COM 31800: Prin. Of Persuasion

Chapter 6: Tools of Analyzing language and other persuasive symbols

Three of many dimensions for language

**Semantic**: What the words mean

**Functional:** What the words do

**Thematic:** How the words feel or generate a mental image

Words can motivate actions, indicate cause and effect, lay and deflect blame.

“Definitions are like blinders on a horse, they focus attention on some aspects while blinding us to others.”

Defend vs. Attack, Work vs. Labor, Failed to fix vs. attempting to fix, Blockade vs. Sanction

Some language functions to compensate for our personal feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

“Name droppers” – people who bolster their self-worth by knowing important personalities.

Words can create fear, which can be very persuasive.

**Semantics** – using the word “baby boy” vs. “human being” or even “fetus”

Choosing the proper words in a semantic sense can be the key to creating common ground or a misunderstanding.

**Thematics** – onomatopoeic words convey movements or sounds like buzz for bees or ding for the sound of an elevator chime.

**Assonance** – the repetition of vowel sounds.

Clean, sweep, sheep, beat. This is an example of assonance

**Alliteration** is similar except it is a repetition of the first sound of a word.

Clean Cats Caked in Clay is an example.

Metaphors and other figures of speech produce a texture or theme as they carry meaning, making them powerful tools.

Archetypal metaphors refer to common substances understood across all cultures such as light and dark, death and birth, sacred and profane.

Two parts to a metaphor

* Tenor or subject
* Vehicle or means of conveyance

Symbolic expression has immense power, it can replicate itself in real life.

People who use stomach related negative phrases tend to get ulcers in their stomach. Additionally, older people tend to die after a significant event.

Symbolic sympathetic pains can become real, Symbolic action has a massive power to it.

Why does the bible begin with creation where God states something then it becomes reality?

The distillation of ideas into a short phrase is called **synecdoche.**

**Richard Weaver’s Grammatical Categories**

Sentence types used by a speaker indicate something about the speaker.

**Simple sentences** express a single complete thought or point and must contain one subject or noun and one action and an object. Speakers who prefer these tend to view the world in less complicated terms. They tend to view things in the world as larger things made of component objects.

**Compound sentences** consist of two sentences that are simple joined by a conjunction. This method sets two things into balance or opposition. These sentences can express resolved or unresolved tension. Persuaders who use these see the world in terms of opposites and similarities.

**Complex Sentences** contain two or more components, but not all the components could be standalone parts. Components will rely on one of the others components to form a basic idea. Weaver states that the speakers who use complex sentences often express basic principles and relationships with the independent clauses more important than dependent ones.

**Nouns** are typically viewed as if they are the things they represent. Usage of nouns can be revealing.

Adjectives add to nouns, making them different. Most adjectives are considered uncertain by Weaver, if you need to modify a noun then you are uncertain of it. The only certain nouns are dialectical, good and bad, hot and cold, light and dark.

**Adverbs** are words of judgement to Weaver. These modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.

**Syntax** is the pattern and usage of words in a sentence. The placement of words or phrases can alert or divert the listener regarding things in the sentence. By placing something at the start of a sentence you emphasize it. By placing something at the end of the sentence you obscure it.

According to L. H. Hosman, language variations affect one of three elements of the persuasion process:

“judgement of speaker, message comprehension and recall, and attitude toward that message”

Hosman also reports that active sentence structure influences perceived believability, clarity, appeal, and attractiveness in print advertisements in different ways than does passive sentence structure.

Ambiguity is a useful tool used by unethical persuaders. It can be used to force the listener to provide their own idea of the meaning, which can be used against them.

Methods of ambiguity include using contradictory terms, provide support to your statement by preceding it with an “ethos building” statement, refer to multiple topics at once and insist their parallel or equivalency.

Ambiguity can be offensive in some cultures where it is preferred that someone might cut to the chase.

Burke’s Dramatism maintains that the basic model used by humans to explain various situations is the narrative story or drama.

Action requires motivation and the ability to use symbols like language is a motivated act.

Burke thought that we used words to fill some dramatic purpose. Different individuals find certain elements in the drama more potent than others do thought all terms begin and terminate from the same source.

**Scene** includes the location, situation, context, and time of some dramatistic act. It determines the meaning of an action and the requirements of members who attend the scene.

**Act** refers to a motivated purposeful action which occurs in the scene. How could you manipulate your choice in action and scene to best display some message?

**Agent** is the person or group who take action in the scene. Again, how does changing the agent of the action change the meaning?

**Agency** is the tool, method, or means used by persuaders to accomplish their ends.

**Purpose** is the reason an agent acts in a given manner.

These five elements can help develop a persuasive strategy, it depends on what you choose to represent each portion of the pentad.

It is also important to examine the pairs of each part of the pentad.