COM 31800: Prin. Of Persuasion

Chapter 5: The Making, Use, and Misuse of Symbols

Symbols are an important part of persuasion.

Symbol is defined as: “Something that represents something else by association, resemblance or convention.”

Language is a symbol with great potency, having the ability to unify and divide people.

Language led to vocal agreements, then as writing arose legal documents. Soon it was discovered that these agreements could be broken.

Neil Postman: “Invisible technology” … “give direction to our thoughts, generate new ideas, venerate old ones, expose facts or hide them.”

Kenneth Burke: “humans are symbol making, symbol using, and symbol misusing creatures.”

Must examine the logical, emotional, and ethical meanings.

Metaphors are a powerful signal, requiring mastery of language. Analyzing them tells you the pattern of use or misuse by the persuader. Their stylistic choices and motives. Knowing these things lets us anticipate the messages to come from the speaker.

English is one of the most powerful languages

* Second most spoken language
* 80% of text on computers is encoded in English
* Richest vocabulary with 615 thousand words
* Considered international language of tourism, politics, air travel, etc.
* English tends to be one of the easiest languages to learn as a second language.

Our symbols used reveal a lot of information about us.

Language is symbolic ideas to be spoken, but these ideas become action.

Langer’s Approach:

Symbol realization is a human trait. Language lets us talk about our feelings about things that may not be present.

Two concepts with this capability of ours – signs and symbols. Signs indicate the presence of an event, feeling, or object.

Langer: “Symbols are not a proxy of their objects.” | Using symbols is a human need

**Concepts** and **conceptions**

**Concepts** are symbols that have a common meaning

**Conceptions** are individual and unique meanings for a concept.

**Signification** indicates a sign that accompanies a thing to be considered. (A skull signifies danger)

**Denotation** refers to a common and shared meaning between people.

**Connotation** refers to a personal, metaphorical, and emotional meaning for any concept

Discursive symbols: sequential and smaller bits of meaning that unfold across time to yield meaning. (A speech or videogame)

Presentational meaning: occurs when a message is experienced all at once, in images or paintings.

**Maps** (a concept developed by Korzybski) are inner perceptions of places, person, or things.

**Territories** are the real-world equivalents to those maps.

When we communicate using our maps, we may frequently live as though they are real. Unfortunately, this is faulty in logic. This is considered a **signal response**, which is emotionally triggered reactions to symbolic acts.

**Extensional devices** are techniques for neutralizing or defusing emotional connotations that accompany words by adding information that makes the meaning clear.

**Indexing** is the act of identifying specific groups considered in a statement

**Dating** is the act of identifying a time frame considered in a statement

**Etc.** indicates the issue of never accurately identifying an issue.

**Quotation marks** indicate that the sender is using specified words in a personal or particular manner.

**Burke’s approach to language**:

“the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” – Persuasion

**Identification –** the cooperation induced by persuasion

**Sub-stances** – the views and ideas that a single person has

Persuasion is an attempt to describe our “essential parts”

Where symbols arise, their **negative** (what they are not) also arises. This gives rise to sets of “Thou Shall nots.”

No is the most powerful and emotionally invoking thing we hear as children and we learn to use that power. This core of guilt can be used to induce shame and gain power over others.

Pecking orders also form in our behavioral patterns, this attributes to our guilt.

We have an innate desire for perfection that causes us guilt.

In order to purge guilt we will purge it symbolically in religious aspects.

In everyday life, we may lay the blame elsewhere or on ourselves.

Persuasion works because we all share sub-stances and guilt, at least on an identification level.

**Semiotics** is a field of persuasion concerned with generating and conveying meaning.

Semiotic Theory – **All text convey meaning through *signs* and *signifiers*.**

**Signifiers** are the absence or presence of some concept

**Signifieds** are the things that signifiers refer to.

A host at a restaurant is a signifier, their presence is a signified to how you should seat yourself.

In semiotics we examine

1. The words that are or aren’t spoken
2. The context in which they are or aren’t spoken
3. Other signifiers, visuals, tone of voice, background, etc.

Metaphors are the most powerful linguistic structure. Requiring creativity and artistic use of language. They liken some object to another without the use of words like “like” or “similar”

Two parts:

**Tenor** – the subject

**Vehicle** – the means of embodiment or transmission of meaning

It is important for our metaphors to map back to one another in a meaningful way. They need to also be archetypal, or understood across cultures. This can refer to common ideas like dark/light, hot/cold, quest/journey, etc. Metaphors should also be familiar to the audience.