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Verbal Behavior and Politics

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VERBAL BEHAVIOR AND POLITICS

Doris A. Graber

"Communism," "New Deal," "Black Power" — such highly charged terms have become an integral part of our vocabulary, easily identified but less easily defined. When a politician rails against "Communists in our midst," does he truly intend to draw attention to this presumed threat? Or does he simply want to obtain a column in the newspaper, or a moment on TV, for publicizing his own efforts to his constituents? Does his message increase fear of communism, spur defense efforts in the U.S., and antagonize the Communist World?

As Doris Graber observes, politics involves interaction among people, through various forms of communication, to make and enforce rules for their social systems. Verbal tactics and interactions shape the course of politics at all levels, from the sabre-rattling threat at the international level to barbed dialogue at a school board meeting, and from the media message broadcast to the world to the intimate conversation between world leaders.

In Part One of the volume, Graber deals with general characteristics of verbal behavior, discussing the construction of political messages and the importance, effects, and inferences drawn from them. She also sets forth theories and techniques for accurate analysis and measurement of verbal behavior. Part Two, which concerns verbal behavior in political settings, contains analyses based on recent social-scientific research involving national and international politics.

DORIS A. GRABER is professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, and the author of many other books and articles, including *Public Opinion, the President,*

BARGAINING

Formal Theories of Negotiation

edited and with contributions

by Oran R. Young

Bargaining is common in a great many sociopolitical relationships, from the interactions of members of family units to the interactions of nation states. Because of this widespread occurrence, there is a need for theoretical work on bargaining by students of all the social sciences. In taking stock of the body of deductive work in the field, evaluating the prospects for further theoretical work, and clarifying several conceptual problems which commonly arise in analyses of bargaining, Young's book attempts to encourage this needed research.

1975. 420 pages. \$15.00.

VERBAL BEHAVIOR AND POLITICS

Acknowledgments

Authors usually want to give credit to all those whose efforts or sacrifices bear directly on the writing of their books. In this spirit, I thank the members of my family for graciously accepting my long hours of communion with the typewriter which kept me from joining in their activities. I wish to express appreciation to the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle; the appointment which it granted me as a post-doctoral fellow in 1971 released me from part of my regular teaching activities so that I could engage in research for this book. I am grateful for the expert secretarial services which I received from various members of the staff of the political science department at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle. For able help with proofreading and indexing, thanks go to Jack and Susan Graber.

The manuscript has benefited in substance and style from the suggestions of those who read parts or the whole, including the readers whose identity is hidden behind the collective label of "consultants for the University of Illinois Press." The contributions of Paul J. Hiniker, my friend and colleague at UICC, have been particularly outstanding. He carefully critiqued each chapter, giving me the benefit of his keen insights into the processes of political communication and his profound knowledge of the scattered literature of the field. The footnotes throughout the text which acknowledge his suggestions are but a small indication of the stimulating impact which he has had on my thinking about this book.

John Donne reminded us many centuries ago that "No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine." I gratefully acknowledge vast intellectual debts to my fellow scholars who have recorded, described, and analyzed man's verbal behavior throughout the ages. With them, I wish to share the credit which accrues to social scientists for their contributions to advancing human knowledge and welfare through the study of verbal processes. With them, I bear the burden of blame which falls on all of us for the shortcomings in our work, and for the many pressing questions which social scientists have not even begun to answer about the verbal symbols which dominate our lives.

