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## Understanding Linguistics of American Politics

The recent election was frightening, the only fact which both parties agree on. Because the United States currently harbors a two party system (for the most part) and because the United States leads the world in the realm of diversity, these two parties are as different as two separate cultures. As a result, the speech which they like and dislike also varies, with each party's vernacular being nearly incomprehensible to the other. People from either side are constantly blown away by the furtiveness and stubborn ignorance of their opposition, forever claiming that they are ignoring the facts to facilitate the spread of their nefarious agenda. Perhaps, in reality, the arguments of the opposite are not being ignored, but rather are not being correctly translated. Each party thinks in a frame work of priorities (things like globalism, peace, safety, religious freedom, and other values) and this frame work is the basis on which they build their speech and arguments. Because the frame work's essential hierarchy is different for conservatives than for liberals, they cannot understand each other; each frame work is simply in a different order. For example, conservatives might place sovereignty higher on this hierarchy than charity, while liberals do the opposite. It is not that conservatives are selfish or liberals are mindless bleeding hearts. They both simply prioritize different virtues based on their experiences and education. In this paper, it will be argued that through exploration of the speech of politicians (Clinton and Trump) who exploit this frame work, insights can be discovered which if fully realized could bring a higher sense of understanding to both parties regarding their counterparts, and also reveal their truly hidden motives, benign or otherwise, all in an effort to circumvent the language barrier

between political factions in the United States, which at present threatens our national well being.

To begin, it should be noted that in the realm of political linguistics, Trump dominates all recent literature. In fact, almost any research found about Clinton's way of speaking does not revolve around her political agenda, but rather overcoming her gender in the political realm through masculinizing many aspects of her style, including speech. Perhaps this is because Clinton, though female, represents a more traditional type of politician than Trump in her respective party; despite the marked significance of having come close to being the first female president, her language is fairly typical, possibly purposefully so. She likely avoided linguistic attributes which may have set her apart as an outlier, because she knew those attributes would immediately be blamed on her sex. Trump had no such qualm.

The first issue to be analyzed is the widespread misconception that Trump is simply the most honest political candidate, the most forthwith and thereby trustworthy, and that he isn't, in fact, politically minded at all (an aspect largely seen as an asset by many Americans). Trump's speech is fragmented, which makes it sound conversational and light. He speaks as though he is telling a personal anecdote rather than diagnosing the problems faced by a world superpower, and he uses the pronoun, "I," to do it, as if he himself were directly involved. When someone hears Trump, they hear something akin to a kitchen table conversation. However, when people see Trump's words transcribed, they melt into something like gibberish. Clinton, on the other hand, speaks the way in which one writes, which while sounding educated, also sounds overly formal and is thereby only convincing to those who seek out academic ideas when listening to a representative.

A second cause of Trump's perceived acclaimed radical honesty is his appeal to emotion, an act seen as warm and open, something done in life, not in politics. Geoffrey Nunberg, in an article called, "Use Vivid Language," points to specific strategies which effectively influence people to believe this misconception. He states the following:

One of the interesting things about Trump is the utter absence of ideological language. Even when he's going on about Obamacare, the problem is that it costs too much, not that it's a socialistic intrusion on American liberty... Instead, he makes emotional appeals. He plays on cultural insecurities and fears of violence and offers a restorative anger in their place (Nunberg).

This absence of ideological dialogue is common in the majority of people's personal lives. People only talk about ideology when they're arguing with someone antagonizing, learning something in the academic realm, or are required to in their career. Point being, people would generally much rather discuss personal aspects of politics (i.e. "How does this affect me?") than delve into the political jargon and get their hands dirty in complicated moral decisions. Trump doesn't make people think about politics. He makes them think about how they feel about politics, regardless of their lack of education on the matter. He validates the angry and confused, the hurt and mistrustful of the government.

