and progress it gives to students who shall study without homework, science and mathematics in their curriculum. It also appeals on the emotion of the target audience since would give comfort to students who fear science and mathematics as exemplified in the lines provided:

If I will be the president of the Republic of the Philippines, I will ban the subject Mathematics and Science)  
 For me, if I will be voted as the president of the Republic of the Philippines, I will ban and remove homework all over the Philippines



### Political Advertisement 3

In this performance, the language of persuasion exemplified by students is composed “Glittering Generalities” as a propaganda technique. The corpus is a promotional advertisement of a political candidate who is vying for a position highlighting on social justice and progress as major areas of concern when elected as president. Essential qualities and factual information of the endorsed candidates are mentioned in order to encourage the public, thus “Glittering Generalities” is being used. It is exemplified in this line as it evokes an emotional response from the public as the target audience and who shall the make decision during the election:

Good afternoon everyone, it is now the right time to vote for the right person in our society. Who will you vote?)  
(For me my friends, we need a leader who has the power to lead the people. And so, that is Miss Guadelito  
She is a perfect leader  
*She's great and she's needed for her country*  
The future of humanity is my top priority!

### C. Testimonial Device

Testimonial is also one of the most persuasive devices of propaganda. It is based on the idea that “big name” personalities are used to endorse a cause. Testimonials technique is used to make an appreciated or unloved individual disclose that a certain idea plan or person is good or bad (Lee & Lee 1939: 74). When the testimony is provided by a popular celebrity, we are much less likely to be critical. Testimonials are frequently quotations given by a famous person or authority and exploited by propagandists to give credibility to their political cause (Hamdani, 2017)

This “consists in having some respected or hated person say that a given idea or program or product or person is good or bad... [S]ome of these Testimonials may merely give greater emphasis to a legitimate and accurate idea, a fair use of the device; others, however, may represent the sugar-coating of a distortion, a falsehood, a misunderstood notion, [or] an accidental suggestion.”<sup>1</sup>

The method of using testimonials is simply by showing what others could say about the advocacy or the product. The use of testimonials as propaganda can be a good promoters. It's like letting the people talk about the product's capability in a positive manner. This is one of the strongest means of promoting nowadays, especially that we now live in an age where fake news and false claims are getting more common.

### Political Campaign

In this classroom performance, the propaganda techniques used by the students is “Testimonial”. In this advertisement, the students' portrayal of the performance delves on the promotion of politician foregrounding the poverty as the situation. Various circumstances indicating the voice of hopelessness being poor are conveyed through personal experiences and testimonies of diverse people who benefited the benevolent act of the endorse politician which makes the linguistic corpus an example of “Testimonial”. Moreover, the performance also highlighted the necessity to vote someone as the perfect exemplification of true leader who can eradicate poverty as indicated in this line:

I am a mother of children  
*I don't have education*  
 My mother is jobless  
 Sometimes, we can only eat once in a day  
 I was forced to work at the very young age  
 We all experience poverty?  
 The good thing, Shiela is there!  
 We can have our food now!  
 We can go to school!  
 My mother has her job!  
 We will no longer work!  
 Check for a better world! Number one!  
 Check for the better world! Excellent one!

#### **D. Bandwagon**

It is an appeal to the individual to follow the masses, to join in because others are doing so as well. Bandwagon centers on the theme all the people do and work together for the same thing. This technique attempts to convince us that all members of one group consent on idea and need to join them by getting on the bandwagon (Lee & Lee 1939: 105 as cited by Hamdani 2017). When talking about propaganda, Ellul (1973) emphasizes the significance of jumping in the bandwagon and joining the crowd: “everything is in the clutches of evil. There is a way out. But only if everybody participates” and “you must participate. If you don’t, all will be lost, through your fault”. (Hamdani, 2017)

It aims at persuading people to do a certain thing because many other people are doing it. An example can be a soft drink advertisement wherein a large group of people is shown drinking the same soft drink. People feel induced to opt for that soft drink as it is shown to be consumed by many.

#### **Wattpad**

In this performance, the language of persuasion used is composed Bandwagon as the propaganda technique. The promotional advertisement revolves on the substitution of the wattpad application of printed books and the pleasure it gives towards a reader who doesn’t have a capacity to buy books or novels. Bandwagon is observed in the linguistic corpus since it highlighted the necessity to use the same endorsed application as many have been using it. It focuses on the feeling of “inclusion” being part of the social trends. It evokes the feeling being with group and its positive emotion as effect using the technological trends as manifested in these lines:

*“Lonely? Why don’t you read stories on your phone?  
 Hey there? Are you jealous of them because you can’t afford to buy books? Why don’t you try watt pad in your phone? You can read unlimited stories there.  
 “Watt pad! The more you read, the more you learn and the more you enjoy!”*

## 5. Conclusion

Giving communicative tasks focusing on the discourse of persuasion essentially provide ESL learners to acquire Communicative Competence Using English language. This allows the non-native speakers of English language to acquire communicative competence on the use of the target language. Having exposed to various advertising activities provides students an opportunity to explore the different use of language specifically in persuading other people. This helps them organize their speech, edit their own work and provide them the chance to create a meaningful stretches of both oral and written discourse, or even used strategies to repair communication breakdowns and to accommodate the need each speaker as participant of the performance.

Additionally, communicative tasks would also give learners an opportunity to work cooperatively and collaboratively in the language classroom and that help students to develop their critical and creative thinking skills. The activities provided by the teacher enable students evaluate what specific area of language they have to improve and practice in order for them to acquire the target language with native like proficiency and sophistication. The freedom to select what product to endorse and to identify the avenue of endorsement caters the multiple intelligences and differing learning styles of each student. Creativity as a skill is being promoted among learners who performed the tasks in manner they are comfortable with and in the most creative way.

Lastly, students were given an ample opportunity to work on their own pace, on their comfort and on their own choice with a supervision of a language teacher to assure the attainment of the target learning outcomes. The use of authentic activities in the language classrooms promotes and creates a positive learning atmosphere where each learner is encouraged to participate and engage to the task given. Learning and acquiring English language is even made enjoyable and dynamic since students are given the freedom to work on their own pace and perspectives.

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