LINGUISTIC MANIPULATION IN POLITICAL ADVERTISING

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ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Elections in India offer ample opportunity to political parties and their leaders to put into effect the persuasive power of language. Over the years, 'the skill of persuasion and reasoning' has become a legitimate political practice in Indian politics. Political advertising in Indian election campaigns has been noticeably dominated by the exploitation of persuasive language. In their hunt for electoral support, the competing political representatives of political parties engage intensely in mechanized and manipulated forms of language to identify and share the worldview of the electorate. However, there is an implicit meaning-system working within this manipulated and exploited communicative order as manifested in the language of political advertising.

Linguists maintain that any proposition can be expressed in a variety of ways, and that in any given situation one of these ways will be the most effective in swaying an audience. Hence, when persuasion is the overriding goal of political advertising, the persuasive perspective of such advertising suggests that the manner in which a statement is expressed may be more important than its content. The promise of persuasive communication is that there exists a system for identifying the most effective <u>form</u> of expression in any given case. Thus, a persuasive approach to the language of political advertising will rest on three premises:

1) that linguistic manipulation can be expected to have important consequences for how the language of political advertising is processed;

2) that these consequences can in turn be derived from properties of linguistic manipulation; and

3) that these formal properties are systematically interrelated.

LINGUISTIC MANIPULATION

A linguistic manipulation in the language of political advertising can be defined as an <u>artful deviation</u> (Corbett 1990). In other words, linguistic manipulation in the language of political advertising is deviation from the norm. A manipulative expression occurs when an expression deviates from expectation, while at the same time the expression is not rejected as nonsensical or faulty. The deviation occurs at the level of form rather than content, and the deviation conforms to a pattern that is invariant across a variety of content and contexts.

THE NORM AND THE DEVIATION

This definition supplies the standard against which deviation is to be measured (i.e., expectations). It sets a limit on the amount and kind of deviation (i.e., short of a mistake), and locates the deviation at the level of the formal structure of a text, and imposes a grouping requirement (i.e., there are a limited number of patterns, each with distinct characteristics).

For example, Laloo Prasad Yadav, the chief of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) who is known for his wit and crass or down to earch humor, asked the RJD supporters at an election meeting in Chapra (Bihar), *'Lathi utthavan, tel pilaavan, Bhaajpa bhaghaavan'* (Take your lathis, oil them well, and chase the BJP out). In this slogan, Laloo Prasad Yadav diverged from established linguistic norm and general expectation. However, his supporters did not reject the slogan as nonsensical or faulty; rather it was recognized as a humorous and witty expression. The slogan generated what the semiotician Barthes would call a "pleasure of the text" -- the reward that comes from processing a clever arrangement of signs.

LINGUISTIC BOUNDARIES

On the other hand when Lalu Prasad Yadav's party coined the expression " Gharib Raila" (for a political rally of poor), the Hindi-speaking audience was not amused because it crossed the limit on the amount and kind of deviation. The coinage of the new expression

"raila" was supposed to mirror its larger size. The coinage was based on the common linguistic pattern of Hindi-Urdu; *Thailli* 'a smaller bag,' *thaila* a larger bag; *daigchi* 'a smaller pot,' *daigcha* 'a larger pot. It shows how linguistic manipulation provides a means for making the familiar strange.

Deviation in language of political advertising then, is a matter of creating what consumer researchers might call <u>incongruity</u>. A key contribution of communication studies is to explain how certain kinds of text structure, can produce incongruity in the language of political advertising.

LINGUISTIC MANIPULATION

The limiting conditions in the definition of linguistic manipulation are intended to clarify the concept by explaining what it does not include. Bad grammar and faulty diction also deviate from expectations, but these constitute a failure of expression.

In linguistic manipulation or rhetoric, the linguistic structure of the text deviates but does not slip up. Non-erratic deviations in message <u>content</u> are also not considered manipulated styles. For example, a claim that "Bharatiya Janata Party is preferred by retired police officers" would deviate from our expectations but would not constitute a manipulated style because the deviation lies at the level of content: the reference to "retired police officer" rather than the more customary "youth," "women," etc.

The final limiting condition distinguishes linguistic manipulation within the broader category of stylistic devices. For a deviation to be a linguistic manipulation, it must be possible to define the deviation independent of any individual occurrence. Skillful deviations in form that have a one time character, or where a rule applicable across content elements cannot be formulated, are only stylistic devices.