This is not to say that every person who appreciated Trump was uneducated or unconcerned with the depths and dimensions of politics; it is only to say that those people who were uninterested in challenging their emotional responses were particularly easy prey for Trump's method of persuasion.

Clinton, of course, is not innocent of attempts at manipulating the American public. It is just that her attempts were aimed at an entirely different demographic, and were as a whole rather plain and easily foreseen. She appealed to a more, “modern,” predisposition, taking on Obama’s leftovers and utilizing ideas of social justice and women’s rights. To many linguists, it is not what Clinton said but how she said it that sealed her fate in the election. “Why Do So Many People Hate the Sound of Hillary Clinton’s Voice?” is the actual title of an article for New Republic by Elspeth Reeve, who presents statistical data regarding the accents and overall likability of the voices of prominent politicians. Perhaps as a result of Clinton’s gender or her lengthy career (some compare her voice to that of a, “nagging wife,”), her voice is simply memorable, widely scrutinized, and largely disliked (Reeve). Clinton, perhaps in an attempt to kill any ideas of her being from the so-called gentle sex, often increases her volume to abnormal levels without changing the pitch of her voice, creating a feeling in the audience of, “being lectured” (Reeve). Clinton takes enormous steps in an effort not to sound emotional, or stereotypically feminine, which has had the adverse effect of killing any emotion she might have evoked in an audience. People who, consciously or subconsciously, take issue with a powerful female figure, find her voice grating and untenable. People without those issues still find her unmoving and cold, aspects which could have contributed to the widespread idea of her being a liar, and a cold-hearted political fiend.

When beginning research, the goal was to exclude analysis of Clinton’s gender, and separate the gender issues from the linguistic ones. However, as the above information dictates, that would have censored valuable input which highly influenced voters. In fact, the information revealed by this research lowers the possibility of a woman’s election to the position of president

in the United States. She is either feminine, and unfit for the position, or attempts to masculinize, and is untrustworthy and hard-hearted; truly, it is unknown what a female politician could possibly do to be both likable and respected. Clinton's most significant linguistic flaws echo from her gender, and her removal of emotional language from her speeches sets her apart as Trump's polar opposite, and easy opponent.

While it would be idyllic to believe that facts are the most interesting and compelling dimension of a debate, the election has demonstrated the ease with which fickle and selfish emotions make puppets of all. Those who found Trump's speech offensive would hear nothing more be said, and essentially closed open discussion, which is horrific for several reasons. If in an argument one party becomes so flustered they refuse civil dialogue, they forfeit the win to their opponent. Not only did they forfeit their point, they also forfeit the moral fortitude and attitude of those they represented. Lastly, they deeply insult the person with whom they could not contend, leaving them feeling snubbed and disrespected. Nothing ends cooperation quite like a feeling of disrespect. Both sides of the American political realm led with their hearts, and both got them broken, leading to defensiveness, apathy towards the well being of their opposition, and an increased will, or even need, to get what they want.

The argument this past election was never about politics. It was about who hit first. Conservatives hypothesized that Trump's anti-political correctness stance was an appropriate and necessary response to liberal censorship of ideas with which they did not agree. Liberals simply thought Trump was offensive, and someone offensive commits terrible things when in power. Both operated out of fear, one of suppression, and the other of helplessness.

To analyze why Trump was so offensive can be conveniently done through discussion of one simple word: 'the.' Trump, unlike the majority of people, prefaced every minority group with this ambiguous article. This sounds harmless enough but its affect on the human interpretation of his words is immense. 'The,' implies two very significant things. First, they are outsiders. They are a group outside of the norm and they must be listed as such. Trump uses this extra word to quite literally distance himself from the group being referenced. He would never say, for example, "the Americans," because this is a group with which he identifies. His use of 'the,' illustrates exactly how different he perceives minority groups to be from himself. Secondly, this way of speaking de-pluralizes the whole. It has the effect of implying that all African Americans are more alike than different, and are a cohesive whole, defined by the common attribute of their race. Trump also, when referring to other nations which he considers enemies, uses phrases like, "those guys," an extremely bizarre way to refer to an organization or government, which has much the same effect as, 'the.' "Those guys," generally accompanied by a hand wave, is dismissive, as though the group to which Trump is referring is simply moronic, and not worth thinking about.

