

Defining media speech effectiveness: A case of Ukrainian president Zelenskyy's addresses to national parliaments

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ABSTRACT: The paper argues that effectiveness of media speeches, i.e., their ability to influence the addressees, largely rests on national prototypes, representing cultural entities and historic events. The national prototypes are clear and accessible, resonating with the addressees' values, attitudes, and beliefs. The article analyzes rhetorical effectiveness of Ukrainian president's addresses delivered at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war to parliaments of seven states: Poland, USA, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan and Greece. Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeals to the target audiences' national prototypes representing events or cultural entities correlating with Ukraine's current plight. It is found that with respect to the similarity to the national prototypes of other countries the arguments employed in Zelenskyy's speeches fall into three types: direct, implicit, and gradual. The most effective is direct reference to prototypes at the global or national levels of the listeners' worldviews. Less effective are implicit arguments left for the addressee to be inferred like any other implicature. The least effective are gradual arguments based on presuppositions about some commonly shared information: they modify the existing national prototypes with reference to the present or future which is not always accepted by the audience.

KEYWORDS: effectiveness; address; categorization; prototype; worldview; cognitive rhetoric

1. Introduction

Media speeches distributed by modern means of communication, such as television, radio, electronic newspapers and magazines, are one of the ways of influencing the audience. They differ from the traditional addresses produced by the human voice only drawing on the traditional five canons encompassing invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery (Cicero, 2005). The rise of modern communication means results in the development of media rhetoric (Mateus, 2021). Among other things it turns attention to media speeches (Schulze, 2013) reaching the mass audience worldwide. The effectiveness of such kind of addresses, traditionally associated with ethos, logos and pathos, "refers to the affective ways in which the message will influence the beliefs, attitudes, and values of an audience" (De Oliveira Fernandes and Oswald, 2023, p. 3).

The purpose of this paper is to study the effectiveness of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches through appeal to the target audiences' events or cultural entities correlating with Ukraine's current plight. For example, the phenomena uniting the British audience with Ukrainians are the Shakespearian "to be or not to be" statement with the president's answer emphasizing its first component and Winston Churchill's iconic speech "We shall fight on the beaches" (Potapenko, 2023).

What is the name of this phenomenon? First, this is hardly an allusion since not all the references are implicit (Lennon, 2008, p. 1). Second, they are hardly intertextual devices as besides textual fragments they include other phenomena which cover people, organizations, events, monuments. Moreover, some of the references are complex because they name people and events or events and texts simultaneously. For example, Winston Churchill's speech is incorporated into World War II as an event. Consequently, it is preferable to refer to all these entities as *realia*, denoting objects associated with everyday life in a culture (Collins, 2023).

The research question is how addressers employ *realia* to make their media speeches effective.

2. Materials and methods

The material under study includes Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches which employ *realia* associated with the worldviews of the citizens of the countries addressed. All in all, we have found seven speeches of this kind delivered in the first half of 2022 to the parliaments of such states: Poland on 11 Mar 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022a), Canada on 15 Mar 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022b), USA on 16 Mar 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022c), Germany on 17 Mar 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022d), Italy on 22 Mar 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022e), Japan on 23 Mar 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022f) and Greece on 07 Apr 2022 (Zelenskyy, 2022g).

In accord with the intended audience media speeches fall into global, national, international.

Global speeches are usually distributed all over the world. They include American presidents' inaugural addresses (Belisle et al, 2018; Widiatmoko, 2017), British sovereigns' Christmas greetings (Talavira, 2022), the addresses of the heads of states to the UN General Assembly (Mandal, 2019) etc.

National speeches are broadcast all over the country. They comprise the inaugural addresses in separate states, for example Ukraine and Russia (Potapenko and Izotova, 2021), American presidents' weekly addresses to the nation (Neüff, 2018), the State of the Union addresses (Tenpas, 2010), the British prime ministers' addresses to their parties (Denver and Johns, 2021) etc.

International speeches are delivered by foreign leaders to other countries' audiences which happens under exceptional circumstances. The latest case in point is the Ukrainian president's resistance addresses delivered throughout 2022 to the parliaments of other countries in search of international support in the fight against the Russian aggression. His texts are organized according to a six-section model combining the speech acts of address, gratitude and request with the sections of resistance, unity with the country addressed and an appeal to similar events in the listeners' national history.