Preface

Politics is by definition a social activity which involves interaction among people, through various forms of communication, to make and enforce rules for their social systems. Much of this communication takes the form of the spoken or written word. Though verbal interchange is indispensable to modern politics, the study of verbal behavior has been neglected. As Benjamin Whorf remarked decades ago, "Natural man, whether simpleton or scientist, knows no more of the linguistic forces that bear upon him than the savage knows of gravitational forces."¹

Aside from the study of rhetoric by early Greek political philosophers, political science has neglected linguistic studies more than other social sciences. Psychologists and sociologists concentrate on verbal behavior in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Philosophers deal with "ordinary language philosophies which make inferences about mind, morals, nature, and God from the use of language."² However, there is as yet no disciplinary subfield of political linguistics which focuses on verbal behavior as an important aspect of politics. Minor areas of concentration purport to teach how to use language effectively to formulate political viewpoints and to persuade, but they rarely delve beneath the practical aspects of political persuasion to underlying principles, and they do not cover verbal behavior in its broader aspects.

This book is intended to fill a small part of that knowledge gap. Through description and analysis of verbal behavior studies pertaining to politics, the book seeks to show how and why knowledge of verbal behavior is important to an understanding of politics. This endeavor calls for a discussion of the functions which verbal behavior performs in the conduct of politics, the manner in which those functions are performed under various circumstances, and the consequences of verbal behavior, including the inferences which may be drawn from it.³

1. Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1956), p. 251.

2. Vere C. Chappell, ed., *Ordinary Language* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

3. This book deals primarily with the part of language study known as pragmatics, rather than semantics and syntactics. Pragmatics "directs its attention to the investigation of language as human activity, not only its specific cognitive uses, but also its emotional, volitional, and other essentially private psychological effects. Pragmatics also concerns itself with the action, circumstances of the action, and outcomes which obtain on the occasion of linguistic use" (A. James Gregor, *An*

It also involves an examination of alternative verbalizations which were available but not used, and discussion of the differences which their use might have made. Such speculations are worth making because verbal behavior, more than most other behaviors, allows the speaker a wide array of choices for coping with the exigencies of a particular political task. If one knows the options from which the ultimate choice was made, one may gain important insights into the decision-making process.

At present, most verbal choices of substance and form of expression are made and judged intuitively. There is little theory to guide the speaker or analyst in predicting the probable consequences of alternative verbalizations. Choices and analyses would be improved if verbal theories and their applications were more fully developed. Development of pre-theories and theories is one of the most pressing tasks of studies dealing with verbal behavior.⁴ This book therefore not only describes various forms of verbal behavior and their consequences; it also surveys theories and techniques which have been developed for the analysis and measurement of verbal behavior.

The first two chapters deal with the major political functions of verbal behavior, and with problems of constructing and deciphering political messages. The next two chapters contain a general discussion of various political effects of verbal formulations, also scrutinizing important inferences to be drawn from verbal data. Then comes a fifth chapter examining the philosophies underlying several techniques for measuring verbal outputs. It presents an overview, rather than detailed techniques, of various quantitative and qualitative methods now used to study verbal behavior.

Part Two analyzes verbal behavior in selected political settings; each has been chosen because of its intrinsic political importance and because it illustrates a different facet of verbal behavior. Chapter 6 shows how the mass media contribute to conceptual environments which shape the agenda for political life. Chapter 7 treats the verbal behavior of political elites, indicating why and how it is significant. Chapters 8 and 9 focus on verbal behavior as an interaction process in different types of political settings. The importance of settings is noted, and the political consequences of interactions in particular settings are deline-

Introduction to Metapolitics [New York: Free Press, 1971], p. 44). Semantics, by contrast, deals with the rules concerning the meaning of symbols, and syntactics with the rules governing the grammatical relation of words to each other.

4. See Harold D. Lasswell, Daniel Lerner, and Ithiel de Sola Pool, *The Comparative Study of Symbols* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952), p. 64.

ated. Chapter 10 deals with an especially powerful tool of verbal behavior, the condensation symbol. This magical verbal concoction can activate a whole host of feelings, evaluations, and cognitions which may inspire political action. A brief epilogue presents a glance backward over the intellectual territory traveled thus far, and forward to the challenges which face students of verbal behavior in politics in their search for new substantive knowledge, theories, and research tools.