Another small, common, and highly used word in Trump's rhetoric is, 'very' (Stein). Everything is either very good or very bad, in no particular way. 'Very,' as an adjective, provides the illusion of a description having been given, when in reality none is present. 'Very,' is a simple amplifier, which only enlarges or exaggerates whatever words it happens to be associated with. Nothing of substance is genuinely expressed by the word, 'very.' Yet, it remains Trump's pet phrase. Joshua Stein, writer for The Daily Beast, calls the word, 'very,' a, "megaphone for whomsoever picks it up." Essentially, 'very,' is the easiest path to elongating sentences and

inflating them with superfluous meaning so as not to sound quite so empty. The famous Mark Twain once said,

Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very'; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be (Lee).

His words ring especially true in the realm of politics, where every word counts and every connotation has significance. Trump portrays himself as ignorant when he refuses words with actual substance and instead uses barren phrases like, 'very.'

Despite the problematic meaning of overusing, 'very,' Trump still managed to gain the presidency. Perhaps this is what the public really wanted, a simplicity (correlated psychologically with honesty). It is possible the public believed hopefully that what Trump's emotional appeals and empty words truly signaled was candor, not inexperience in politics. Truly, it is highly likely that Trump could only have been elected after the American people became severely disillusioned with the current way of things, enough to wish for even the riskiest upheaval.

Finally, arbitrary and imaginary class distinctions permeated dialogue surrounding the election, and it's partly due to language. As aforementioned, Clinton's speech was clean, polished, and sounded overly rehearsed and ingenuous. Trump appealed to emotion, conviction, and avoided interacting with ideology or arguments involving any semblance of formal logic. This contrast depicts, in vivid color, an appeal to two very different social groups, despite the inconspicuous wealth of both candidates. Mike Huckabee writes in, "God, Guns, Grits, and Gravy," about distinguishing between the, "bubbas and the bubbles" (Reeve). The so-called Bubbas are the true Americans, hard working, middle-class individuals who are referred to as, "folk," more often than not. The Bubbles are their opposite, savvy and snobby city-slickers bent

on wrenching power away from the morally superior Bubbas. Trump played to the Bubbas. Clinton spoke to the Bubbles. Both pulled their regional prejudices close and refused to let go. Fortunately for the Bubbas, their particular regions managed to snag the electoral college without the popular vote.

This stereotype of Bubba and Bubble is only worth mentioning because it is actually believed. People in smaller, more agricultural areas often really do harbor beliefs of moral fortitude associated with their geographic region, and people in the cities do believe they are more educated and globally minded. This divide between the Bubbas and Bubbles strikes to the core of American politics, as globalism competes with isolationism, and tradition wrestles with modernization. The Bubbas are afraid of losing respect and their way of life. The Bubbles are anxious to catalyze progress and feel held back by their less than willing counterparts. The election proved that, in reaction to many changes in the direction of the political left, the Bubbas can and will pull back. The dichotomy between the halves in the United States is necessary, but has become toxic. Cooperation can only be achieved when the Bubbles lose their presumptions and attempt respectful communication, and the Bubbas accept the changing world for what it is.

To finish, the phrase, “Make America Great Again,” truly summarizes the linguistic conflict. It is focused centrally on America and makes the presumption that America was once great, fabulously great, and that our supposed progress was actually a downward slide. This represents the sentiment of older generations, refusing to let go of power and allow change into the midst of American culture, as they perceive disrespect in this change. It is no wonder there was a bloody war of ideas, when it is literally a tug-of-war between past and future, as the future grows so starkly unique and alien.

