How do words persuade?

Words as "compacted doctrines" that stand in for concepts – the reflections of social attitudes.

But how do words to the work of persuading/legitimating/mobilizing?

Why shouldn’t they just sit there?

Extension/metaphor

Extension of reference:

religious of merchants’ behavior
entrepreneur, hate speech, terrorism… Note: not (initially) metaphors – consider war on terror…

Metaphor

Surgical strike, puppet government, witch hunt, character assassination, hardball, new deal…

Let's Leave Out the Aker
wage slavery (countered by “freedom of contract”)

Appraisive terms

Terms that imply an appraisal of their reference. Belong the larger class of expressives:

“Expressives” defined as much as what they don’t do as by what they do:

Expressive meaning is exemplified by exclamations like Wow! Shit! Ouch!, and so on; by expletives used as modifiers, as in It's bloody cold in here, and by expressions such as to stuff oneself [s'empiffrer], as in He just sat their stuffing himself... Expressive meaning expresses some emotion, judgement, or attitude, but in a non-propositional way. That is to say it does not contribute to the propositional meaning of the utterance, and therefore does not affect its truth value. Alan Cruse, A Glossary of Semantics and Pragmatics

Appraisive words:

* steed* for horse, *cur* (köter) for dog [Frege], *blubber* for cry, etc.

Derogatory epithets (derogatives): *redskin, boche*

Appraisal doesn’t figure in truth-conditions:

Did John bring his cur with him? – No, he didn’t.

The example of community

Old word (Jews in 19th. C.) alternative kinds of group living
reinvented in early 20th c for ferdinand tönnies
E.g., community influenced by German Gemeinschaft – (cf values)

groups joined by feelings or mutual bonds (family, neighborhood)

"Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe alternative relationships. … Unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive or opposing term." Raymond Williams

McDonalds – "commitment to the community." Give back to the community

The rottweiler/vegan/Windows/bowling/pedestrian/Campbell's Soup/piercing community

?the Holocaust denier community/ ?pedophile community.

?The women's community…

Semantics of appraisives:

LEXICAL FEATURES:

Skinner: speech-act of commendation/condemnation

[+positive, disparaging, etc.] – lexicographers’ usage labels

Speech-act characterization. Cf Chris Potts

FRAMES

Fillmore on carrion: The [dictionary] definition does not inform me that I can’t legitimately use the word carrion to refer to meat that had been left out of the refrigerator while the family was vacationing, nor can I use it to refer to dead animal parts that I accidentally stepped on while walking in the woods. Carrion is the word used for the food of scavengers, that is, animals that are opportunist, nonhunting carnivores: Their diet is evolutionarily specialized to include the meat of animals that they find dying or already dead. The word belongs to a larger conceptual framework of the ethology of this group of animals.

Cf Christopher Hom on chink

…racial epithets express complex, socially constructed, negative properties determined in virtue of standing in the appropriate external, causal connection with racist institutions. The meanings of epithets are supported and semantically determined by their corresponding racist institutions.

Symbols

Background of Lippmann

Growth and heterogeneity of the public

Complexity of government

Political significance of information & literacy
[To the free library] we may hopefully look for the gradual deliverance of the people from
the wiles of the rhetorician and stump orator…. As the varied intelligence which books can
supply shall be more and more widely assimilated, the essential elements of every political
and social question may be confidently submitted to that instructed common sense upon
which the founders of our government relied. J. P. Quincy, 1876

Rise of the mass media

The local face-to-face community has been invaded by forces so fast, so remote in
initiation, so far-reaching in scope and so complexity indirect in operation, that they are,
from the standpoint of the members of local social units, unknown.

We have the physical tools of communication as never before. The thoughts and aspirations
congruous with them are not communicated, and hence are not common. Without such
communication the public will remain shadowy and formless… Communication alone can
create a great community. Dewey, The Public and its Problems

The rise of “propaganda”

"If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to
control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing about it? The
recent practice of propaganda has proved that it is possible, at least up to a certain point and
within certain limits. Edward Bernays, Propaganda, 1928

The “Informed public”

LIPMMANN ON LIMITS ON INFORMATION (V. NOUN)

Structural barriers:

artificial censorships, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meagre time
available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, the distortion arising because
events have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small
vocabulary express a complicated world, and finally a fear of facing those facts which
would seem to threaten the established routine of men’s lives.

Psychological barriers: the “pseudo-environment”

"[humans] are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many
permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have
to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. Lippmann, Public
Opinion

The need in the Great Society not only for publicity but for uninterrupted publicity is
indisputable. But we shall misunderstand the need seriously if we imagine that the purpose
of the publication can possibly be the informing of every voter. We live at the mere
beginnings of public accounting. Yet the facts far exceed our curiosity. ... A few executives
here and there . . . read them. The rest of us ignore them for the good and sufficient reason
that we have other things to do. Lippmann, The Phantom Public
Forming “Public Opinion” -- on “the group mind”

The role of symbols

How in the language of democratic theory, do great numbers of people feeling each so privately about so abstract a picture, develop any common will? …How are those things known as the Will of the People, or the National Purpose, or Public Opinion crystallized out of fleeting and casual imagery. Public Opinion

The making of one general will out of a multitude of general wishes is not an Hegelian mystery… but an art well known to leaders, politicians, and steering committees. It consists essentially in the use of symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas. Phantom Public

The question of a proper fare on a municipal subway is symbolized as an issue between the People and the Interests, and then the People is inserted in the symbol American, so that finally in the heat of a campaign, an eight cent fare becomes un-American. The Revolutionary fathers died to prevent it. Lincoln suffered that it might not come to pass, resistance to it was implied in the death of those who sleep in France. Phantom Public [symbols] do not stand for specific ideas, but for a sort of truce or junction between ideas.

