

A Comparative Analysis of American and Chinese Political Slogans: A Critical Linguistic Perspective

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1. Introduction

Invoking Aristotle's idea that "we are all political animals, able to use language to pursue our own ends" (Chilton 1), the relationship between language and ideology has been a central topic in the study of political discourse for the past several decades. One of the major concerns of critical linguistics, which was developed by Fowler and his associates in the 1970s, is how political media language might work ideologically. In Fowler's book, published in 1979, he believes that there is a determinant relationship between ideological processes and linguistic processes. More specifically, linguistic choices that are made in texts can carry ideological meaning. Critical linguistics examines how underlying ideologies are embedded in linguistic structures such as vocabulary and syntax. However, original versions of critical linguistics have been criticized on both linguistic and sociological grounds. More recently, critical linguists have revised some of their own earlier stances. The notion that ideologies reside in the text, proposed by critical linguistics, has been challenged by Fairclough. Admitting that it is true that form and content of the text do bear the imprint of ideological processes and structures, Fairclough contends that it is not possible to "read off" ideologies from the text. Ideology, Fairclough argues, "is

located in structures that constitute the outcome of past events and the conditions for current events, and in the events themselves as they reproduce and transform their conditioning structures" (308). Regarding discourse as social practice, Fairclough discusses discourse in relation to ideology and power; that is, ideologies are propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in the text.

Van Dijk has provided a comprehensive study of the intricate relationships among discourse, ideology and media. Defining ideology as "the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group" (8), Van Dijk takes a multidisciplinary approach to ideology, which is represented by an analysis of the "triangle" of cognition, society and discourse. Van Dijk argues that social structures can not be directly related to discourse structures. Moreover, cognitive structures and mental models in discourse act as mediating dimension, or interface, between discourse and society. With the convergence of the approaches of Fairclough and Van Dijk, a new approach has evolved: this is "Critical Discourse Analysis," (256) to be called hereafter CDA. In this thesis, we try to conduct a comparative analysis of Chinese and American political slogans by adopting methodologies of CDA.

Besides research adopted in the CDA, other linguistic theories have also focused on the relation-

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ship between language, culture, and ideology. Linguists usually consider that culture is reflected in language. At the beginning of 20th century, American scholar Edward Sapir and his pupil Benjamin Lee Whorf, in their studies of American Indian languages, proposed a new view of the interdependence of language and thought, which is known under the name of "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis". (10) It makes the claim that "the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one thinks and behaves." (11)

Thompson develops an original account of ideology and relates it to the analysis of culture and mass communication in modern society by proposing a new methodology. Thompson offers a concise and critical appraisal of major contributions to the theory of ideology, from Marx and Mannheim to Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas. He argues that these social and political thinkers and theorists have generally failed to deal adequately with the nature of mass communication and its role in the modern world due to a deficiency in methodology. In order to overcome this deficiency, Thompson undertakes a wide-ranging analysis of the development of mass communication, outlining a distinctive social theory of mass media and its impact. This is called "methodological frameworks of depth hermeneutics." (274) Utilizing methodological frameworks of depth hermeneutics, Thompson analyzes the political language from social-historical and formal or discursive aspects. From these two analyses, we can interpret the ideological implications of political language from the aspects of the cultural background and linguistic characteristics in different social environments.

This study is based on data collected from Chinese political slogans from the People's Republic of China, founded in 1949, and the American presidential campaign slogans from the 1920s. Hopefully, meaningful findings will result from conducting a comparative study of American and Chinese political slogans. Nowadays, political slogans in China as well as in the United States have become worthy of close consideration, because they play significant social roles in a manner that is pervasive, aggressive, repetitive and intrusive. Politicians and parties want to spread their political messages to the public. Political slogans can be accepted in a variety of

ways according to the type of culture where they are used. They are an effective and efficient way for politicians to achieve their goals. Plainly, the knowledge of how to successfully run a political slogan in a given cultural circumstance is important and meaningful to the politicians and parties in both China and America, especially when they feel the need of managing cross-cultural political exchange. By discussing the function of political slogan's language, this paper will also try to investigate the relationship between language and culture in a critical linguistic analysis. Additionally, this paper will compare the political slogans from a critical linguistic perspective, contrasting factors such as ideology and philosophy of the American political campaign slogans to the equivalent of the People's Republic of China.

