

Political Speech under Philosophical Theories: Impact of Stalin's Speeches on the Soviet Union

Anzhe Zhu^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), University College London (UCL),
London, WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom*

a. zhuanzhe2003@gmail.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Language has always been a powerful tool in human society, it is often used for political purposes and a political speech can be extremely influential to the society and its audience when it is based on philosophy. During the reign of Stalin, his political speeches heavily influenced the citizens of the Soviet Union or the USSR. In fact, one of the main factors that led to the success of those speeches was the involvement of philosophical ideologies and theories in the language. The ideas from multiple philosophers such as Grice, Brandom and Tiersall earnestly supported Stalin's speech and increased its influence, especially in the agricultural speech provided by Stalin in the late 1920s. For instance, Stalin by giving speeches based on philosophical theories, which helped gain the support and recognition of the vast majority of citizens, was able to shape the Kulaks as the enemy of the Soviet Union society and arrange suppression and eliminations towards them. Thus Stalin and his speech will be analysed in this paper by offering theories from different philosophers and discovering the role of the philosophy of language in politics, especially in political speeches. Additionally, providing an understanding of the huge influence and power of language for scholars exploring this field of study.

Keywords: United Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR), Grice, Brandom, Tiersall, political speech

1. Introduction

The multiple functions of language have made it crucial in human society. Since humans use language to communicate, convince, achieve goals or harm people. Political speech is one of the ways language is used by people, especially by politicians, to achieve specific purposes, such as convincing people to endorse ideas delivered by the performer in their speech. Speeches delivered by politicians have always heavily influenced their target audiences, both in the past and the modern era, leading to specific possible changes to society, no matter a small society, a broader one or the whole human society. In the early 20th Century, there were a lot of meaningful and influential political speeches made by famous politicians due to many different events, such as many wars, for instance, World War I and II, and revolutionary events. The Soviet Union was one of the countries that faced several serious issues both within and outside the country, especially during the reign of Stalin. This paper will analyse a speech related to the agrarian policy made by Stalin, in which Stalin mentioned their enemies within the country and discussed the difference between communism and capitalism

economic development of the country. Furthermore, it will also analyse specific languages that Stalin used to convince citizens that the collective farm was essential for the country because the United Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR) was surrounded by capitalist countries with more advanced and developed technology than them. At the same time, this paper will focus on discussing and analysing why Stalin's speech was harmful and robust enough to become a powerful political tool that supported him in achieving his goals by using three different philosophers' theories: Grice, Brandom and Tirrell.

Furthermore, the analysis will provide examples from Stalin's speech to prove that it involved other philosophical theories and became influential. This paper proves the strong correlation between politics and philosophy and mainly focuses on how the philosophy of language can possibly become a political tool for politicians in order to reach to an outcome. Additionally, this paper can be considered a source for researchers exploring this field since it provided specific examples to illustrate the relationship of politics, philosophy and language, thus, being useful for future researchers to have more understanding of the study.

2. Background of the Soviet Union During Stalin's Period

On December 27, 1929, Stalin, which was the ruler of the Soviet Union, made a speech about the agrarian policies within the country, and that was also the year in which the Great Break happened, a radical change in economic policies mainly occurred due to the establishment of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was promoted by the two top governmental officials of the Soviet Union, Stalin and Bukharin, in the early 1920s. Although the NEP was a policy that contradicted communism ideas and embraced capitalism since it allowed free trade and individual merchants to exist, it was necessary for the Soviet Union since "NEP had driver an impressively rapid recovery of the Soviet economy in the aftermath of the Civil War" [1]. "But between 1926 and 1929, the central pillars of NEP were knocked down one by one." [1]. This was because "Neither the party nor the working class had ever been comfortable with NEP's reliance on the capitalist 'kulak' and 'NEPman'" [1]. This is because the Soviet Union was a communist country, and NEP was a more capitalist policy that created the kulaks, wealthy farmers, that contradicted the government's and majority's ideologies. Once the country recovered from the aftermath of the Civil Wars, the government needed to sacrifice the economy to solve political issues. Therefore, Stalin had to bring back Central planning and eliminate capitalist ideologies inside the country, representing the elimination of kulaks [2]. One prominent feature of central planning that Stalin promoted, his first Five Years Plan, was collective farming since he wanted to increase the industrial sector by controlling the agricultural industry. The promotion of collectivisation meant that Kulaks had lost their rights to their lands and properties, indicating that all the goods produced would belong to the government in the future [2]. This caused them to resist the government and threaten the social stability of the Soviet Union; thus, it made Stalin eliminated them.

