

Persuasive Strategies: An Intercultural Perspective

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Abstract

Persuasion is one of the essential aspects of communication, mainly in the area of pragmatics. In our daily life, deliberately or unconsciously, while affected by others' opinions and behaviours, we would like to exert influences on others' statements and actions by way of persuasion. However, due to cultural barriers, different people with different cultural backgrounds may use different persuasive strategies. This paper examines different types of persuasive strategies and identifies some factors, which affect the choice and effective use of persuasive strategies, such as age, gender and social status. Three related concepts are also examined in academic writing: persuasion, rhetoric and argument. The discussion will explore issues relating to persuasion in different cultures. Finally this paper argues some practical implications for intercultural communications.

Keywords: persuasion, persuasive strategies, pragmatics

Introduction

Persuasion is one of the essential aspects of communication, mainly in the area of pragmatics. In our daily life, consciously or unconsciously, while affected by others' opinions and behaviors, we still exert influences on others' statements and actions by way of persuasion. Meanwhile, persuasion is a complex communicative behavior. Different factors exert different influences on persuasive communication. The first part of this paper identifies three related concepts: persuasion, rhetoric and argument. Next, the paper examines various types of persuasive strategies and identifies some factors which affect the choice of persuasive strategies. Finally, due to cultural barriers, different people with different cultural backgrounds may use different persuasive strategies. The discussion will explore issues relating to persuasion in different culture.

What is Persuasion?

Although 'persuasion' is the common concept - we persuade or are persuaded by others' statements and behaviors everyday, there is no unified definition for this concept. Many scholars, based on a great deal of pilot research, gave the definition in different ways. According to Simons, Morreale and Gronbeck (2001, p7), "persuasion is human communication designed to influence the autonomous judgment and actions of theirs." and they explain further, "persuasion is a form of attempted influence in the sense that it seeks to alter the way others think, feel, or act, but it differs from other forms of influence". Perloff (2003, p.8) summarized the definition as "a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitude or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice."

In fact, 'persuasion' is not a new subject attracted and studied by contemporary scholars but an ancient discipline with a long scholastic history. We can found persua-

sion even in the Old Testament (Perloff, 2003). In ancient Greece, Aristotle is the first scholar who systematized the study of persuasion (Simons, Morreale, & Gronbeck, 2001) and “developed the first scientific approach to persuasion” (Perloff, 2003, p.22). Disagreeing with his teacher Plato who claims that rhetoric, the art of persuasion, is the art of deceiving the ignorant of the injustice or justice of a matter and conveying no real knowledge, Aristotle maintains that rhetoric is an instrument for giving effectiveness to truth (Simons, Morreale, & Gronbeck, 2001). In the middle of fourth century B.C., Aristotle wrote his masterpiece, *On Rhetoric*, in which he systemically explains the persuasion in great detail. According to Aristotle and Kennedy (1991), Aristotle divides persuasion (*pisteis*) into two groups: one is non-artistic group, including the evidence of witnesses or written contracts; another is artistic means of persuasion, which consists of three elements: *Ethos* means speakers’ characters, such as believability and credibility, which can maintain a moral connection between himself and his content; *Pathos* refer to use the emotions as one of the means of persuasion to arouse feelings of audience. *Logos*, the major element in persuasion, means speaker’s rational, logical and evidential argument. Speakers resort the three inseparable elements *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* to persuade successfully.

Differences among Persuasion, Rhetoric and Argument

Rhetoric, persuasion and argument are three overlapped concepts which even can be substituted one another on special occasions. Many philosophers, rhetoricians and psychologists have explained them in different angles. In fact, they have different emphasizes or focuses respectively. As discussed before, Aristotle divided the means of persuasion into two groups: non-artistic and artistic groups. And in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle and Roberts (2004) points out that among the means of persuasion, some belong to the art of rhetoric and some do not. Such non-artistic means as witnesses and evidences which are not invented by the speakers or writers do not belong to rhetoric domain, while artistic means of persuasion that we can design are rhetoric. Therefore, Reale and Catan (1987, p.368) states that “Rhetoric is a sort of methodology of persuasion, an art of analyzing and defining techniques by which a man tries to convince other man, and this specifies its basic structure.”

