

**Teaching the political speech at secondary level schools.**

**Towards critical and digital literacy.**

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**Abstract**

In this study, I present the teaching approach of political discourse to high school students, aged 17-18 (secondary level education in Greece). Through this didactic scenario students will acquire the knowledge required for political communication, political discourse, persuasion techniques and means. In addition, through this teaching scenario, students will be led not only to critical thinking but also to digital literacy.

**Key words:** teaching, political speech and communication, secondary level education, critical and digital literacy.

**1. Introduction**

My postdoctoral research, titled "Persuasion in Textual Genres of High School Language Textbooks for Composition and Expression," motivated me to delve deeper into instructional scenarios and teaching methodologies. Furthermore, the analysis of texts using rhetorical tools (see Alexandropoulos 2015, 2016), already initiated during my doctoral studies, along with subsequent investigations applying computational tools to classical texts, propelled me to combine these two aspects and create a teaching scenario for political discourse aimed at 17-18-year-old students. Through the instructional methodology of this specific scenario, not only are digital skills enhanced, but students also learn to derive scientifically sound conclusions from quantitative data to qualitative outcomes. Similar studies have been conducted in the past for the teaching of Ancient Greek (see Loumos 2021) and the study of Modern Greek literature (see Karra 2019), but

they are minimal. In our case, political speeches will assist us in their stylistic comparison.

Political communication<sup>1</sup> refers to the use of communication strategies, channels, and technologies to influence the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals and groups in the context of politics and government. Political communication can take many forms, including speeches, debates, advertising, news coverage, social media, public opinion polling, and grassroots organizing. The goal of political communication is often to persuade individuals to support a particular candidate, party, or policy position. It can also be used to mobilize voters, build coalitions, and shape public opinion on specific issues. Political communication can occur at various levels of government, from local to national, and can involve both formal and informal political actors, such as political parties, interest groups, and individual citizens. Political communication is an interdisciplinary field that draws on a range of disciplines, including communication studies, political science, sociology, psychology, and media studies. It encompasses both the analysis of political communication as well as the practical applications of communication strategies in political contexts. Overall, political communication plays a critical role in shaping the political landscape and informing public opinion on a range of issues. As such, it is an important area of study for scholars, practitioners, and citizens alike.

Fairclough (1992:63) proclaims that "the use of language in society is a form of social practice rather than individual activity". Fairclough's (1989) model for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) illustrates the relationship between text, reader/writer and context and advocates using all three dimensions to make reading critical. Represented as three concentric boxes, with the innermost labelled 'text', the middle box labelled 'processes of production and reception' and the outermost 'conditions of production and reception', the model helps to illustrate how one must look beyond the text and its intended meanings to consider how meaning is realized in context, in both production and reception. Each dimension is thus interconnected: Without enough focus on the text's composition, the reader/writer ignores the effect that grammatical choices during

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<sup>1</sup> For more details about political communication and discourse, see van Dijk (1997), Halmari (2005).

construction have on overall meaning. Without enough attention to the processes of production and reception, the reader/writer overlooks how subjectivity influences meaning potential. And, without consideration for the conditions of production and reception, the reader/writer assumes that texts and their authors work in an ideological vacuum (excluding the effect of sociocultural, historical and political context). Again, the ability to read using all three boxes enables critical interrogation of text as part of the social processes of meaning making, while a writer's movement across all three boxes suggests a social consciousness of the design choices that go into text production (taken from Govender, in press, 5).

## **2. Steps of teaching political speech**

The purpose of our scenario is the critical and digital literacy. We adopt the following theoretical framework of multiliteracies by Cope & Kallantzis (2000). This model emphasizes the use of texts and genres from a wide range of media and cultural sources to engage learners. Through this engagement, learners develop a critical language to speak and understand the social and cultural power of these texts and related social practices. There are four crucial dimensions in multiliteracies pedagogy: *Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice*. These four components of multiliteracies do not follow a hierarchical order, but are interactive in complicated ways. Overall, the critical literacy, a learning approach where students are expected to examine various texts to understand the relationship between language and the power it can hold, will be combined with digital literacy, having the skills students need to live, learn, and work in a society where communication and access to information is increasingly through digital technologies like internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices developing their critical thinking skills as well. Concerning the learning outcomes: the students recognize the ideological dimension of political texts, identify propaganda elements, learn about persuasion methods and means, and acquire digital skills.

### **A. Overt instruction (First hour)**

1. We will present general information about persuasion and political speech.
2. Students will watch political orators deliver speeches to the public. We have chosen two political speeches: i. Martin Luther King (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iY1TtS3s>) and ii. Nelson Mandela (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GkwO6w7WOQ>).
3. We will then ask the following questions: a. Who is the speaker? b. Who is the audience? c. What is the message of the political speech? d. What do the students feel about the speech production?
4. We will then create a map of meanings about political speech on the blackboard.
5. We will upload political speeches of Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler to the e-class for students to watch at home (flipped classroom).

