

Rhetorical Addressee in Political Discourse

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Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of rhetorical addressee. Rhetorical addressee is someone who though not present during the speech event is constructed as the ratified addressee, that is, addressee who is present during the speech event and is able to respond. A Political speech by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is used to illustrate the concept.

Keywords: Listener roles, rhetorical addressee, ratified addressee, Prime Minister Modi, political speech.

Introduction

This paper discusses the concept of rhetorical addressee and illustrates it with an example from a political speech from India. Rhetorical addressee overlaps and cuts across the different listener roles that have been suggested in the study of conversational organisation. The paper begins by exploring the different listener roles that have been suggested so far and summarises them. Then the paper analyses portions from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's (here onwards referred to as P.M.) election speech in West Bengal (see Nagpal 2021, for a report on the speech and 'On 2 May *'Didi jaachhe', says PM Modi*' 2021 for full video) where he used the phrase 'Didi, o Didi' ("Sister, you sister") to refer to the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee (here onwards referred to as C.M.). I try to show that whereas the crowd is constructed as 'ratified addressees' (Dynel, 2010), the C.M. is sometimes constructed as a 'rhetorical addressee' in this speech.

Listener Roles in Discourse: Literature Review

As Goodwin, 1981 says, "The activity of conversation provides a set of positions for the participants, the most salient being speaker and hearer" (p.4). I will now make an attempt to look at the possible hearer/listener positions that a conversation may provide. There have been many attempts to define listener roles in conversation. Goodwin, 1981 makes a distinction between participants and non-participants. "... anyone engaged in a conversation" is a participant and those who are "... not part of a relevant conversation" (p.3) are non-participants. Goffman, 1981 opines that "When a word is spoken all those who happen to be in the perceptual range of the event will have some participatory status relative to it (p.3)".

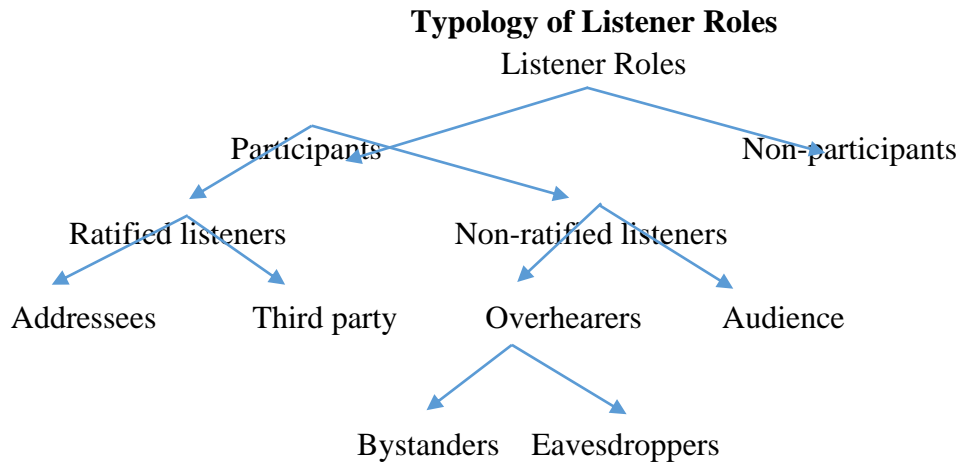
The concept of perceptual range will have to be extended when we are talking of television and YouTube. Goffman, 1981 divides listeners into addressed ratified participants, non-addressed ratified participants and overhearers (pp.9-10). Addressed ratified participants are those who are addressed by the speaker, "...that is, oriented by the speaker, in a manner to suggest that his words are particularly to them, and that some answer is therefore anticipated from them more so than from other ratified participants (p.10)". There can be some ratified participants "not specifically addressed by the speaker (p.9)" and hence they are non-addressed ratified participants. Then there are overhearers who can just be 'bystanders' who happen to listen or 'eavesdroppers' who deliberately listen though they are unrated. He uses the term audience to refer to those who "...hear talk on the radio or TV". Clark, 1996 uses the terms *participant addressee*, *side participant*, and *overhearer*, corresponding to Goffman's *addressed ratified participants*, *non-addressed ratified participants* and *overhearers*. He adds the concept *respondent* to refer to "...the person who is to recognise what [the speaker] meant and answer the question he asked" (pp.21-22).