Persuasion and argument also are two similar concepts, which even can be used interchangeably in some cases. However, in the strict sense, they are two different concepts although there are overlapping in some areas. According to Aristotle’s definition, *Logos* (argument) is one of the elements of artistic persuasion. Besides argument, persuasion also includes *Ethos* and *Pathos*. Therefore, persuasion has more extensive connotation than argument. “...all argumentation is persuasion and no persuasion is argumentation.” (Crosswhite, 1996, p.257). Furthermore, as Myers and Shaw (2004) state that argument involves adopting reasons to present speakers or writers’ views, so that it is necessary to considerate opposing point of views. In contrast, persuasion is more personal and single-minded. It inclines to adopt emotional means to change other people’s views or behaviors, and not usually consider others’ views.

Persuasive Strategies and Demographic Factors

Persuasion is a complex communication process, in which, persuaders attempt to change opponents’ attitude and behaviors by the means of persuasive strategies. Persuasive strategies refer to the general types of tactics and skills that individuals use to

persuade others. However, the choice of persuasive strategies are influenced by some factors, such as communicators' gender, age, intelligent, social status, self-esteem and need for cognition etc., and other peripheral factors including message repetition, fo-rewarning, fear appeal, distraction and channel etc. These factors play important roles in persuasive communication. Visser and Cooper (2003) explain the roles of these factors in the attitude change process: first, as a peripheral "cue", they allow people to determine what attitude to adopt without mainly considering the content of the mes-sage; second, they can serve as persuasive argument, providing essential information related to the attitude object; third, they can influence the extent and direction of cog-nition elaboration. Thus, in order to persuade effectively and successfully, persuader must carefully analyze on these factors and choose the most appropriate and effective persuasive strategies during persuasive process. Next, the following will discuss these factors in details.

Gender

There is a unambiguous claim that man are generally more persuasive than wom-en, whereas women are generally more persuasible than male in a various situation at least in this culture (Burgoon and kingle, 1998). In fact, the conclusion is not drawn accidently. Research of the effects of gender stereotypes and gender-linked language provide a great deal of evidences for supporting the statement (Reardon, 1991). In gender stereotypes study field, Language Expectancy Theory (LET) is one of most influential research achivement. According to Burgoon, Denning and Robert (2002), Language Expectancy Theory is a rule-governed system and that people develop ex-pectations and preferences in regard to the language strategies employed by commu-nicators in persuasive attempts. Expectations are mainly a system of cultural and so-ciological norms, and preferences are usually the features of cultural values and social standards for what is competent communication performance. Language Expectancy Theory includes two sub-theories: one is that entire social categories, for example, male and female, were restricted by relatively rigid normative expectation of appropri-ation of their speech and behaviors, and another is the concept of normative band-widths which vary in size in accordance with the expected language behaviors of dif-ferent social categories. Burgoon and Klinge (1998) suggest that the theoretical framework leads to explanation of why women tend to be generally less persuasive. In traditional expectation, females are presumed to use less aggressive language in their persuasive message. When these individuals use more aggressive language, they are regarded as negatively violating expectations and thus persuasive effect is inhibited. Contrastively, men can choose either aggressive or unaggressive verbal strategies and be persuasive. It clearly shows that male have more linguistic freedom (wide band-widths) to choose more persuasive strategies without violating preset expectation (Burgoon, Denning and Robert, 2002), whereas women have limited choice of strate-gies if they do not wish to violate expectative, so women have a much narrow band width of socially acceptable behavior than do man in this society. (Burgoon and Klin-gle, 1998). Moreover, females' characteristics also make them less persuasive and more perusable. Women tend to use verbal behavior that is perceived as weak, power-less or more emotional compared to the linguistic behavior of men. Besides, women are more sensitive to others' nonverbal cues than men and more involved in caring for others than man. (Wood and Dindia, 1998). Furthermore, men are usually described

as task-oriented and women as socio-emotional in orientation when both are involved the majority of their behavior to the task. Men, focusing on solving problems, are more likely to emerge as leader to dominate in groups by talking more and interrupting more, whereas women are found to be more expressive, supportive and cooperative than men, and focus more on relationship and share more personally with others (Aries, 1998). Also, it is due to their greater tendency to weigh alternative perspective that women yield more often than man (Reardon, 1991).