The proper role of the public:

Essentially plebicitory: can say “yes” or “no”

Decisions must be left to experts, chosen by other experts…

Theoretically we ought to choose the most expert on each subject. But the choice of the expert, though a good deal easier than the choice of truth, is still too difficult and often impracticable.

One mind, or a few can pursue a train of thought, but a group trying to think in concert can as a group do little more than assent or dissent. Distance alone lends enchantment to the view that masses of human beings ever cooperate in any complex affair without a central machine managed by a very few people.

Dewey’s Response to Lippmann

Democracy as both means and end.

Democracy is not an alternative to the other principles of associative life. It is the idea of community life itself.

Modern Symbolic Politics

Varities of “Symbols”:

the flag, $600 ashtrays, personal pecadillos, Terry Schiavo, bad bowling, the “War on Christmas,” the Ten Commandments monument, etc.

“Symbol words”:
values, tradition, freedom (economic, of contract, of choice, etc.) ownership, patriotism, government, choice, color-blind, preference…

cf Richard Rorty on our “final vocabulary”: “All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes.

Reclaiming symbols: “In thinking about symbols it is tempting to treat them as if they possessed independent energy.” Lippmann

**SYMBOLS AS “INFORMATION SHORTCUTS”**

Political symbols as “just another form of information cost-saving.” (Popkin)

Shortcuts in daily life: brands, endorsements, personal appearance (cf. Nelson Algren’s three rules for a happy life)

Ideologies as a shortcut, “verbal image of the good society.”

If voters…. Were fully informed about government and could assess how their own benefits would be affected by a party’s platform… they would pay no attention to ideology… Ideology is not a mark of sophistication… but of uncertainty. Popkin

Demography as a shortcut (Identity politics)

Inferring competence & moral values

E.g., Eagleton choice, Dukakis in tank; private moral choices as shortcuts

**BLOCKING INFORMATION**

Downs: “Party loyalties operate to reduce the effects of the media”

“Selective exposure.” The role of “media bias”

**How do words become symbols?**

How do words come to “assemble emotions”?

The question of a proper fare on a municipal subway is symbolized as an issue between the People and the Interests, and then the People is inserted in the symbol American, so that finally in the heat of a campaign, an eight cent fare becomes un-American. The Revolutionary fathers died to prevent it. Lincoln suffered that it might not come to pass, resistance to it was implied in the death of those who sleep in France. Phantom Public

**appeasement**: "The policy of granting concessions to potential enemies to maintain peace.” Cf similar definitions of *palliation* or *placate*, propitiate, etc. (Churchill advocated a policy of "prudence and appeasement" towards the Turks when they went to war with the Greeks in 1919.)

Now: *appeasement* is saturated with a set of particular images;
Chamberlain with his silly high collar, striped pants and drooping moustache, Hitler's face superimposed over goose-stepping German troops, Churchill glaring defiantly over his cigar.

Cf values

History of word; move to right in 1970’s.

"I represent the… mainstream views and the mainstream values. And they are your values, and my values, and the values of the vast majority of the American people."

Kerry campaign: “a celebration of American values”—“I will stand up for the values that have always made America great, faith and family, strength and service, responsibility and opportunity for all.”

Whenever I go home to the heartland, I am reminded of the values that build strong families, strong communities and strong character, the values that make our people unique.” GW Bush 2000

Images that support the conception of values: gay marriage, “the war on Christmas,” etc.

Internal inconsistencies; cf "Win a Date with Todd Hamilton"

Cf similar proceses with "democracy."

"Democracy is the line that forms on the right. It's the don't in 'don't shove'. It's the hole in the stuffed shirt through which the sawdust slowly trickles. It is the dent in the high hat, the feeling of communion in libraries. … Democracy is a letter to the editor" and the "feeling of vitality everywhere. Democracy is the score at the beginning of the ninth. It's the mustard on the hot dog and the cream in the rationed coffee." E.B. White

Basic Symbols: "Government" and "Freedom"

The shifting conceptions of government.

[aside: National variation in keywords and the idea of a language]

Tom: You got dances, too?
Tom: You got dances, too?

Caretaker: We got the best dances in the county every Saturday night.

Tom: Say, who runs this place?
Caretaker: The government.

Tom: Why ain't there more like it?
Caretaker: You find out, I can't.

-- The Grapes of Wrath, 1940 (screenplay by Nunnally Johnson)

I've always felt the nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.” -- Ronald Reagan, 1986 (repeating a well-worn one-liner)

The shifting constellation: "big government" and "big business"

The persistence of "freedom"
The persistence of "freedom"

Freedom and liberty: positive and negative freedom

The new rhetoric of freedom:

Free markets, free enterprise, free world, freedom of choice, economic freedom

Child's
NEW
BILL OF FARE

Freedom of Choice

MEATS
For the Meat Eater

FRUITS CEREALS
FRESH VEGETABLES
DAIRY PRODUCTS
For Health and Economy

AND THE BEST
50c TABLE D'HOTE MEAL
IN THE COUNTRY

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