2. Analysis

2.1 Different Ideologies (spatio-temporal setting and social structure)

2.1.1

The ideological difference between capitalism and communism has been highly emphasized in the early history of the People's Republic of China. Communism is a political system based on the ideas of Marxism. According to Marxist theory, communism occurs after an overthrow of capitalism and at an intermediary phase referred to as socialism. In the socialist society, the communist party functions as "the vanguard of the proletariat, ruling on their behalf and paving the way for the eventual establishment of communism." (Jocye 56). A notable feature of communist states is "the paramount position of an official socialist ideology and the domination or total monopolization of political affairs by the official Communist party" (Jocye 40-1). The party controls the mass media of that country. From 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, through 1980s when the market and economic reform policy was implemented, communistic ideology and warfare theory have always been the main topics of Chinese political slogans. Let us take some examples of these:

Fight against the aggressiveness of the capitalists

(打退右派分子的猖狂进攻), (1950s)
Class fighting is omnipresent (阶级斗争, 一抓就灵)
(1960s)
Against capitalism and hegemony (斗私批修),
(1970s)

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Communist China admired Mao Zedong, the first Chairman of the People's Republic of China, and Maoism, which is considered to be a development of Marxism with Chinese features. This is also reflected in the slogans of that period. Here are some of the examples:

People's commune is good (人民公社好),
Chairman Mao is the red sun in our heart (毛主席
是我们心中的红太阳)
Long live Mao's theory (毛泽东思想万岁).

The period from 1950s to 1980s has been considered to be the "golden age" of China's political slogans. At that time, each new slogan would be published almost on daily basis, and thousands of political slogans were posted and broadcasted through the means of mass media, billboards, or even as home decorations. The content of those slogans, however, was comparatively simplified toward introducing communistic ideology and class warfare theory. Because Communism was immature and fragile in new China's early history, the Chinese government looked upon ideology as a great weapon in propaganda and public relations. The party put the introduction and cultivation of communist ideology as their first concern. Every day of the year, hundreds of political slogans were made to attain this aim. The Chinese communist pioneers felt they had a great responsibility to protect, spread, and develop communist ideology and Marxism against the aggression of western capitalistic powers. Meanwhile, they were also desperately hopeful to find the right way to develop a new communistic country with Chinese characteristics. Such enthusiasm is reflected clearly in that period's political slogans:

Work hard, try the best and build the socialistic society in a prosperous, efficient, good and economic way (鼓足干劲, 力争上游, 多快好省的
建设社会主义) (1950s)

Independence and hard work, build the country economically (独立自主, 自力更生, 艰苦奋斗, 勤俭建国) (1960s)
Seize the revolution, stimulate/fuel the production (抓革命, 促生产) (1970s)

When the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold war ended, the creation of the market opening policy was proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1980s. At this point the Chinese party and the government's focus changed dramatically from ideology to economy; the content of political slogans also reflected the change: As can be seen in some of the popular slogans of the 1980s in China:

Practice is the only standard to test the truth (实践是检验真理的唯一标准)
Liberate the mind to open and reform policy/economy (解放思想, 改革开放)
Poverty is not socialism, let some become rich first (贫困不是社会主义, 让一部分人先富起来)
The iron rule is development (发展是硬道理)
Develop the socialistic market economy (发展社会主义市场经济)
Seize the chance, face the challenge (抓住机遇, 迎接挑战)
Build the Xiaokang¹ society from all aspects (全面 建设小康社会)

The Chinese party still maintains its belief in communism and anti-capitalism that are shown in such political slogans as "坚持四项基本原则". This means "four stick-tos" (stick to the socialistic road, stick to the communist party; stick to the proletariat class and stick to Marxism and Maoism). However, 90% of the political slogans' content have been changed, as we can see from the preceding lists. Instead of criticizing the different nature of capitalism and the western political system and focusing on ideological differences, the main content of political slogans has been to enlighten people with the importance of economic development, and with the nature and advantages of communism in ruling the country.

Achieve four modernizations in industry, agriculture, science, and military force (实现四个现代化),

Three-fold representation: the party represents the direction of advanced labor force, the basic interest of Chinese people, and the direction of our society's culture (三个代表)

Two tenets to remember: remember that to serve the people is the basic function of the party, remember that to achieve communism is the final goal of the party. (两个牢记)

Party for the public, government for the people (立党为公, 执政为民)

After the failed social attempt at the Cultural Revolution and the end of the Cold War, the Chinese communist party began to implement economic reform and market opening policy with the concept of building "a socialist country with Chinese features" (建设有中国特色的社会主义). The decline of political slogans about ideology strongly demonstrates that the Chinese communist party has become more practical and confident in handling both domestic and foreign issues. The task of the Chinese party changed from establishing the communist ideology to developing the national economy and building up a socialistic country in a Chinese way.

