

Influencing the US Presidential Campaign with hypnotic language patterns! Can Linguistic Skill be a tool to win the nominations?

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We all know that language is powerful. Its power and influence has been proven in smart advertising campaigns and their impact on the shopping behaviour of buyers.

Now, can the question be thrown up that purposeful use of language also influences people to choose one presidential candidate over another? Is it possible to predict the next candidate of the Democratic Party for the upcoming election in the US through their purposeful use of language?

The write-up below looks at the language structure of Barack Obama, and how it is possible that he appeals to and influences the unconscious motivation of the American population for change through his speeches. We also shortly contrast this with the language structure of Hillary Clinton. Lastly, we give some short insights into the overall mood of the American population for a change in government.

We begin by analyzing Barack Obama. It is known that Obama uses language skillfully to persuasively influence audiences, create empathy and garner support. The New York Times, Washington Post, Fast Company and many other publications acknowledge this great ability. But how subtly Barack uses language has not yet been unearthed. Let's see how he is doing it, with some detail.

Obama uses metaphors, stories and comparisons in his campaigns and these are very powerful tools to influence someone subconsciously.

Stories can contain messages that are supposed to teach lessons. Hidden inside, there might be messages, lessons, and attempts to influence our opinions. However, usually, we just listen to stories because it is nice to listen to stories. While we listen, our conscious mind, the part of our mind that evaluates, criticizes and filters, is switched off. Basically, we go into trance, since we just listen to a story, right? Just remember the last time you went to a conference and listened to a speaker's story. May be you rejected the overall message of the speaker, but I bet you were simply listening and enjoying the story without filtering out its contents. Thus, it can be said that if there then is a suggestion in a story, it can easily penetrate the unconscious mind, as the conscious filter is "switched off".

In the beginning of April 2008, Obama talked about his adventure in learning fly-fishing during a dinner of the Democratic Party (Washington Post, April 6 2008). Fly-fishing? Not everybody is able to do this and not everybody knows about it – it is not a very common

hobby, is it? People probably laughed and had fun during the story, especially since he is a great entertainer as well.

The use of stories paces the reality of the audience – we all learn all the time, we encounter challenges, even so it sometimes is hard to get out of our comfort zone to do something new. That happens when we learn. In the process of learning we make mistakes but as adults, we have learnt to get up and move on.

How does this relate to Obama? Let's put the pieces together. Obama's potential inexperience as president has been criticized. His career as politician is pretty short and his opponents say that his experience in dealing with foreign affairs is limited.

Put one plus one together. The story about fly fishing and the possibility to learn as a president. Can you see the relation? As dramatic as it sounds – at an unconscious level, it is possible that the audience linked the story of learning how to fly-fish to the ability to acquire capabilities as a president.

Now you can see the relation!

If Obama would say “Just give me the chance in Washington, let me be president and I will quickly learn what there is to learn,” our conscious filter might become alert. It could simply reject the message: “this is not correct, this is wrong, this cannot be done, I cannot accept this, let's not vote for him.”

Another example for influencing others unconsciously is his victory speech in Iowa in January 2008. Again, he simply described what happens around him: “In lines that stretched around schools and churches, in small towns and in big cities, you came together as Democrats, Republicans and independents, to stand up and say that we are one nation.”

In their head, the audience might have nodded and agreed. It was their experience. He was mind-reading the audience. They queued up in lines around schools and churches.

That is the initial part of the sentence. And again, it is true as their experience.

But did the people say that they are one nation? No one knows. He put it in their mind. He continued: “We are one people. And our time for change has come.” To repeat, he first paced their experience and their reality before he stated his message for change. If one message is true, it is easier to agree to the message as well.

Metaphors create buy-in and lull us into a slumber so that the unconscious mind becomes more receptive to other messages. Obama opens the mind to then influence the people with his message of change and hope.

Another powerful way of how he skillfully influences his audiences is through the personalization of his speeches. He frequently uses the word “we” which includes the

audience. This contrasts with the use of “they” when he speaks about the Republicans or his opponents. It is “us” against “them”. People like to belong to a group, and to differentiate against others. This is better than being in an undifferentiated mass of individuals. It gives them clarity and purpose. And to have someone to look up to and is inclusive gives the feeling of appreciation.

Clinton, on the other hand, writes and speaks differently. On March 28, 2008 she wrote the following to her supporters: “Have you noticed the pattern? Every time our campaign demonstrates its strength and resilience, people start to suggest we should end our pursuit of the Democratic nomination...” She says “our campaign” and “have you noticed the pattern”. It is a “we” as we, the party, and you, the supporters. It separates her supporters from her, as a person. The deeper meaning of “we” is not clear. Is it a “we” as in Hillary together with her supporters, or is it a “we” as in Hillary and her voting machine.