METAPHORS

In terms of speech act theory, every communication encounter sets up expectations as it proceeds, and more general expectations that hold across encounters function as

conventions or constraints (Grice 1989). With respect to metaphor, for instance, listeners are aware of conventions with respect to the use of words, one of which might be formulated as, words are generally used to convey one of the lead meanings given in their dictionary entry. A metaphor violates that convention.

For example, we can cite Pramod Mahajan statement where he justifies his party's poll symbol (lotus) over that of the Bahujan Samaj Party (elephant) and Samajwadi Party (cycle) poll symbols in the following manner: *'Lakshmi haathi per baith kar nahi aati, Lakshmi cycle per baith kar nahi aati, Lakshmi aati hai to kamal ke phool per baith kar hi aati hai'* (Lakshmi – the goddess of wealth – does not come riding the elephant or cycle, but if she comes she comes riding on the lotus).

In a normal situation, "cycle" or "elephant" are better movers as they are large, strong and dependable carrier; but, in this context, the statement is describing a "lotus" as a better mover. This statement is decorated with mythological certification.

Sperber and Wilson (1986) contend that listeners know exactly what to do when a speaker violates a convention: they search for a context that will render the violation intelligible. If context permits an inference that the "lotus" is particularly strong, then the consumer of the political message will achieve an understanding of the encoder's statement.

If Mahajan's statement had said, "lakshmi car par baith kar ati hai," most consumers would have considerable difficulty. Nonsensical or anomalous statements represent a double violation or deviation of the second degree. In other words, consumers have available conventions about how to deal with violations of convention. If a search for context restores understanding, the consumer assumes a stylistic usage and responds accordingly. Else, the consumer assumes some failure of communication.

ADDITIONAL MEANING BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE MEANING

As a deviation with respect to specific or general expectations, any linguistic manipulation carries at least one additional meaning beyond its immediate meaning

(Genette 1982). This overlaid meaning might be expressed as "Look, I chose to violate a convention here - take note."

When told that the "lotus is a mover of goddess of wealth," the consumer of the message both finds a translation supported by context -- this party's symbol "lotus" is particularly strong, and brings a greater degree of economic prosperity, etc. -- and understands that BJP leader Paramod Mahajan was unwilling to simply say "the lotus is strong" or "it brings prosperity."

The implication is that none of these two paraphrases just given quite suffices to capture the encoder's intent; in fact, that no single, univocal predication applied to the "lotus" appears adequate to capture the encoder's thought. Thus, the resort to a style provokes the consumer to consider a variety of predications concerning the "Lotus" that will be consistent with the use of "Lakshmi" and render it comprehensible in context.

STYLISTIC DEVIATION REPRESENTS A GAP

In Genette's (1982) terms, every stylistic deviation represents a gap. The linguistic manipulation both points to a translation, and denies the adequacy of that translation, thus encouraging further interpretation.

It is important to acknowledge that any particular manipulated expression can deviate to a greater or lesser extent and thus it would be more or less strange (Leech 1969). This outcome applies at two levels: that of any individual stylistic variation (a particular occurrence of rhyme or metaphor, for instance), and at the aggregate level (such as puns, may in general involve a greater degree of deviation than others, such as alliteration). All of our statements that compare stylistic variation or situate them on the gradient of deviation refer to the hypothetical "average" instance of that style.

DROPPING BELOW THE THRESHOLD

Moreover, if the deviation drops below some threshold then there is no longer a manipulated expression. This occurs, for example, in the case of metaphors that have

become frozen or conventional. In Hindi Urdu, the metaphorical use of Sher for bravery has become frozen, nevertheless, it is used in political discourse. When Indira Gandhi was contesting election from Chikmagloor, the Congress Party coined the slogan, Ek sherni aur sau languor, Chikmagloor Chikmagloor.

In frozen metaphor, deviation may be temporally situated, what once was a stylistic variation need not always remain one. This example, together with the "lotus" metaphor, serves also as a reminder that stylistically manipulated structure resides and operates within a complex web of socio-cultural signs and meanings

LINGUISTIC MANIPULATION AND CONSUMER RESPONSE

A stylician will assume that the widespread use of stylistically manipulated expressions must be deliberate and designed to serve as an effective adaptation to the circumstances in which the political advertisement will be encountered. A fundamental feature of field exposure conditions is that the consumer has complete freedom to ignore a political ad or to devote the barest minimum of processing effort to it, because consumers are under no compulsion to start reading a headline, or finish reading it, or continue on to read the rest of the ad, and therefore, an important function of stylistically manipulated expression is to motivate the potential reader. In this regard, strangeness or stylistic deviation is among one of those factors that call to and arrest attention. Hence, when ad exposure is not forced, consumers should allocate a greater amount of attention to stylistically motivated political ad language as compared to non-stylistically motivated ad language..