2.1.2

There are some strong ideological slogans such as "Better Dead than Red" in historical American political slogans. Nowadays, we can see that American political slogans rarely use the word "communism" (even in the Cold War). Instead, their main point is domestic issues, and their contents are much more various. Many historical events are reflected in the American presidential campaign slogans.

In the early 1920s, a very prosperous era of America, people enjoyed their life and a fast economic growth, one presidential campaign slogan sang "Cox and cocktail" (1920 Warren G. Harding) reflecting people's dream of a high living standard in that period. However, in the Great Depression which happened in the late 1920s, a campaign slogan ran "a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage" (1982 Herbert Hoover). This demonstrates that during the Great Depression, the basic necessities of everyday life were essential to the American people. Those slogans reflect the changing living standard in 1920s.

After World War II, some American campaign slogans expressed their wish that people want to have a better world and a promising American life. These are some of the examples:

Peace and Prosperity (the 1956 U.S. presidential campaign slogan of Dwight D. Eisenhower)

He is making us proud again (1976, Gerald Ford)

Let's Make America Great Again (1980 U.S. presidential campaign theme of Ronald Reagan)

It is morning again in America (1984, Ronald Reagan)

Kinder, Gentler Nation (1988, George Bush)

Do not stop thinking about tomorrow (1992 Bill Clinton)

Moving America forward (2004, George W. Bush)

There are two major parties, the Democrats and the Republicans in America and the election is conducted in the "first-past-the-post system" (Jocey 65). It means that American citizens are periodically invited to vote:

They are asked to choose representatives for local, state or national office. Elections are the mechanism whereby the views of citizens are translated into political actions, providing them with an opportunity to play a part in the political affairs of their country. They enable public participation in key activities which include selecting the personnel of the government and determining the content of public policy. (Jocey 66)

These Elections further constitute the process whereby public office holders can be made to account for their activities to the general public. It is an essential feature of the American election system that sovereignty resides with the people living in America. The Government is accountable to people for its actions. Those that lose the backing of the public will be replaced by representatives drawn from another political party in the next round of elections. Elections, therefore, provide an essential link between the government and the governed. They serve as barometer of public opinion and ensure that the holders of public offices, and policies they enforce, are broadly in accord with the wishes of the general public. It is because of this

that American presidential campaign slogans are directly related to the public opinion; and that is why candidates always try to use “sweet slogans to woo the voters”.

Real plans for real people (2000, George W. Bush)
Government of, by, and for the People (2000, Ralph Nader)

In order to attract voters, some political slogans take on personal implications:

I like Ike (1952 U.S presidential campaign slogan of Dwight D. Eisenhower)
Nixon's the One (1965 U.S presidential campaign slogan of Nixon).

Some presidential slogans have focus on special and specific issues to get people's attention:

The stakes are too high for you to stay at home.
(Tax issue, 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson)
Leave no child behind (education issue, 2000, George w. Bush)
War on terror (terrorist issue, 2000, George w. Bush)

The first-past-the-post system makes those candidates follow the ideal of “putting people first” (1992, Bill Clinton) and discourages parties from fragmenting. It thus promotes the dynamics of politics within the confines of a two-party system. Meanwhile, because American people put a greater emphasis on their everyday lives rather than ideological differences, this results in ideology becoming diluted, obscured or played-down. In order for the parties to serve as vehicles capable of attracting a wide range of political opinion, the system is likely to honor the interests of the times. This is the reason why most of American election campaign slogans are designed to focus on domestic issues rather than ideological difference.

2.2 Philosophy (Fields of interaction)

2.2.1

In Marxism, the content of communism is charac-

terized by the abolition of private property and class divisions and the creation of equality in which citizens live in cooperation and harmony. Once the goal has been achieved, the state and government “becomes unnecessary and will wither away” (Eagleton 44-5). The 1950s to the 1970s was a long period when the People's Republic of China strove to realize the Communistic definition of the ideal society proposed by Marx. During this time, thousands of political slogans were published to stimulate the enthusiasm of people for that reason.

