'Figurative Framing in Political Discourse'

PhD by Amber Boeynaems (Vrije Universtiteit Amsterdam), supervisors: Elly Konijn, Gerard Steen & Christian Burgers.

Christ'l De Landtsheer[*]

The suggestion that Sound bites – "Make America great again" – can win you the elections gained popularity since the 2016 election of Donald Trump as a president of the US. Sound bites – short utterances by politicians that generally include style elements such as metaphors, hyperbole, and alliteration – do not need an explanation; the shorter they are (their length even dropped over the years), the more they speak for themselves. These messages or word groups, nevertheless, are more often quoted by the mass media than other sayings by politicians. Sound bites replaced the earlier 'slogans'; slogans, such as the 1970' pacifist slogan "Make love not war" or the feminist slogan "Boss of your own belly", now seem rather old-fashioned; in contrast to the stylish sound bites, slogans emphasize content. Sound bites correspond with commercial media dynamics, in which style dominates over content. In the modern, commercialized media landscape, political language style is one source of cues by which people decide whether they support a politician (De Landtsheer, De Vries & Vertessen, 2008; Opfer and Anderson, 1992; Hallin, 1992). In this context of new media dynamics, every scientific attempt to detail the components and processing of sound bites is welcome.

This certainly holds for the scientific study by Amber Boeynaems, who, in her doctoral dissertation on 'Figurative Framing in Political Discourse', examines the (persuasive) effects of two prominent stylistic devices in sound bites, metaphor and hyperbole, and the effects of the combined use of these devices. The rise of political populism and the success of political extremism in various countries provide us with more reasons than modern communication dynamics, for taking a closer look at the figurative framing of subjects by way of metaphor and hyperbole. To a large degree, populists and extremists rely on figurative frames like metaphor and hyperbole (De Landtsheer et al. 2011; Kalkhoven & De Landtsheer 2016). It is, therefore, socially desirable that scientists pay attention to political language by populist and extremist movements and politicians. The fact that Amber Boeynaems concentrates on political metaphor and hyperbole in their combined effects, makes her study scientifically original and important (Burgers et al., 2016).

In the 'General introduction' in Chapter 1, Boeynaems presents her main research question, on how figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion. She explains her choice of framing theory as a point of

[*]   Political Communication Research Unit, University of Antwerp.

departure to look at political language effects. As we can learn from the dissertation, this choice is without any doubt a justified one and it is equally productive and fruitful in view of further studies. Boeynaems' choice for the 'figurative framing' concept demonstrates how concepts from communication sciences can enrich interdisciplinary research on persuasion, from such fields as linguistics, the philosophy of language, cognitive psychology, political psychology, and political science. Figurative style is, since Lakoff and Johnson's 1980 book 'Metaphors we live by', no longer considered as just a matter of ornaments; metaphors and other forms of figurative language are capable of producing new content and meaning. According to this 'cognitive turn', language and thinking are both essential components for metaphor, and as was later established for other types of figurative discourse such as hyperbole and irony (Gibbs & Colston, 2012). The third dimension of communication added to this model by Steen (2008) emphasizes the communicative function metaphor in language and thought. This communicative dimension is particularly relevant when studying persuasive effects of figurative language, in the general context of how frames affect their recipients (De Vreese, 2012). Frames are typically seen in terms of text elements or linguistic structures that imply a treatment recommendation (Joris et al., 2014).

In this general introduction of the dissertation, Boeynaems equally announces her choice to test, in chapters three, four, and five, figurative framing effects using two competing theoretical models, a direct-effect model versus an indirect effects model.

As we will see in these three chapters, the author studies direct effects in reality, sometimes mediated by personal characteristics and perception, and hardly by contextual factors.

Chapter 2 offers a literature overview of research on 'The effects of metaphorical framing on political persuasion'. The overview compares in a systematic way approaches and results from studies set up according to CDA, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', and REA, 'Response-Elicitation Approach'. CDA is thereby considered as real world changes because of systematic patterns in language use, whereas REA uses respondents exposed to language stimuli (p. 47). Even though this choice by the author is, for practical purposes, defendable, in this chapter I miss a more thorough discussion on the approaches as the author sees them. It would have been interesting to read something more about the distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the field. I particularly miss the attention to persuasive processes at the macro-level. Especially in the case of figurative language, the importance of long-term effects cannot be neglected. For example, propaganda research underlined the importance of message repetition at various occasions. The undivided attention to short-time effects in themselves is not as evident as the author presents it in the course of her dissertation. In her discussion in chapter 6, nevertheless, Boeynaems honestly concludes that when framing and figurative language is concerned, researchers should not expect everything from their interest in direct effects. I would add that especially in this case we are faced with persuasive processes, which reveal their

effectivity and impact most often on the longer term.

Chapter 3, on 'The impact of conventional and novel metaphors in news on issue viewpoint' is the most important chapter of this dissertation. The author undertakes a valuable attempt at separating cognitive and affective components in figurative frames. She provides the reader with a challenging and inventive approach to a tricky and difficult scientific issue that until now was hardly dealt with in a successful and/or profound way. Boeynaems concludes that metaphors which are perceived as novel, positively affect cognitive and affective text perception.

Chapter 4, entitled 'The persuasive power of right-wing populist rhetoric: how figuratively framed populist statements affect political persuasion', addresses the gap in effects of populist rhetoric for general voters and for sympathizers, what may contribute to polarization in society.

The results of the study in chapter 5 'Attractive or repellent? How right-wing populist voters respond to figuratively framed anti-immigration rhetoric' go against dominant ideas about the appeal of anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles to right-wing populist voters; these voters were found to be attracted by the content, regardless or even despite of the figurative frames. I was, however, not convinced by this conclusion, due to the characteristics of the stimulus materials (the particular metaphors that were used). This chapter illustrates, even more than the former empirical chapters, the relative value of experiments. Not only because of the fake environment of the laboratory, but also because of message manipulation bia-

ses. Conclusions from experiments pointing to no effects of figurative framing in political rhetoric can be the result of the fact that the used metaphorical and/or hyperbolical messages lack real metaphorical and/or hyperbolical character.

My general conclusion on this dissertation is that it is an excellent piece of work because of its meticulous procedures, and more importantly because of the author's courage to address this challenging and difficult research area, in a social and political context that is waiting for answers on how democracy can deal with the attraction of extremist and populist politicians for voters.

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