3. Grice and Brandom's Theories

First of all, whenever a conversation or a speech is happening, it is always necessary for each other to understand the intentions and the message that the speaker is trying to deliver [3]. The same case was for Stalin when he made his speech at a conference of Marxist students. It was essential for the audience to realise his intentions; without people realising his senses, the political speech would have been useless since his main goal was to promote communist ideologies and eliminate capitalism within the country. At the same time, just making the audience realise his intentions were not enough to achieve his goals of making people think that the kulaks were their enemies; therefore, another purpose of his speech was to make other people endorse and protect his claims [3]. Thus Stalin's

speech was already based on Grice's theory about Meaning, which is to make the audience recognise and believe the intention of the speaker, and Brandom's theory of Assertion, which endorses other people to rely on the information being asserted. In the speech, Stalin uses both Logos to make the audience endorse his theories. For instance, Stalin asked a series of questions to the audience: "... Can we advance our socialised industry...But how are the agricultural units to be enlarged?" [4]. After asking those questions, he also provided two methods to use, capitalism or communism, to solve the situation. In this case, Stalin involved Logos in order to make citizens endorse him since all his questions and the solutions he provided were logical, thus making the audience believe him. Only by making the audience think and realise the intention of Stalin was the speech able to become significant.

4. Tirrell's Theory

For Stalin's speech to become a sharp sword to eliminate the kulaks by making the audience realise the intention is insufficient. On top of Grice and Brandom's theories, Tirrell's theory definition of derogatory terms should be added to it to support and make the intention of the speech more realisable and harmful. Tirrell's definition of the derogatory term is composed of five principles: "(1) the insider/outsider function is a key function of speech acts containing such terms; (2) they tend to make a negative essentialist claim about their targets; (3) they must be embedded in a social context, particularly within networks of oppression and discrimination, to gain their derogatory force, and they gain this social embeddedness through use; (4) speech acts involving derogatory terms exhibit functional variation, particularly with respect to the different parties involved in the speech act itself; and, (5) like other speech acts, those involving derogatory terms are action-engendering. These five features work together." [5]. In Stalin's speech, the word Kulak would be derogatory since it separates most people and the kulaks into two groups.

Furthermore, it creates and enforces the hierarchy, which meets the essentialism condition, discrimination and oppression since the kulaks betrayed the communist ideologies and the majority of the country. The speech provided by Stalin gave an idea of the fact that kulaks were evil to the majority of citizens. Still, the kulaks themselves might not know that the title kulak they had was a negative influence. According to Tirrell, the word kulak meets the five principles of the meaning of a derogatory term. Thus, the word kulak used by Stalin, in this case, was harmful since it kept on brainwashing and influencing his audience and citizens to see kulaks as their enemy. In order to make the audience realise his intention, which was the goal to eliminate kulaks, Stalin used rhetorical devices to enforce his concept of kulaks. Throughout the speech, especially at the end of the speech, Stalin uses the rhetorical device of anaphora to enforce his decision to eliminate and make the audience pay attention to the issues created by the kulaks by enforcing words such as "now" and "enemy" and "kulaks". On the other hand, by saying that "You do not lament the loss of the hair of one who has been beheaded." at the end of the speech, Stalin also used analogy [4]. This analogy further increased the audience's acceptance of his concept, making the word kulak become influential and his speech a dangerous weapon. In this case, Stalin is comparing the kulaks with the loss of hair, meaning that the kulaks were not important to him, and Stalin was also expecting the audience to have the same feeling as him. By saying words and using rhetorical devices that made Stalin's intention even more apparent, his speech became a weapon to harm people.