Obviously, many aspects of verbal behavior have not received extensive treatment in this book; others have been omitted altogether. In making decisions about inclusion or exclusion of topics, two questions were asked: How significant is this aspect for political outcomes? How well has it been covered by other studies? For example, the decision to exclude voice attributes from extended treatment was made on the grounds that they are relatively insignificant — much verbal output receives its widest exposure through indirect transmissions, written or paraphrased by the media. Furthermore, in gatherings of professional politicians, voice attributes are often consciously discounted or overshadowed by other considerations.

The decision to focus on the message aspects of verbal behavior rather than on senders, receivers, or message environment followed from the second criterion. Although the literature is not extensive, psychological, sociological, and rhetorical studies have given a great deal more prominence to message senders, their audiences, and their environments than to the nature of the message.⁵ Certain types of verbal activity were adjudged to be so well covered by other studies that they could be omitted from this book. These include deliberate manipulative behavior, such as propaganda, political campaigning, public relations work, and the rhetorics developed for them.⁶ Availability of other studies also led to the exclusion of analyses of communication networks which trace the flow of verbal communications and the consequences of verbal flow patterns.⁷ The vast area of language varieties

5. Neglect of message studies pervades the social sciences. For instance, in "Ideology as a Cultural System," Clifford Geertz complains that ideologies are rarely studied as symbol systems. See David Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 47-76.

6. Brief studies with extensive bibliographies are: Terence H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare* (New York: Random House, 1965); Dan Nimmo, *The Political Persuaders: The Techniques of Modern Election Campaigns* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970); and Stanley Kelley, Jr., *Professional Public Relations and Political Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

7. Examples are Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government: Models of Politi-*

among and within nations as bases for national and subnational cohesion or conflict has likewise been omitted. Although this is not usually the primary focus of social science studies, it has been touched upon in a number of works which deal with the politics of individual countries, regions, or the international system.⁸

No broad theory of verbal behavior undergirds this book; "... there is as yet no good theory of symbolic communication by which to predict how given values, attitudes, or ideologies will be expressed in manifest symbols. . . . There is almost no theory of language which predicts the specific words one will emit in the course of expressing the contents of his thoughts."⁹ However, there are a number of middle-level theories derived from analysis of specific verbal behavior situations. Many of these are borrowed partly or wholly from psychological and sociological research; theories which involve the prediction of future political behaviors from regularities of past verbal output are one example.¹⁰ This volume uses such theories in its appraisal of various forms of verbal behavior and verbal behavior studies.¹¹ Nonetheless, far too many of the observations about verbal behavior presented in this book remain intellectual orphans in search of their theoretical parentage.

Fortunately, the prospects for rapid development of empirical studies and theories of verbal behavior seem brighter than ever. The new social science techniques which use computers and various mathematical operations have made it possible to study large samples of verbal output more systematically, making it easier to discern patterns of verbal behavior and test hypotheses on large bodies of data. One would hope that such additional studies will be neither "the piling up of sterile information . . . nor monuments of worship of whatever facts

cal Communication and Control (New York: Free Press, 1966) and *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York: Wiley, 1953); also Richard R. Fagen, *Politics and Communication* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966).

8. See for example Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). Charles F. Gallagher, "Language, Culture, and Ideology: The Arab World," in Kalman H. Silvert, *Expectant Peoples: Nationalism and Development* (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 199-231.

9. Lasswell, Lerner, and Pool, *Comparative Study of Symbols*, p. 49. The fact that this more than twenty-year-old observation is still valid documents the painfully slow growth of theory in this field.

10. Examples would be predictions of hostile international behavior, predictions of judicial decision-making, or predictions of leadership style. See pp. 70-72, 78-88, below.

11. Lasswell warns against confusing theories about ideas with theories about symbols (*Comparative Study of Symbols*, p. 65). Since this book deals with the significance of verbalization of ideas, as well as with the significance of symbols, it has been difficult to heed this warning consistently.

and practices exist."¹² Rather, with skill and luck, these data can help us discover how verbal behavior can bring about some of the political and social advances which we have captured in words and dreams, but which elude us in reality.