To study the effectiveness of Zelenskyy's speeches this paper applies the cognitive rhetorical approach combining mental structures with the rhetorical canons of invention, i.e., argument choice, arrangement, style, concerning verbalization of the content, memory and delivery. The last two canons have merged into performance due to the rise of modern technologies (Burke, 2014, p. 12). Every canon contributes to the effectiveness of speeches though our research focuses on elocution and performance manifesting the speaker's arguments via linguistic units when the addresser aims at resonating with the audience's most deep-held values and beliefs (De Oliveira Fernandes and Oswald, 2023, p. 3).

The mental structures employed include the worldview treated as cognitive orientation of a person encompassing the whole of their knowledge (Głaz, 2022, p. 3) and categorization regarded as our ability to identify perceived similarities and differences between entities and thus group them together, reflecting knowledge representation and linguistic meaning (Evans and Green, 2006, p. 248). It is believed that

humans categorize perceived objects with respect to a prototype, i.e., a schematic reflection of the conceptual key feature and attributes of the category members (Rosch, 2009, p. 44). The vertical dimension of categorization rests on the degree of generalization of category members which gives grounds to distinguish three levels of categorization: basic, superordinate, and subordinate (Rosch, 2009, p. 45). The basic level encompasses objects categorized with respect to their perception, shape and function similarities with identical attributes typical of all or most members of a category. Superordinate categories display lower resemblance and fewer common attributes, while subordinate categories share common attributes, more details about their members, which can overlap with other classes of objects (Rosch, 2009, pp. 45-46).

The prototype of each category draws on good examples of categories (Rosch, 2009, p. 44), entrenched into the worldviews of speakers of particular languages. So far, the prototype theory has been applied to the explanation of lexical meaning (Geeraerts, 2006, p. 141). However, it is overlooked that prototypes underly the formation of ideals and exemplars which are emotionally charged, vivid, concrete, meaningful or interesting (Rosch, 2009, p. 44). These are the characteristics of realia naming national prototypes in the addressees' worldviews. These realia designate prototypes of similar historic value in Zelenskyy's addresses to the parliaments of other countries.

Drawing on the cognitive rhetorical approach, the paper attempts at establishing the national prototypes the realia in the speeches resort to and to evaluate their effectiveness in appealing to the target audience.

3. Results and discussion

This paper dwells on our findings that the effectiveness of arguments in Zelenskyy's resistance speeches depends on their direct, implicit or gradual use to evoke national prototypes.

3.1. Direct use of arguments

The direct arguments seem most effective since they name a prototype of a particular nation's culture straight away. The differences in the use of the direct arguments depend on their textual order which may be zoom-in, zoom-out or transnational.

The zoom-in arrangement begins with universal prototypes which have a global value and moves on to the national variants which is the case with the address to the American Congress (Zelenskyy, 2022c).

The first prototype to be mentioned is the Mount Rushmore National Memorial symbolizing democracy in the US and worldwide:

*I remember your **Rushmore National Memorial**. The faces of your prominent presidents. Those who laid the foundations of America [...] **Democracy, independence, freedom and care for everyone**.*

The universal role of the memorial is underscored by the keywords in the last sentence of the passage above: *Democracy, independence, freedom and care for everyone*.

The universal argument supporting democracy is followed by two realia referring to national prototypes which embrace Pearl Harbor attacks of World War II and the 11th of September attacks of 2001:

***Remember Pearl Harbor**. Terrible morning of December 7, 1941. When your sky was black from the planes attacking you.*

Remember September 11th. A terrible day in 2001, when evil tried to turn your cities into a battlefield. When innocent people were **attacked**. **Attacked** from the air.

The keywords attracting the audience's attention to the prototypes in the last example are *remember* and *attack*. The verb *remember* directs the addressee to find the prototype in the memory. As for the verb *attack*, it seems to perform three functions. First, it reveals similarity between two events in America's history: *Pearl Harbor* and *September 11th*. Second, it forms an opposition to democracy, independence, and freedom symbolized by the Rushmore National Memorial. Third, it is linked to the present-day state of Ukrainians attacked by the Russian invaders which is reflected by the thesis *In your great history you have pages that will allow you to understand Ukrainians* and the statement *Russia has turned the Ukrainian sky into a source of death*.