Big community, state ownership (一大二公)
People's community is good (人民公社好)
Three red flags: the leading schedule, the big ride, the people's community (三面红旗)

However, Communist China has not yet achieved the ideal situation referred to by Marx. It adjusts itself to what is assumed to be the “pre-phase” of communism referred to as “socialism.” Collectivism is closely identified with socialism. This is especially the case with those who view state ownership as the means of production and also as the way to achieve a more just society. However, collective action can be organized through social units other than the state, and this may underpin economic ventures such as co-operatives in which people can work together and pursue common aims within capitalist economic system. In some sense, collectivism is considered as China's main social philosophy. This is why Chinese communist party calls its nation as “a socialistic country with Chinese features” (建设有中国特色的社会主义). There is a strong sense of collectivism in Chinese political slogans. Here are some examples:

More people, more power (人多力量大)
Serve the people (为人民服务)
United is power (团结就是力量)
Build up a harmonious society (建设和谐社会)

Today, collectivism is highly praised in Chinese politics. It entails the sacrifice of self-interest to commonly agreed goals. These are often asserted by the central political authority. This represents a belief that the state should take an active role in directing the resources at its command to achieve

these objectives. Collectivism is usually seen as the opposite of individualism since group needs are placed above the pursuit of individual interests. However, some arguments of liberalists show that these conflicts are not irreconcilable. For, in their view, the sense of co-operation and fraternity, developed through collective endeavor, enables individuals to develop their personalities while serving the public interest. .

2.2.2

Individualism is historically linked to liberalism. The classical notion of limited government holds that the individual should be as free as possible from state interference since this would deprive him of his ability to exercise responsibility for his conduct. By the same token, state involvement in social policy, especially to protect the poorer and weaker members of society, was rejected by liberals for much of the nineteenth century on the grounds that individuals should be responsible for their own welfare. The “new right” enthusiastically adopted many of the ideas associated with classical liberalism in the 1980s. In America, individualism “underpins the free market and enhances the high level of voter’s participation for elections (sometimes referred to as “turn out”)” (Jocey 42). Compared with Chinese slogans, American campaign slogans place a greater emphasis on individuals. Those slogan makers tend to highlight the individual’s life rather than appeal to their sense of patriotism.

Are You Better Off Than You Were Four Years Ago? -- A 1980 U.S. presidential campaign slogan of Ronald Reagan that referred to the sluggish economy of the Jimmy Carter presidency

In Your Heart, You Know He’s Right ---1964 Presidential campaign slogan of Republican Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater.

In Your Guts, You Know He’s Nuts -- an unofficial anti-Barry Goldwater slogan, parodying “In Your Heart, You know He’s Right” 1964.

I’m just wild about Harry - 1948 U. S. presidential slogan of Harry S. Truman, taken from a 1921 popular song title written by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake

I still like Ike - 1956 U.S presidential campaign slo-

gan of Dwight D. Eisenhower

Vote yourself a Farm --1860 Abraham Lincoln

The stakes are too high for you to stay at home---
1964 Lyndon b. Johnson

Individualism, as opposed to collectivism, places the interests of individual citizens at the forefront of its concerns. As a political doctrine it suggests the idea that the sphere of government should be limited so as not to encroach on the ability of the individual to pursue his own interest and thereby to achieve self-fulfillment. As an economic principle, individualism opposes government intervention in the workings of the economy, its preference is given to the free market and laissez-faire capitalism so that it sees no reason for government imposing restrictions on matters of wages and working condition.

2.2.3

Different philosophies are implicit in Chinese and American political slogans. Chinese slogan tends to be general and collectivist, while American slogans are more personal and individualized. As time goes on, the governmental policies of respective country have begun to reverse polarity: instead of placing focus on the ideology of class warfare, the Chinese political slogans have recently become more oriented to ward the economic development of China. Here are some examples:

To develop the economy is a focal point (以经济建设为中心),

Poverty is not socialism (贫困不是社会主义)

Rich together (共同富裕)

Support the big development of the West (of China)(支持西部大开发)

As we see here the wholesale slogan has shifted its emphasis from collectivism to individualism and the value of human being. The following are some of the examples:

Humanity is the basic principle (以人为本)

Power is used for the people, enthusiasm is from the people, profit is given to the people (权为民所用, 情为民所系, 利为民所谋)

Despite its heavy ideological characteristics, these slogans begin to pay more attention to specific economic policy and human rights. This stimulates the Chinese people's enthusiasm to enjoy an affluent life and their faith in a more practical and reliable government. More than that, political slogans are also in decline in China, and after the year of 2000, we see seldom ideological slogans broadcast in China's mass media. This is illustrated by the fact that even during the period of NATO bombing China's Belgrade embassy, the government only used "(Being alert about peaceful interfering) 防止和平演变", and quickly changed it to (steady is everything) 稳定压倒一切" after the solution of this incident..