 Stylistic manipulations also yield what the semiotician Barthes called a "pleasure of the text"—or " a pleasurable degree of arousal" The rewarding character of artful deviation thus suggests that stylistically manipulated ad language, as compared to literal ad language, should produce a more positive attitude-toward-the political ad.

Because positive effects on attention, ad liking, and recall derive from the linguistic manipulation that constitutes a stylistic deviation, all manipulated expressions can be expected to confer these advantages to some extent. This may explain why Leigh (1994) found rhetorical figures in three-fourths of the magazine ads studied. However, as we

move down the taxonomy, we will come to properties that differentiate specific types of figures. Both qualitative and quantitative distinctions will be drawn. These distinctions will then suggest consumer responses that are not uniform across all kinds of rhetorical figures, thus indicating circumstances where we can expect one kind of figure to be more effective than another in a particular respect.

TYPES OF MANIPULATION

The types of linguistic manipulation correspond to the classical distinction between schemes and tropes (Leech 1969). A manipulative expression in the schematic mode occurs when a text contains excessive order or regularity, while a manipulative expression in the tropic mode occurs when a text contains a deficiency of order or irregularities. Schemes and tropes thus encompass two distinct types of linguistic manipulation. Familiar examples of schematic manipulation in the language of political advertising would include rhyme and alliteration;

1. Congrees ka hath Gharibon ki sath
2. Vote Atal   Vote Kamal
3. Desh ki Andhi   Soniya Gandhi
4. Raj tilak ki karo tyyari   A rahe hain Atal Bihari
5. Chalegi cycle, uregi dhool
   na rahega panja, na rahega phool

(When the cycle (election symbol of Samajwadi Party) moves, dust will fly, there will be no hand (Congress Party Symbol) and no flower (BJP Symbol) left.

On the other hand, metaphors and puns would be familiar examples of tropic manipulation. For example, the parody based on a film song hitting out at Sonia Gandhi being a foreigner is one of the best examples of tropic manipulation.

Tum to thahre Pardesi sath kya nibhaoge ,

The Indian electorate witnessed a musical warfare in 2004 general election, as parodies of popular Hindi movies countered the ideologies of candidates. Countering the BJP's *"tum to tahre Pardesi,"* the Congress party retorted *Pardesi Pardesi jana nahin mujhe chor ke.*

COMBINATION AND SELECTION CONSTRAINTS

The linguistic manipulation that constitutes schemes and tropes respectively can be understood in part in terms of the linguistic distinction between combination and selection constraints (Leech 1969). A combination constraint limits how signs can be combined into sentences, while a selection constraint limits which signs can fill certain positions (subject, object, verb, etc.) in a sentence. Schemes can be understood as deviant combinations, as in the BJP slogan *"Sab ki bari bari bari ab ki bari Atal Bihari"* This slogan is excessively regular because of its repetition of sounds and words. It violates the convention that sounds are generally irrelevant to the sense of an utterance, i.e., the expectation held by receivers that the distribution of sounds through an utterance will be essentially unordered except by the grammatical and semantic constraints required to make a well-formed sentence. The BJP slogan suggests that sound-play can be used to build up meaning in an effective way.

TROPES

Many tropes, particularly metaphors and puns effected in a single word, can be understood as deviant selections. Thus, in the BJP Political slogan *" tum to tahre Pardesi sath kya nibhaoge,"* there is a figurative metaphor, because "Pardesi" does not belong to the nation and therefore can not be loyal to the country. However, not all tropes are effected in a single word, so that tropes such as rhetorical question or paradox have to be explained with the aid of the more general semiotic distinction between under- and over-coded texts.

In over-coding there are more possible organizations of information than are necessary for message reception, while in under-coding, the readily available organizations of information are insufficient. Schemes thus fit a model of over-coding while tropes fit a model of under-coding.