Dynel, 2010, reviewing contributions from Bell 1984, Levinson 1988, and Clark and Carlson 1982, proposes an elaborate typology of listener roles. She defines participant as "... any individual who partakes in a conversation/interaction whether or not legitimately (with the speaker's legitimisation) and whether or not actively contributing to it" and non-participant as "...someone absent or someone physically present but unable to hear the talk or garner any meanings conveyed non-verbally" (p.6). She divides the ratified hearers into addressees and the third party, the difference being that addressee is "entitled to reply" (p.11). As far as third parties are concerned, "...speakers not only are heedful of them, but also intend to be listened to, by them (p.20)". Unrated hearers or overhearers are "participants who listen to a conversation without the speaker's (and usually ratified hearers') authorisation" (p.7). She divides them into bystanders and eavesdroppers following Goffman.

Thus, we have participants and non-participants to begin with, then among participants we have ratified hearers (who are divided into addressees and the third party) and unrated hearers or overhearers (who are divided into bystanders and eavesdroppers).

Typology of Listener Roles

Surveying the above inputs, we propose the following typology of listener roles, which mainly follows Dynel's typology. The following typology is not a contribution to other typologies but a consolidation of them. We are only focussing on the listener roles, ignoring for the purposes of this paper the speaker roles. In addition, it is suggested that this typology can be used for dialogues, monologues, or even pseudo-dialogues (see Mustajoki, 2018 and Ramaprasad, 2013 for discussion on pseudo-dialogue). When illustrating these terms, we keep in mind the fact that we are trying to analyse a political speech.



Non-participants are simply those who, whether or not in the vicinity of the speech event, ignore it. This applies when the event is telecast on Television too, either live or recorded. All those who choose to participate are **participants**, though any non-participant can become a participant simply by choosing to listen.

Ratified listeners are those **participants** that the speakers authorise as their listeners. Among **ratified listeners**, the speakers may deictically mark some, by addressing them through pronouns like 'you', or direct their non-verbal gestures towards them, and expect them to respond by replying, asserting, agreeing, etc. When we are talking of a political speech, for example, the crowd is expected to shout responses, clap, etc. We can use the category **ratified addressees** to describe them. **Third parties** are those ratified **listeners** that the speakers know are present or may listen to them, but who are not directly addressed, and not expected to respond. The police personnel managing the crowd during a political speech are **third parties**, though the speakers may make them addressees by addressing them once or twice in the speech. **Non-ratified listeners** are those that the speaker does not legitimise as hearers: they are people who are present during the speech event but are not expected to be listeners. The difference between them and **third parties** is that the speaker is aware that the third parties may listen to him. There can be two types of **non-ratified listeners**, **overhearers** and **audience**. **Overhearers** (divided into **bystanders**, who inadvertently overhear and **eavesdroppers** who deliberately overhear) are those who listen to the conversation though they are not expected to listen. For example, a political speech meant for supporters can be inadvertently heard by the opponents (**bystanders**) or the speech may be deliberately listened to by the opponents for political purposes (**eavesdroppers**). However, it is difficult to see how in the modern age any political speech can be 'overheard' as every politician is aware that the speeches will always be recorded and watched on television, YouTube etc. and every politician intends as many people as possible to listen to his/her speech. Hence, we have the category **Audience**, which is here used not in the sense of the audience of the speech, which really includes everyone present. It is used to refer to those who may listen to it on Television, or radio, or watch it on YouTube (see Goffman, 1981; p. 138).

Analysis of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Speech

Now we analyse portions of speech made by the P.M. on 24th March 2020 during an election rally of the state assembly elections of West Bengal in Kanthi in West Bengal. His political opponent in West Bengal was the incumbent Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee. (see Nagpal, 2021 for a report on the speech and '*On 2 May 'Didi jaachhe', says PM Modi*', 2021, for full video). We try to show that sometimes the C.M. is addressed as if she is expected to respond, though she is not present in the vicinity. The speech is in Hindi, and we have translated the relevant utterances in the speech to English.

Because we are speaking of a political speech, we can ignore the categories non-participants and non-ratified listeners. Anyone can become a participant just by opting to listen to the speech or watch it on YouTube. A political speech, particularly this one, is made in public, with the full intention of reaching out to as many people as possible and hence it is difficult to imagine a non-ratified listener. Among ratified listeners, as earlier said we can think of the crowd as ratified addressees and the police personnel as the third party. The speaker knows that the police personnel are present and can hear him but does not address them or expect them to respond to the speech. The crowd is the ratified addressee, as the speech itself makes clear that they are expected to not just listen but also to respond at correct moments. Those who watch the speech on Television or YouTube are audience. Let us now look at how the speech constructs the crowd as the ratified addressees.