Age

Age is another importance factor in persuasive communication. People with different age would have different degree of persuasible. Generally speaking, old person are less susceptible to attitude change than youth (Brief, 1998). Messerschmidt (1933) pointed that young children were quite open to suggestion, whereas the older have more stability in attitude than that of young individuals. Besides, people will become less susceptible to influence as they grow older (Glenn, 1980), and there is a curvilinear relationship with younger and older individuals being most susceptible to change (Sears, 1981). The reason to this phenomenon would be that as people grow older, their knowledge on many issues increases, which can help a person to resist an incoming message reversely. In contrast, young people may appear to exhibit less stability in attitude because they happen to be exposed to more challenges to their attitude than old individual. In addition, individual of different ages will likely find different topics of greater or lesser interest and different arguments as being of higher or lower quality (Petty and Wegener, 1998). For example, the motivation underlying volunteering appear to characteristically differ for person of different age: old persons seem to be motivated more by community obligation concern than by the interpersonal relationships that can come from volunteering, whereas the opposite is more likely to be the case for younger adults (O'keefe, 2002).

Intelligent

The relationship between intelligent and persuasion is complex. Johnstone (1996) stated that great intelligent which commonly related to greater knowledgeability enables more critical understanding of messages. Wood, Rhodes and Biek (1995) further explained that the higher a person's level of intelligence, the more the person is able to appreciate the merits of a excellent argument and the more objective knowledge that a person has on some topic, the more the person is able to distinguish strong arguments from weak ones. Thus, Reardon (1991) suggested that intelligence can make a person more susceptible to persuasion through the increased comprehension, but it reduces persuasibility through increased resistance to yielding. In other words, intelligence is positively related to reception, while negatively related to yielding (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005). Intelligent individuals would have great relevant knowledge on many issues, so they usually have a great ability to defend their current position especially when they are facing weak arguments. Erwin (2001) explained the phenomenon like that increasing levels of intelligence are associated with greater levels of persuasion up to a certain point, because of their impact on the reception factor, but after that point persuasion may decline because of increasing resistance to yield.

Social Status

Erickson, Lind, Johnson and O'barr (1978) conducted the research about differences of linguistic characteristics of persons with different social status, and found that those with low status have a relatively high frequency of such language characteristics as hesitation (e.g., "um", "er"), polite form (e.g., "please", "sir") and intensifiers (e.g., "certainly", "surely"). Erickson et al. called these as powerless style. In contrast, those high in status spoke with relatively few of these language characteristic, and this was labeled as a powerful style. They also found that a person with a powerful style is more credible, attractive, dynamic and sociable than a speaker with a powerless style. Most subsequent research showed that powerful style has a positive effect on changing attitude, that is, a powerful style should be more persuasive. However, further research found that a powerful speech style was more persuasive than a powerless style when the message was presented by speech, but no significant difference between styles emerged when the messages were written (Hosman, 2002).

Need for Cognition

Recipients' differences in the motivation to think about topics also influence the persuasibility in complex ways. Some people enjoy analyzing or thinking about the issue more than others. Those who have high need for cognition are more willing to consider and attend to the content of a message than those who have low need for cognition. Thus, they are more persuaded by the substantive argument of the message itself than they are by other peripheral cues of the message (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005).

In addition, different degrees of cognitive complexity also influence the features of persuasive communication. Cognition "refers to the basic ability of the brain to process, store, retrieve, and manipulate information to solve problems" (Priyatno, 2005, p.3). Constructivists consider that people usually interpret, reflect and react to social situations with their personal system of cognitive structures. They integrate new experiences into memorable messages that they can call upon to reflect context-specific situations and to guide action in that context. Thus, memorable messages, just like master rules that subsume more specific rules, with other rules and constructs together help the individual to shape expectations. People integrate rather than differentiate new experiences with their existing knowledge. Cognitive complexity does play an important role in communication. In the persuasive domain, complexity theory suggests that more cognitively complex persons can integrate more readily but inconsistent information into their current knowledge systems more readily than can less complex persons. Therefore, individuals with less complex cognitive systems tend to reject inconsistent information or distort it to fit their existing knowledge systems. Cognitively complex individuals, contrastively, can integrate inconsistent information without attitude or behavior change by further differentiating their belief systems. In other words, more cognitively complex people are more persuasive because they more easily accept different perspectives than less complex individuals. Besides, more recent research suggests that cognitive complexity also influences the degree to which individuals attend to multiple goals or aims when contrasting their messages. The research pointed out that the more complex people are, the more they are involved in modifying their message to serve face and interaction maintenance goals effectively (Reardon, 1991).