The zoom-out arrangement starts with national prototypes followed by the universals of global importance which is the case with the speech to the Polish parliament (Zelenskyy, 2022a).

The reference to the national prototype begins with the former Polish president's prediction of a possible Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Baltic Republics and his country:

*I will recall the words of President of the Republic of Poland Lech Kaczyński said in Tbilisi in 2008: "We know very well: today – Georgia, tomorrow – Ukraine, the day after tomorrow – the Baltic countries and then, perhaps, the time will come for my country – Poland". On February 24, this **terrible "tomorrow"** for Ukraine came, which President Kaczyński spoke about. And today we are **fighting** for such a bad time for Poland and the Baltic States to never come. We **fight** together.*

In the statement above the keywords evoking similarity between national prototypes are *terrible "tomorrow"* and *fight*.

This passage is followed by reference to the Smolensk tragedy in which President Kaczyński cited above and many members of the Polish leadership perished:

*We remember the terrible **tragedy** of 2010 near Smolensk. We remember all the facts of the investigation into the circumstances of this **catastrophe**.*

The keywords stressing similarity of national prototypes are *tragedy* and *catastrophe*.

The universal argument is represented by the statement of John Paul II:

*We united to constantly gain and create **freedom**, as a great Pole, a close friend of Ukraine John Paul II said.*

The keyword *freedom* performs two functions here. On the one hand, in a universal sense it is related to America's Rushmore National Memorial as a symbol of democracy, independence, freedom and care for everyone, on the other hand, it signifies the importance of global democratic prototypes for opposing the war.

The transnational prototypes are beneficial for both nations which is the case with the address to the Greek parliament (Zelenskyy, 2022g) hanging on the different forms of the keyword *tie*.

First, it links the Greek cities built on what is now Ukrainian Black Sea coast and Filiki Eteria, an organization set up in Ukrainian Odesa to fight the Osman rule in Greece:

*The **ties** between Ukraine and Greece are so old that it is now impossible to find their origin. Greek poleis on our Black Sea coast, cultural exchange and trade, community coexistence – all this is thousands of years of history. Greek Chersonesus was even depicted on our national currency – hryvnia.*

*It is with Greece that the development of Christianity is **tied** not only in our country, but also in our region in general. [...] If someone tried to snatch **Greek roots** from Ukrainian history and culture we would lose a fundamental part of ourselves.*

The keyword *ties* in the cited example is supported by the *roots* metaphor. The same verb also refers to Ukraine's role in the Greek history drawing on the example of the "Freedom or death!" organization:

*In the same way the basic things of your history, your national self-perception **are tied** with the Ukrainian land. "Freedom or death!" – these words now reflect not only our **struggle** against Russia's attempt to conquer Ukraine.*

Besides the verb *tie*, another key phrase related to the Greek fight for independence, is *union of friends* creating new associations with saving the Ukrainians and Greeks living alongside with them:

*Filiki Eteria, founded in our Odesa, has played a role in the history of your country [...] And I urge you now, openly, to create such a new **union of friends**, which will be able to save the Ukrainians and Greeks of the south of our state.*

3.2. Implicit argument

The implicit argument, close to allusion, refers to a prototype without naming it. It is a hint at the Fukushima nuclear disaster opening the address to the Japanese Parliament (Zelenskyy, 2022f).

After greeting the audience the president goes on to say:

*Each of you knows what **Chornobyl** is. **Nuclear power plant in Ukraine**, where a powerful explosion occurred in 1986.*

In the passage above, the keywords *Chornobyl* and *nuclear plant in Ukraine* evoking the Ukrainian national prototype to describe the Russian occupation of the Chernobyl exclusion zone imply the Fukushima plant without direct reference to it:

*On February 24, Russian **armored vehicles passed through this land**. Lifting radioactive dust into the air. **The Chornobyl station was captured**. [...] **Russia has turned this facility into an arena of war** as well. And Russia is using this 30-kilometer territory, this closed zone, **to prepare new attacks** against our defense forces.*

In the passage above the war in Ukraine is referred to by the propositions *Russia has turned this facility into an arena of war; the Chornobyl station was captured; armored vehicles passed; prepare new attacks*.

3.3. Gradual arguments

The gradual arguments altering the existing national prototypes fall into derivative and potential.