## **B. Situated practice (2<sup>nd</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> hour)**

### **➤ Second hour**

1. Students will have watched the political speeches of Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler and must answer the following questions: a. Who is the speaker? b. Who is the audience? c. What is the message of the political speech? d. What do the students feel about the speech production?
2. We will ask them to work in groups and create a small corpus<sup>2</sup> of speeches for each orator and then upload them to the Voyant tool. They must then extract the most frequently used words, create a word cloud after excluding the stop word list, and make comparisons. The first speech will be Hitler's First Radio Address (Excerpted Version) on February 1, 1933, two days after he was appointed chancellor, where he spoke over the radio to the German people about his vision for the future of the country. The second speech will be Donald Trump's inauguration speech.

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<sup>2</sup> Corpus linguistics and stylistics can be combined with and serve as specific goal of this research. The perceptual salience is not always enough to approach texts.

**Figure 1. Word cloud of Adolf Hitler**



(Sinclair, S. & G. Rockwell. (2023). Cirrus. Voyant Tools. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://voyant-tools.org/?stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt&whiteList=&visible=25&corpus=0f2f2b015de124606a8499340e00bc29&view=Cirrus>).

**Figure 2. Word cloud of Donald Trump**



(Sinclair, S. & G. Rockwell. (2023). Cirrus. Voyant Tools. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://voyant-tools.org/?stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt&whiteList=&visible=25&corpus=0f2f2b015de124606a8499340e00bc29&view=Cirrus>).

3. Students into groups are asked to extract the word cloud of speeches by Vladimir Putin (Nation Speech 21 Feb 2022) and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to extract the word cloud and make comparisons.

➤ **Third hour**

1. Students into groups are asked to extract the word cloud of speeches by Vladimir Putin (Nation Speech 21 Feb 2022) and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to extract the word cloud and make comparisons.

**Figure 3. Word cloud of Vladimir Putin**



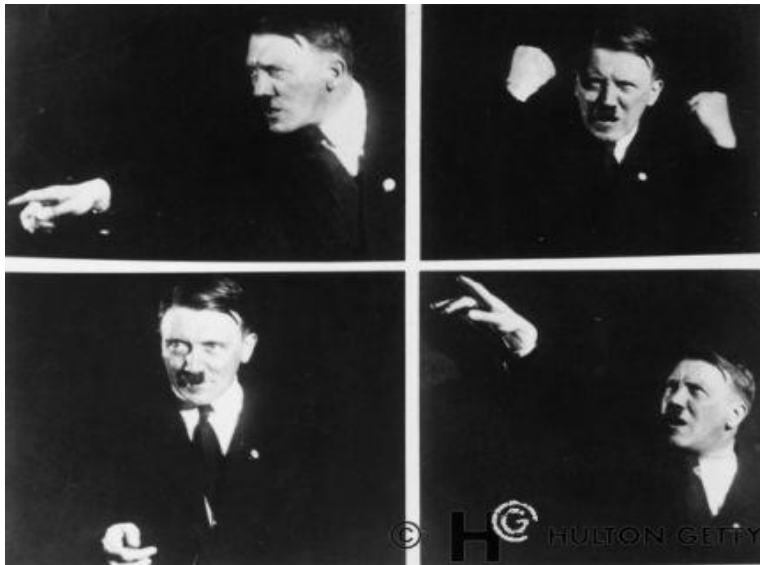
(Sinclair, S. & G. Rockwell. (2023). Cirrus. Voyant Tools. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=f57d6d3fc3bfd2dde693e8c0fa94bf0e&view=Cirrus>).

**Figure 4. Word cloud of Volodymyr Zelenskyy**



(Sinclair, S. & G. Rockwell. (2023). Cirrus. Voyant Tools. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://voyant-tools.org/?stopList=stop.en.taporware.txt&whiteList=&visible=25&corpus=922c5a315713e2ed6acaa02a8fc3e981&view=Cirrus>)

2. Students are asked to note the following pictures and describe the emotions of both political orators. In this way they will understand how politicians use gestures (see Daniela Trotta and Raffaele Guarasci 2021).



**Hitler's emotions.**



**Trump's pistol hand gesture.**

**C. Interdisciplinary activities (Fourth and fifth hour)**

1. Discussion about politics and literature, politics and art. For example, we could analyze the poem of Georgios Seferis: *Over Aspalathus Bushes*<sup>3</sup> and ask students how Seferis promotes his opinion about dictatorship in Greece.