1. The P.M. uses Bengali words and phrases sometimes in the speech. As the P.M.'s mother tongue is not Bengali, and as the mother tongue of most of the people in the crowd could be assumed to be Bengali, this can be seen as a way of asserting the ratified addressee status of the crowd.

2. As in any political speech, there are direct addresses to the people, like, 'Brothers and Sisters'.

3. The P.M. goads people to respond to certain slogans by repeating them or completing them. For example, the speech begins and ends with 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' (hail, mother goddess India). Many times, the P.M. utters the first part of the salutation and indicates to the crowd through body language that they are supposed to complete it for him. Same is the case with 'On second May, Didi is going back', 'West Bengal wants, B.J.P. Government', 'Press with enthusiasm, the button with Lotus' (*Lotus* being the election symbol of B.J.P, the button referring to the button on the Electronic voting machines), etc. In each case the P.M. makes the statement fully first, then repeats the first part allowing or goading the crowd to repeat the second part. On each occasion, this is repeated at least three times. Thus, as ratified addressees, the crowd is expected to respond to the speaker and the crowd responds often indicating that the ratified addressee role has been accepted by the crowd. The

speaker does not address the third parties, like the police personnel, in this manner, as they are not expected to respond to the speech.

4. The crowd is sometimes addressed directly in second person, as in ‘Didi has deceived *you* [from central schemes]’, ‘*Your* vote has the power to end [corruption]’ etc. Thus, the deictic words indicate the addressee status of the crowd.

5. Finally, once or twice, there is the use of inclusive ‘we’ as in ‘we have to change this situation’. Thus, the addressee and the addresser (speaker) are seen as part of the same group.

Rhetorical Addressee

The C.M. is referred to as ‘Didi’ in this speech throughout. Generally, she is referred to in the third person. Thus, we have sentences like “Didi now a days comes to Medinapur and ... [makes excuses]”, “when necessary Didi is not seen”, “Bengali farmers cannot forget how Didi has been [unsympathetic] to them”, etc. This is to be expected as ‘Didi’ is not immediately present in the vicinity. The P.M. is talking to the crowd who are his ratified addressees about the C.M. The C.M. is a non-participant, though it is to be expected that she will, as a politician attend to this speech. Thus, she is not the addressee constructed by the speech generally.

However, there are many instances where the P.M. addresses her as if she is present and can answer his questions, just as the ratified addressees can. The phrase ‘Didi, o Didi’ (“elder sister,” “You elder sister”, or “elder sister, hey, elder sister”) is repeatedly used. This constructs her as an addressee. We have sentences like, “Didi, o Didi, now West Bengal is asking you [answers to questions]”, “Didi, o Didi, the people of Bengal will give you punishment in the polling booth”, “Didi, you don’t listen, but if you can see, see”, “Didi, o Didi, don’t play games, serve us”, etc. Thus, sometimes the C.M. is spoken of in the third person as someone not present in the vicinity, and sometimes she is addressed as if she is the ratified addressee. There is even an occasion where this shift occurs within two consecutive utterances- “...every child in West Bengal has understood *your* game. That is why West Bengal is showing **Didi** the door”. In the first sentence, the second person pronoun ‘you’ is used conveying the sense that Didi is present on the occasion, whereas in the second sentence the third person ‘Didi’ is used. Thus, there is some back and forth from third person address to second person address. Whereas the crowd is a constant ratified addressee, the Didi seems to shift from being the non-participant who is absent to being the addressee who is expected to answer questions.

Conclusion

Thus, we have here at least sometimes an addressee who does not fit into any of the listener roles mentioned above. The C.M. here is not even a participant and the speaker does not expect her to be present. Nor does he expect that she will respond to those questions

immediately, like the crowd responds to his statements. (She may, at a later point, and she and her party colleagues did continue the 'conversation' by criticising P.M.'s speech, but not immediately, nor as ratified addressees respond to speech). However, some sentences construct her as an addressee. We call such an addressee rhetorical addressee. Rhetorical addressee is someone who is not a ratified addressee, being not immediately present on the occasion of the speech event, but who is addressed of as if he/she is present and can respond to the speech event.

We have illustrated the concept of rhetorical addressee using a political speech. There are many other possible occurrences of rhetorical addressee. The question of its occurrence in other domains including face to face dialogues, the question of the expected possibility of the rhetorical addressee responding at a later stage, the question of rhetorical addressee and the speaker not sharing a channel, (the speaker may use a language that the rhetorical addressee may not know), etc., have to be explored further.

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