Derivative arguments construct new referents changing the existing prototypes represented by utterances or objects.

The derivative argument altering a prototype represented by several statements is found in the speech to the American Congress which has already been discussed with respect to the direct use of prototypical arguments (Zelenskyy, 2022c):

*"I have a **dream**" – these words are known to each of you. Today I can say: I have a **necessity**. The **necessity** to protect our sky. The **necessity** for your decision.*

The cited example is based on the analogy between Zelenskyy's keyword *necessity* repeated three times and Martin Luther King's original noun *dream*. The citation is so well known to the Americans that the Ukrainian president does not refer to the author.

Another derivative argument employed in the address to the German parliament (Zelenskyy, 2022d) performs a text-forming function since it organizes the text body. In this case the prototype is the Berlin Wall which once encircled Western Berlin. The derivative argument of a new wall dividing Europe is introduced by the following thesis:

You are like behind the wall again. Not the Berlin Wall. But in the middle of Europe.

Further arguments compare the activities of the German government with building the new wall:

*And **this wall grows stronger** with each bomb that falls on our land, on Ukraine. With every decision that is not made for the sake of peace.*

*When we told you that **Nord Stream** was a weapon and a preparation for a great war, we heard in response that it was an economy after all [...] But **it was cement for a new wall.***

*Just as you are still **delaying the issue of Ukraine's accession to the European Union.** Frankly, for some it is politics. The truth is that it is stones. **Stones for a new wall.***

*And now **the trade** routes between you and the country that has once again brought a brutal war to Europe are **barbed wire over the wall.***

*And you don't see **what's behind this wall**, and it's between us, between people in Europe.*

*You can see it all. If you **climb over this Wall.***

As can be seen, the derived argument of a new wall is characterized by the units *grows stronger; it was cement for a new wall; stones for a new wall; barbed wire over the wall; behind this wall; climb over this Wall.*

The speech is wrapped up with another derivative argument transforming President Reagan's call to ruin the Berlin Wall into an appeal to destroy the imaginary European wall: *Ronald Reagan once said in Berlin: Tear down this wall! And I want to tell you now. Chancellor Scholz! Tear down **this wall.***

In the example above, the gradual derivative argument named by the definite phrase *this wall* originating from the national prototype represented by the realia *Berlin Wall* refers to an imaginary barrier dividing the continent.

*Potential, or imaginary, arguments referring to the possible damage to the national prototypes are introduced by the verb *imagine* in the speeches to the parliaments of Italy and Canada.*

In the address to the Italian parliament (Zelenskyy, 2022e) the potential argument refers to a projected destruction of Genoa:

*Imagine completely **burned** Genoa. After three weeks of total blockade. Bombing, shelling, which did not stop for a moment. **Ruined** Genoa, from which people are being evacuated, your wonderful people. On foot, by cars, by buses [...]*

The implied damage is denoted in the example above by the attributes *burned* and *ruined*.

Potential arguments perform a text-building function in the speech to the Canadian parliament (Zelenskyy, 2022b) with the introduction appealing to the audience to imagine possible attacks at Ottawa airport, Edmonton and Vancouver:

*Just imagine... Imagine that at four in the morning each of you hears **explosions.** [...] Hear **missile strikes at Ottawa airport.** At dozens of other places throughout your beautiful country, Canada. Cruise missiles. Even before dawn [...]*

Imagine you are looking for words to explain this to **children**. Explain to them that **a large-scale war** has begun [...]

They approach **Edmonton** – imagine – and **fire artillery** [...]

They **blockade** Vancouver and **besiege** hundreds of thousands of people who remain in the city. As in our Mariupol.

The keyword signaling the potentiality of damage is *imagine* subordinating the units *explosions, missile strikes, a large-scale war, fire artillery, blockade, besiege*.