Entering the 21st century, many American politicians change their hesitating attitude towards collectivism. Instead of highlighting individualism, those political campaign candidates tend to persuade people to be more "collectivist" to the States. Almost all the presidential campaign slogans after 2000 stressed these general concepts of "building a strong America/leadership for the future/ prosperity for America's families/ moving our country forward/ let's bring people together/prosperity and progress." (Yang 68)

After September 11th of 2001, a poll conducted by the Roper Reports unit of NOP World, which is based on personal and telephone interviews over several years, found that 81 percent of Americans believed patriotism is "in," meaning it is an important factor in their individual identities, compared with 14 percent of Americans who believed patriotism is "out." (US news 2005) The theme of patriotism also is markedly reflected in American political slogans. Here are two examples: "let America be America Again" (2004 John Kerry) and "yes, America can" (2004 George W. Bush). "That patriotism appears so long after the period of frenzied flag-waving following 9/11 suggests that it is settling in as a fixture of American perceptions," according to Roper Reports. (MSNBC 2005).

Linguists usually think it is through vocabulary that language reflects culture. In the hypothesis called "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis" (Eagleton 58), it combines two assumptions of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism. It means that language is not only a way of expressing and packaging cul-

ture but also a mold to develop culture. Wu Tieping, a Chinese linguist had a similar opinion that "different people in different cultures will view the world in different ways."(Yang 1981) Slogan is a form of language; thus it also reflects culture and develops culture. After the Cold War, the Chinese party and the government's focus has changed from ideology to economy; thus the political slogans about ideology have declined dramatically; and most of the slogans focused on improving Chinese people's living standard and on developing the strength of the country on a comprehensive level. Those slogans have definitely pushed the Chinese society in other direction; and people living in that environment also are changing their aims of life unconsciously or consciously. This is partly due to the influence and instruction by the Chinese slogans in the new century. In the past years, American society highly praised the concept of individualism; everyone was vocal about personal difference or individual uniqueness instead of communal value and patriotism. However, as the international community enters a "cooperation age," no one can attain one's success without the help of others. Now in America, more and more people have come to realize that various social problems are caused by the fallen ideal of individualism. People have begun to support election candidates who claim to build the great country by remaking their communal value. Therefore, American political slogans have come to reflect more cooperative features than at any other periods in its history. This phenomenon demonstrates that philosophies in different countries become interdependent in the development of globalization.

3. Conclusions

Adopting the CDA approach to political discourse, this study has analyzed and discussed the political slogans that have been utilized in China and America, the two ideological systems opposed to each other. We have found noticeable differences with respect to ideology and philosophy. Meanwhile, similarities are also recognized in the political slogans. We suggest that these marked structural choices made by the two forms of political slogans are not arbitrary but are well motivated by their underlying ideologies. Using the methodology of depth-hermeneutics and the Sapir-Whorf

hypothesis, the two countries' slogans represent different features: Chinese political slogans tend to be more content-oriented; whereas, in American counterpart, the form and methodology of attracting people's attention is practically emphasized to a far greater degree. Philologists and linguists have long been interested in the diversity of human languages and their meanings. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis makes the claim that the structure of language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one thinks and behaves. Thompson's methodology of depth-hermeneutics provides us with the way to approach and analyze the interdependence between culture, language and, ideology. Our finding that ideological biases are linguistically embedded in the political slogans supports the idea that slogans simply cannot provide a perspective that is totally free from subjective interpretation of events or content; on the contrary, slogans tend to construct reality in a manner congruent with their underlying ideological and political functions. To a large extent, it may be safely said that political slogan inevitably mirrors, explicitly or implicitly, a country's culture, ideology, philosophy, and political system; and that it influences the development of these elements in one country's political atmosphere.

An interesting phenomenon has emerged as we have discussed in this paper: recently, the style of American political campaign slogans has begun to reflect more collectivistic and patriotic features, while the Chinese political slogans have shifted in favor of using individual elements in achieving its political aim; it now pays much more attention to the form and the way to deliver its slogan. A close comparison of these two countries' political slogans has demonstrated that language is a vehicle of effective social messages with all its ideological background.

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1 a Chinese term indicating a good level of living standard.

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