Unconsciously, this is a confusing message. It does not create the thoughts or feelings of inclusion of her supporters in similar fashion as the metaphors and speeches of Obama do.

Clinton also paints more negative pictures. In a press conference on April 3 2008, she said she continues to sound the alarm about a possible recession. She tells (now discredited) stories about the suffering of people. Do people really want to hear this?

To answer this, let’s take a look at the way people get motivated. Drastically speaking, we get motivated by either gain or pain. The carrot or the stick. In the example above, Clinton took out the stick.

What does this mean?

Let’s have a look at a psycho-linguistic tool for the answer. The Language and Behaviour Profile (LAB Profile), developed by Rodger Bailey in the 1980s, is a tool to understand the mental process behind someone’s motivation to understand how they motivate themselves and how they maintain their motivation.

The LAB Profile Patterns originated from the original Meta Programs, which are part of Neuro Linguistic Programming or NLP. The Meta Programs are the mental filters that determine how individuals sort information. They determine how we react to events, make decisions or simply attempt to make sense of the events around us. They are our mental filters, and located deep in the unconscious mind.

The LAB Profile works with 14 of such filters and one of the filters is the motivation direction – it identifies the way we motivate ourselves in certain situations. It indicates whether or not we prefer the stick or the carrot to get motivated. Or, to put it differently, do people move toward something they want or away from something that they don’t want. Of course, these are two polarity possibility and we all are on a continuum along the filters.

But there are times when we are at the extreme side of the filters as well. It is possible to say that we also move away from certain individuals and their standpoints. It also is possible to move toward people and their opinions or personalities. Sometimes, however, people might move away from something only without being clear into which direction they move.

Judging from the speeches of the two candidates, it appears that Clinton is more on the side of the “stick” and Obama more on the “carrot” side of the line (again, with fluctuations, of course).

What could be the appeal of these two sides to the American population? Could it then also be possible that, in the eye of the American population, Clinton represents policies that are seen as past oriented? Could it thus also be possible that the US population moves away from Clinton? This then does not mean that they would necessarily move toward Obama, but it is a possibility to consider.

Another filter of the LAB Profile determines the way people perceive change in certain specified contexts. It shows how willingly they initiate change themselves or like to be exposed to change.

Clearly, everybody changes and change, and the necessity for change is in everybody’s mind. But how individuals perceive and cope with change is very different and according to the research conducted by Rodger Bailey on work preferences, there are certain timeframes when people simply need to expose themselves to change.

Bailey identified that people fall into four categories, namely “Sameness”. Here, people accept change once every 10 years. People in the “Sameness with Exception” category expose themselves to change every 5-7 years, while those with a “Difference Pattern” initiate change every 1-2 years. People in the category “Sameness with Exception and Difference”, which accepts change every 3-4 years.

And, once again, people express their willingness for change in their language. Without analyzing all categories, Obama’s language, with words such as “change”, and “difference” indicates that he falls into the “Difference-Category”. Fast Company (April 2008) itself quotes Keith Reinhard, DDB Worldwide as saying that "Barack Obama is three things you want in a brand: New, different, and attractive. That's as good as it gets." This describes the “Difference-Category.”

The biggest category with 65% consists of people with a Change Pattern of 5-7 years (Sameness with Exception). This somewhat tallies the length of the current presidency of George W Bush and as such, this category is actually getting ready for change. The question would be – will it be McCain who is attracting this group as Republican, or the presidential candidate of the Democrats.

Let’s take a further look at the overall mood of the American people. I can only speculate but is it possible that in the mind of the American population, Hillary Clinton, McCain

and President Bush represent the old economy, and the old times. They are “coded on the same neurons of the brain”, so to speak.

Can we thus say that the US population is actually motivated to move away from Hillary Clinton, who reminds them of good old Bill and his affairs? Are they also motivated to move away from Bush and McCain with the negative implications of a raging war in Iraq and Afghanistan, recessionary trends in the US economy, and sub-prime crisis?

This together with the propensity of the American population for change can make Barack Obama quite an attractive candidate as president!

Language does influence us. We react to it on a conscious and an unconscious level and it is expressed in our own language patterns. Those who are masters at linguistics are able to influence us easily, while other patterns, that are not that easily detectable, still cast a strong shadow of influence over us.

Based on this short analysis in this article, it is possible that a new President will settle in the White House. Don't be surprised if the name is Barack Obama.

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