Figure 1 summarizes the national prototypes employed in the seven speeches analyzed:

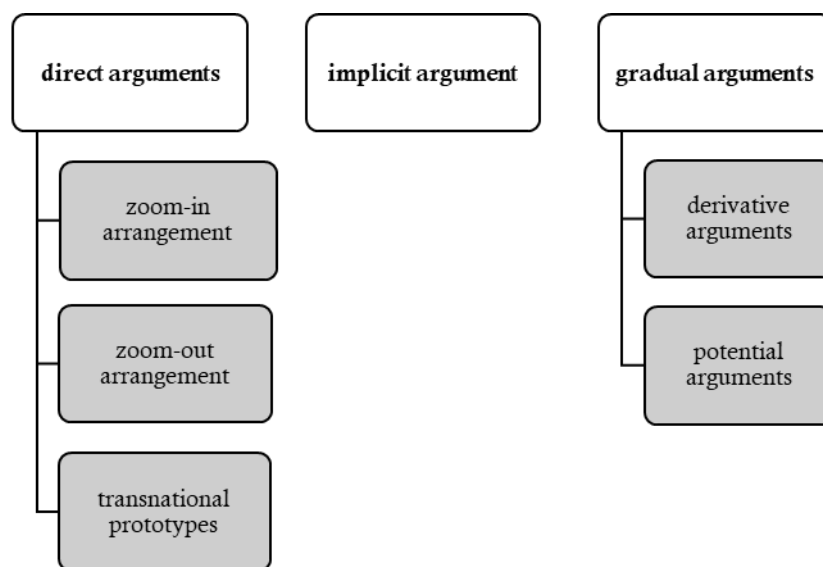


Figure 1. Ways of activating national prototypes.

It is obvious that the effectiveness of the national prototypes in persuading the audience depends on the way they are represented in speeches. The most effective and prevailing are direct arguments since they refer straight away to the prototypes entrenched in the audience's worldview which is the case with the speeches to the Polish, American and Greek parliaments. In these addresses Zelenskyy's speech writers seem to have found the national prototypes of similar importance for both Ukrainians and nationals of other countries. It is more challenging to explain the effectiveness of implicit and gradual arguments. The former reveal a link to the pragmatic notions of implicature covering components of speaker meaning that are not linguistically articulated being left for the hearer to be inferred (De Oliveira Fernandes and Oswald, 2023, p. 11). Consequently, the implicit argument suggesting the Fukushima nuclear station can be treated as an implicature since it is not named being left for the addressee to be inferred. The persuasive role of the gradual arguments seems to rest on presuppositions which allow to point out that some information is (or should be) commonly shared (De Oliveira Fernandes and Oswald, 2023, p. 13) with the audience more likely to accept dubious or problematic contents while the likelihood of challenging moves decreases (De Oliveira Fernandes and Oswald, 2023, p. 16). The derivative and potential arguments differ in relating the alteration of prototypes to present or future. The derivative arguments draw on the alteration of existing cultural phenomena which is the case with the transformation of the Berlin Wall into a European barrier and *dream* by *necessity* replacement. The potential arguments presuppose some forthcoming changes to the existing prototypes represented by well-known cities in the addresses to the Canadian and Italian parliaments. The challenge of the derivative

arguments is that not all the members of the audience are ready to accept the proposed alteration of the existing prototypes while the addressees of the potential arguments might fail to agree with the proposed destruction of the national prototypes the speeches suggest.

4. Conclusions

The analysis concerning the use of realia for the sake of making media speeches effective reveals three levels of persuasive appeal. First, realia as linguistic phenomena are related to prototypes, i.e., mental structures, which can be used as arguments penetrating into the worldview of the audience. Second, with respect to their use the realia evoking prototypes are employed as three types of arguments: direct, implicit, and gradual. Direct arguments referring to existing prototypes seem to be most effective since they are entrenched in the audiences' worldviews with their different values underscored by varying textual sequences. Implicit arguments leave the prototype for the addressee to infer without naming it like other implicatures. The gradual arguments based on suppositions fall into two subgroups with respect to the direction of transforming the prototypes: derivative, altering the existing prototypes in the current text, and potential, referring to the possibility of the forthcoming changes of national prototypes. Thirdly, the effectiveness of the singled out prototypical arguments is explained by the perlocutionary effects of implicatures and presuppositions. The audience is more likely to accept implicit arguments related to implicatures since the likelihood of challenging them decreases. Not all members of the audience tend to agree with derivative arguments based on presupposing a current alteration of existing national prototypes and with potential arguments projecting changes of existing physical prototypes. Further research foresees considering the effectiveness of other leaders' speeches which might provide more discursive insights.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, NT and SP; methodology, NT; investigation, NT and SP; resources, NT; writing—original draft preparation, NT and SP; writing—review and editing, NT and SP. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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