SCHEMES

In addition to being qualitatively distinct from tropes, schemes are also quantitatively distinct. Specifically, a depth of processing perspective argues that on average schemes will be <u>less deviant</u> than tropes. This is because excess regularity is obtained via rearrangements of the surface of the text, i.e., it occurs at a sensory level, as when one repeats sounds to achieve a rhyme or inverts the order of words to create an anti metabole. By contrast, a tropical question or pun is not an apparent feature of the political slogan, but becomes manifest as the text is related to semantic and background knowledge. Those who are familiar with the foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi can only appreciate the slogan " *tum to thahre pardesi."*

Deviation thus tends to be greater in the case of tropes because irregularity represents incongruity, occurring at a deeper (semantic) level of processing.

LINGUISTIC MANIPULATION AND CONSUMER RESPONSE

 Both the qualitative and quantitative distinctions between modes of linguistic manipulation have implications for consumer response. Taking up the qualitative distinction first, although both schematic ad language and tropic ad language should be more memorable than literal ad language, the underlying process will differ as follows. Because they are over-coded, schemes add internal redundancy to advertising messages. Repetition within a text can be expected to enhance recall just as repetition of the entire text does.

For example, a rhyme forges extra phonemic links among the political slogans. When reading, "Congress ka hath Gharibon ki Sath," the consumer has several encoding possibilities available, including the phonemic equivalence (hath – sath), and the rhyming.

In terms of a spreading activation model these multiple encoding possibilities lead to multiple opportunities for subsequent retrieval of the slogan. The possibility of remembering tropes rests on a different mechanism. Because they are under-coded,

tropes are incomplete in the sense of lacking closure. Tropes thus invite elaboration by the reader.

For example, consider the BJP ad with the headline "India is Shining." It is clear from the tone and manner of the campaign that it was set in English, with no rural or vernacular nuances. In this political ad "shining" is unexpected as a selection from the set of verbs. Via reinterpretation, the first meaning, "Shining", takes on a more common quality, namely that BJP will help the electorate to overcome the economic hurdles. The second meaning, takes on the more triumphant quality of an achievement against obstacles.

This tropic political advertisement sets in motion a rich network of associations, thanks to the BJP, that every Indian today is well off, that every farmer uses mobile telephones, every villager is now experiencing motorways, etc. These resolutions may lead to multiple encodings and/or the strengthening of existing conceptual linkages in memory. Thus, the additional cognitive activity expended in the reinterpretation increases the number of associative pathways stored in memory.

TROPIC AND LITERAL ADS

Overall then, tropic ad language should be more memorable than literal ad language. However, in view of the distinct processes involved, there are no grounds for expecting a main effect on ad recall between modes of stylistic manipulation. Instead, a variety of moderating factors will determine whether schematic ad language or tropic ad language is more memorable in a specific instance. A general view of the nature of these moderating factors can be derived from the distinction between under - coded and over - coded text.

For instance, consider factors that tend to inhibit elaborative processing (e.g., distractions, lack of ability). When such a factor is operating, the processing resources available to the consumer will be minimized and the invitation to elaborate provided by a trope may not be taken up (cf. Anand and Sternthal 1990), leading to diminished memory for tropic language.

In fact, in such cases, the trope risks not being comprehended at all. Under these same circumstances where resources are restricted, schemes will actually be advantaged because of their over-coded and redundant nature, leading to enhanced memorability relative to tropes.

Consider now the quantitative distinction between modes of manipulation in terms of the greater deviation characteristic of tropes. Consistent with Berlyne (1971), the greater incongruity of tropes should lead to enhanced stopping power relative to schemes. This suggests that a main effect for tropes over schemes should be found in the case of attention to ad language.

Similarly, the aesthetic reward from successfully processing deviant text argues for a more positive attitude-toward-the-ad in the case of tropes relative to schemes. However, we would expect the tropic advantage over schemes in terms of political advertisement to be augmented or diminished as a function of moderating factors that make the successful resolution of tropic irregularity more or less likely. Thus, while the invitation posed by a trope may be sufficient to draw attention, a boost to attitude requires that that invitation be accepted and followed through.

CONCLUSION

The paper has thus made an attempt to bring to light a largely unacknowledged and undifferentiated aspect of the language of political advertising. It described how a wide variety of linguistic features could be integrated conceptually and related to common consumer responses, and offered an explanation for the high frequency of stylistically manipulated expressions in political advertising in terms of the beneficial effects associated with artful deviation. However, an important limitation of this paper when viewed in the context of the rhetorical and stylistic tradition is a focus that is simultaneously too narrow and too broad.

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