5. Analysis of Speech with Philosophy

The theories related to the philosophy of language are specially used to analyse political speeches created by different philosophers. For instance, Grice, Brandom, and Tirrell mentioned in previous paragraphs used to analyse the speech made by Stalin related to the agrarian policies can also be

applied to analyse and interpret other speeches and specific terms used by Stalin during his reign and dictatorship in the politburo and on the Soviet Union. Besides the political speech on the agrarian topic that has already been analysed in the previous paragraphs, Stalin used certain specific terms in some of his speeches towards the citizens of the Soviet Union in order to unite and make people more cohesive. In the book *The Great Fear*, which James Harris wrote, Stalin often mentioned the term capitalism or capitalist countries. For instance, at the November Central Committee plenum, Stalin mentioned several times the term countries referring to capitalist countries when he said, "We are surrounded by capitalist countries with a much more technically developed industry. So we have the more advanced political system, but with an extremely backward industrial base." Furthermore, he also said that "In order to achieve the decisive victory of socialism in our country, we must catch up to and overtake these countries technologically. Either we do that, or they will wipe us out." [1]. The main focus and goal of this speech are to make the Soviet Union develop its industry to protect itself and defeat the Western capitalist countries.

First of all, the claims made by Stalin used the theory from Brandom, Tirrell and Grice's theories. It is obvious that Brandom's theory supported the claim made by Stalin since Stalin was asking the delegates about it, meaning that he was defending his own claim. At the same time, Stalin also endorsed other people, in this case, the delegates, to rely on the claim or the information being asserted by him. The speech also involves the theory from Grice, this is because Stalin made the audience realise his intentions by mentioning the fact that they were facing multiple difficulties; thus, people had to listen to his method of solving them. By pointing out the problems, questioning the audience and providing solutions, Stalin was able to gain confidence from the audience and since Stalin was the dictator of the country, he also had the power to take all the authority over his claims. All these means that Stalin's speech heavily involved the theory of Meaning from Grice to make the audience implement his solutions throughout the country. Besides the theories from the two philosophers, Grice and Brandom, Tirrell's definition of derogatory and the five principles also appeared in the speech. In fact, the term countries or capitalist countries, in this case, meets both the first and second principles, which are the insider/ outsider function and the intention to make a negative essentialist claim about their targets, since, by taking into consideration the background of the time period and location, Stalin's audience was definitely able to understand that the capitalist countries were evil and the fact that they were their enemies. It also meets the other three principles of the definition of derogatory due to the fact that the Soviet Union had a communist system meaning that capitalism is discrimination and was against the belief and the interests of the country. The speech given by Stalin clearly stated that capitalism and the countries that embraced it were their enemies, and by making the audience realise the complicated situation, which is the fact that their enemies threatened them, Stalin was able to achieve his goal of influencing the audience to embrace his solutions. This solution was that the Soviet Union had to start the collective farm to develop the industrial sector and develop the country's technology to finally be able to defeat and protect themselves from their enemies, the capitalist countries.

6. Conclusion

This paper mainly focused on discussing the importance of language, especially in politics, using several theories to analyse the political speech of Stalin during his rule. Language has many functions and purposes; in some cases, it can become a weapon for people to use in order to harm others. In fact, in the case of Stalin, the use of language in making political speeches against capitalism and kulaks, Stalin was able to make people think that the kulaks and capitalism were evil, which also made him able to convince others to endorse his economic plans. This occurred because Stalin made the audience realise his intentions. By using rhetorical devices and derogatory terms toward the kulaks and capitalist countries, he also made the audience endorse his ideologies and turn them to see

capitalism and kulaks as enemies. Thus, the political speech was a weapon Stalin used to approach and achieve his goals and harm his rivals. Although this paper proved the power of language and its influence in politics, it still has much more to improve. For instance, Tirrell's theory would not be appropriate for analysing certain political speeches that do not meet the five principles, at the same time, Stalin's agrarian speech could be analysed deeper by having other philosophical theories, which would also support this paper. In order to have an even more profound understanding of the influence of language on politics or the relationship between the two, it is necessary to explore more philosophical ideologies and relate them to more historical and political events.

References

- [1] Harris, James, *The Great Fear: Stalin's Terror of the 1930s*, 2015, p.82.
- [2] Harris, James, *The Great Fear: Stalin's Terror of the 1930s*, 2015, p.87.
- [3] Brandom, Robert, *Asserting*, Nov., 1983, p. 647-648.
- [4] Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishers, 1934), p. 391-393, 408-9 411-12. (<https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1929-2/collectivization/collectivization-texts/stalin-on-the-liquidation-of-the-kulak/>)
- [5] Maitra, Ishani, McGowan, Mary, *Speech and Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech*, 2012, p.195-196.