Persuasive Strategies and Culture

Besides the above communications' demographic factors, culture is another important factor that can not be ignored in the persuasive communication. Due to cultural differences, persuasion exhibits various styles in different cultural context.

As Ng (1998) state that based on different cultures having different extent of closeness with those in their social work, there are two social varieties- individualism and collectivism. Normally, western societies are regarded as the societies with obvious Individualistic feature, whereas eastern societies, especially such eastern Asian countries as China and Japan are more collectivistic. Ng (1998) also state that individualistic societies emphasize individualism and independence. Individuals are free to choose what they believe or disbelieve, like or dislike. They should be given right to make and express one's mind freely relying on one's own internal thoughts, judgments and feelings. In a persuasive context, the recipients prefer to perceive self rather than external factors in decisive response. Thus, Communication in the individualistic cultural can be characterized as straight talk and open debate.

In contrast, collectivistic societies emphasize on social harmony, which is over individual interests. Thus, in collectivistic societies, interpersonal relationship serves as a societal foundation. Individual concerns more about how to establish, maintain and enhance interpersonal relationship. As Cooper, Mirabile and Scher (2005) state, people in collectivistic society consider they are always interdependent-connected with others and to their environments, so individual behavior is not only the expression of one's individual thought, they should also consider if it is appropriate to others or society. Thus, in collectivism society, such as China, one of the ways of maintaining relationship with others is to avoid saying negative or unpleasant things directly (Ng, 1998). Cialdini and Sagarin (2005) also found that when people make a decision, peer information exert more influence on the people from collectivistic-oriented culture, while information of one's own history of compliance had more impact on people from individualistic-oriented culture.

Besides, rationality is another feature of individualistic society and logos is the dominant theme in Western style of persuasion. Norenzayan (2000) state that if westerners are confronted with an argument contrary to their own, they will apply a form of logic and judge which one is right. Unless the new argument is very powerful, they will probably summarize reasons why their own beliefs are right and the new one is wrong. They normally are not susceptible to the new argument. Conversely, when eastern Asians are under the same situation, they will immediately consider there is some truth in the opposing argument and move their own opinion in the direction of the new view. In Eastern cultures, such as China and Japan, challenging someone in public is considered rude and unacceptable. According to Ng (1998), western people are found to engage in the factual inductive style of argument and persuade their audiences in a step-by-step process. Compared to Western people, eastern people emphasize the norm of reciprocity, face-work, obligation and personal influence in the persuasive communication.

Conclusion

Consequently, the choice of persuasive strategies, to some extent, determines success of persuasion, and at the same time the persuasive strategies are influenced by various factors. The paper analyzes some demographic factors in detailed from differ-

ent aspects, including communicators' gender, age, intelligent, social status and need for cognition. Research found that men are generally more persuasive than women, whereas women are generally more persuasible than male. Old person are less susceptible to attitude change than youth. Intelligence can make a person more susceptible to persuasion through the increased comprehension, but it reduces persuasibility through increased resistance to yielding. Besides, people with high social status have more powerful persuasive than those with low social status. Those who have high need for cognition are persuaded by the substantive argument of the messages itself than they are by other peripheral cues of the message. Besides demographic factors, the paper also discussed various cultures have various features in persuasive communication. People from individualistic societies are free to judge or express their own opinions, and also prefer to use rational argument to refute opposing views and defend their own opinions. Contrastively, collectivism emphasizes societal harmony. In order to maintain relationship with others, people are easy to consider the truth of the opposing view and accept them. In sum, in order to successful persuasion, persuader should consider carefully these factors in the process of communication and choose appropriate persuasive strategies to make an effective persuasion.

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