12. Karl W. Deutsch, "On Political Theory and Political Action," *American Political Science Review*, 65 (1971), 19.

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PART ONE

General Characteristics of Verbal Behavior

1

Importance of Verbal Behavior in Politics

Words *do* have a magical effect — but not in the way that the magicians supposed, and not on the objects they were trying to influence. Words are magical in the way they affect the minds of those who use them. “A mere matter of words,” we say contemptuously, forgetting that words have power to mold men’s thinking, to canalize their feeling, to direct their willing and acting. Conduct and character are largely determined by the nature of the words we currently use to discuss ourselves and the world around us.

— Aldous Huxley, “Words and Their Meanings”¹

What is verbal behavior in politics? Most simply, when A formulates a verbal message and transmits it to B, that is verbal behavior. A has both consciously and subconsciously selected ideas for verbalization. He has more or less deliberately chosen the words with which he wishes to express them. Word choice may have been guided by a desire to evoke predetermined cognitive, evaluative, and affective responses from the receivers of the message. When verbal behavior occurs in a context which has political significance, it falls within the purview of this study.

Since zillions of words are emitted each day in political settings, the focus of any book dealing with verbal behavior in politics must be selective. “Political significance” must be construed narrowly; here it refers to those verbal stimuli which contain political messages which reach or affect large numbers of people — the outputs of the mass media which convey information about politics; political messages by significant actors in politics, such as high-level public officials; or verbal transactions in an open or closed political meeting, such as a session of the UN General Assembly or a meeting of a congressional committee.

WORDS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

“Verbal behavior in politics” conjures up visions of cigar-chomping politicians. Politics is obviously fueled by word power. Politicians use

1. In Max Black, ed., *The Importance of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 1-2.

words to report and exhort, to bargain and persuade, to threaten and conciliate.² They talk to their constituents, negotiate privately, argue in public assemblies and committees, and give orders which are to be transformed into further orders or physical action.

Politicians are judged in part by their verbal skills. Do they know what to say and what not to say at a particular time? Do they know how to couch their arguments in the most persuasive form? Great care is required in selecting the most effective verbal approaches for each occasion. If a politician wants public support for integrated schools, he must know the language cues which will appeal to his potential backers; talking about the justice of racial balance may be futile, but an appeal stressing economic arguments—saving money—may work. Knowing which appeal works best, and putting it in its most persuasive form, can bring success instead of failure. In fact, the choice of proper language is often such a delicate task that it is left to professionals in the art of verbal formulation.

However, verbal communications by politicians are only a small part of the verbal behavior which shapes politics. Even in the age of television, the bulk of the average person's politically relevant information comes from verbal descriptions of events, rather than from direct experience. We have "more contact with the phantasy of words than the reality of things."³ Aside from pictures, verbal descriptions (primarily written ones) are the only source through which one can know events which have occurred in the past or visualize occurrences in the future. We view the world through semantically colored glasses. Kenneth Burke asks poignantly, "... can we bring ourselves to realize . . . just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by 'reality' has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol system? Take away our books, what little do we know about history, biography, even something so 'down to earth' as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our 'reality' for today . . . but all this clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the pres-

2. Lee C. McDonald, "Myth, Politics and Political Science," *Western Political Quarterly*, 22 (1969), 150.

3. Charles E. Osgood, "Conservative Words and Radical Sentences in the Semantics of International Politics," in Cilbert Abcarian and John W. Soule, eds., *Social Psychology and Political Behavior: Problems and Prospects* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), p. 103. Also see the seventh chapter in Toshiki Izutsu, *Language and Magic* (Tokyo: Institute of Philological Studies, 1956), which discusses the power of words to evoke vicarious sense experiences.