**Georgios Seferis: *Over Aspalathus Bushes***

*Sounion looked beautiful  
that day of Annunciation,  
in spring once again.  
A few green leaves  
around the rusty stones  
colour red and the  
aspalathus bushes  
ready, showing their long  
needles  
and their yellow flowers.  
Not far away the ancient  
columns,  
threads of an harp  
echoing still.*

*Tranquillity.  
-What may reminded me  
of that man Ardieus?  
A word of Plato I suppose  
lost in my brain's ditches.  
The name of the yellow  
bush  
did not change all this  
time.  
In the night I found the  
excerpt:  
"They tied him in hands  
and feet", he says,*

*threw him down and  
skinned him,  
drew him farther and tore  
him apart,  
over the aspalathus thorns,  
grabbed him and left him  
as a rag  
down in Tartarus."*

*And so, in the nether  
world, paid his sins  
Ardieus from Pamfyllia, the  
sordid tyrant.*

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<sup>3</sup> This poem is Seferis' last poem, published in the newspaper *Vima* three days after his death during the dictatorship period (1967-1974). The poem is based on a passage from Plato's "Republic" (614 c-e), which describes the afterlife punishment of unjust individuals, particularly that of the tyrant Ardiaeus. Ardiaeus, a tyrant in a city, had killed his father and his elder brother. As a result, his punishment, along with that of other tyrants, was terrible in the afterlife. When they had completed the customary punishment imposed on the unjust and were ready to emerge into the light, their mouths could not receive them, but emitted a low, groaning sound. At the same time, savage men who were all fire and fury, and who understood the significance of this groaning sound, bound Ardiaeus and some others hand and foot, threw them down, flayed them, dragged them out onto the public highway, and hacked them to pieces in the brambles. All who passed by were told the reasons for their punishment and were told that they were being taken to Tartarus. For more details see Beaton (2003).



2. In a flipped classroom setting, students can watch the political movies 'Z'<sup>4</sup> and 'Julius Caesar'<sup>5</sup> in groups, and then present the plot to their classmates. They can also make comparisons about the political situation.

#### **D. Critical framing (Sixth hour)**

Students talk about the combination of language with power based on the aforementioned analysis on the political personalities.

#### **E. Transformed practice (Seventh- eighth hour)**

At this point, students will be asked to apply what they have learned in the previous stage by engaging in practical applications. They can work in groups or individually. Specifically, students will be expected to:

- ✓ Create a political poster using Glogster.
- ✓ Develop a one-minute digital storytelling commercial to promote a political personality in an election using Movie Maker.
- ✓ Write a political speech of 400 words individually or in groups on a selected topic using collaborative documents on Google. They may be tasked with criticizing the government's handling of environmental issues, racism, crime, etc. and are required to incorporate statistical surveys as evidence. The correctness criteria for the speech will include deontic modality, parallelism, emotional words, epistemic verbs, repetition, and all modes of persuasion.
- ✓ Participate in rhetorical contests or debates on a topic using the investigative method. Alternatively, students may engage in a hot chair of rhetoric by interrogating a dictator about their political purpose.

After completing the above tasks, students will engage in peer and self-assessment activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Z is a 1969 political thriller film directed by Costa-Gavras, from a screenplay he co-wrote with Jorge Semprún, adapted from the 1967 novel of the same name by Vassilis Vassilikos.

<sup>5</sup> Gaius Julius Caesar (12 July 100 BC – 15 March 44 BC) was a Roman general and statesman. On the Ides of March (15 March) 44 BC, Caesar was assassinated by a group of rebellious senators led by Brutus and Cassius, who stabbed him to death.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the students had the opportunity to learn about the ways and means of persuasion. They reflected on the relationship between language and ideology, approached the topic critically, and through interdisciplinarity, managed to understand politics in our lives. The theoretical model that was used was enhanced with an additional distinct stage, that of interdisciplinarity. The teaching intervention lasted for seven-eight teaching hours, which took place in the classroom and the computer lab, while the students' assignments were completed through the utilization of collaborative documents and the e-class platform of the Panhellenic School Network. The students realized that behind all texts, there are ideologies and therefore the texts are not "innocent". Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was creatively and critically utilized as a means of fruitful collaboration, promoting initiative, ingenuity, and self-action. In general, the students worked in groups and the following tools were used: Web 2.0, Voyant, Glogster, Movie Maker, and Google Docs. In addition, the drama education<sup>6</sup> technique of hot chair was used as well. In this way, the students combined critical and digital literacy and were able to understand that texts should be critically processed. Through this teaching plan, the goal is to activate students' interest in social and political life, enabling them to discern elements of propaganda and fake news in their daily lives. As a result, they will seek truth, not fall victim to exploitation and misinformation, be able to think critically, strive for social change, solve social issues, and contribute, through critical and digital literacy, to sustainability in general. Finally, it should be noted that this particular instructional design relies on the students, teachers, and the resources available to each school. Therefore, it can be adapted and changes can be made wherever necessary based on needs and circumstances.

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<sup>6</sup> For more details about drama education see Neelands (2002).

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