A Lexical Pragmatic Study of Democrats' Election Campaign Slogans

Hala Qahtan Dawood[1], Ayad Hameed Mahmoud[2]

[1]M.A. Student, College of Education for Humanities, Diyala University, Iraq. E-mail: halaqahtan44@gmail.com
[2]Professor, Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, Diyala University, Iraq.
E-mail: ayadhameed70@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in this study is simply represented by the sort of uncertainty that may exist over the type of Lexical Pragmatic (LP) processes employed by the designers of election slogans and the strategies they employ to influence their addressees and get them involved into these slogans. The study is intended to investigate the slogans employed in Democrats' posters and political speeches in the American presidential election campaigns. To achieve the aims of the study, two types of procedures have been adopted: theoretical and practical. The theoretical procedures consist of presenting a theoretical framework of LP including its definitions, historical background, and some related studies. On the other hand, the practical procedures consist of selecting four slogans from U.S. News & World Report, Washington Times and NPR. The results of the selected slogans have shown that Democrats depend heavily on narrowing and broadening processes in the slogans they use in political speeches and posters. The results have also shown some differences between the two groups of slogans in terms of the employed LP processes.

Keywords
Lexical Pragmatics, Narrowing, Broadening.

Introduction

Election slogans play an important role in presidential election campaigns. The candidate is represented by these brief formulas, which encompass his message, values and program. They are mentioned frequently in speeches, disseminated by the media, and waved about by supporters. They can influence the results of a presidential election. (D`auriac, 2018: 4).

In the US, there are two major political parties: The Democratic and The Republican Party. Every four years, the American people prepare for another cycle to choose who will be the next president. The candidate and his team use slogans in form of bumper stickers, on the stage and behind the candidate in political speech, signboard, posters, lawn signs, TV advertisements, websites, twitter, and all social media platforms.

The problem of this study can be represented by the sort of controversy that may exist over the probable answers to the questions stated below:

1. What are the LP processes frequently employed in Democratic candidates' slogans used in their political speeches?

2. What are the LP processes frequently employed in Democratic candidates' slogans used in their election posters?

The present study is an attempt to answer the questions stated above, and investigate the LP processes employed by the designers of these slogans. For this purpose, four election campaign slogans from different sources are selected to be analyzed in the light of an elected model.

On Defining Lexical Pragmatics

Blutner (1998: 115) defines LP as a ″ research field that tries to give a systematic and explanatory account of pragmatic phenomena that are connected with the semantic under specification of lexical items″. The main idea here is that the donation of words with conceptual meanings covers more than simply entering the concepts encoded by the words and including them into semantic representations. Comprehension also involves adapting the encoded concepts to reflect particular meanings intended by communicators. A number of linguists, philosophers, cognitive scientists and relevance theorists have worked out in this area.

Wilson (2003: 273) states that LP is the application of semantics- pragmatics difference at the level of the word or phrase rather than the entire utterance. It was developed as a branch of linguistics that examines the processes when the linguistic literal meanings of words are modulated in use.

Historical Background

LP is relatively a new field of linguistics. The last decades of the 20th century witnessed a rapid development of this filed. The acceleration development of this field presents the great interest of pragmatic theory in the meaning of single words used in utterances in different contexts instead of interest in the meaning of entire utterance. (Wałaszewska, 2015: 3- 4). The idea of LP was started by McCawley (1978: 257) who disputes that "a lexical item and a syntactically complex equivalent of it may make different contributions to the interpretation of a sentence without making different contributions to its semantic structure". Also Searle (1980: 227) states that "the literal meaning of a sentence or expression only determines a set of truth conditions given a set of background assumptions and practices." This means that, in various contexts, the same expression or sentence with the same literal meaning may define different truth conditions".

Lexical Semantics Vs Lexical Pragmatics

Lexical Semantics (LS) is the study of word meanings. The subject is not easy to search because word meanings cannot be observed directly. They are private matters, settled within each spokesman's head, and might not even be available for introspection. To compare and contrast meanings with "concepts" or "ideas" let's say, for instance, that the meaning of tree is the concept of TREE, or tree idea. (Taylor, 2017:246). Rebollar (2013) states the difference between LS and LP depends on the difference between encoded meaning vs communicated meaning. Frequently speakers tend to use words in ways that differ from their encoded (literal) meanings; speakers use words hyperbolically,

metaphorically, or to create new ones. Consider the following example:

(1) She`s got personality!

Everybody has a personality. Semantically, the speaker′s words don't seem to convey anything new. Pragmatically, the word has a deeper or narrower meaning, it means she has got a special, independent, personality. Therefore, some type of inferential process is needed to cover the gap between the sentence and the speaker′s meaning.

Based on the above discussion, the distinction between the purpose of LS and LP appears clear and complementary. LS aims at explaining the relations between words and the concepts they encode (the literal meaning of the word), while LP aims at explaining the fact that the concept communicated by using word often differs from the concept encoded in the words (the meanings encoded by words are contextually specified). (Wilson, 2003: 247).

Processes of Lexical Pragmatics

1. Lexical Narrowing

Lexical narrowing involves the use of a word or phrase to convey a more specific concept with a narrower denotation than the linguistically encoded meaning. For example,

(2) All doctors drink.

The word drink doesn't mean drink liquid, but more specifically drink alcohol or drink significant amounts of alcohol. (Wilson & Kolaiti, 2017, 150-152).

2. Lexical Broadening

Falkum (2007: 122-123) indicates that lexical broadening means that the concept communicated is more general and has broader denotation than the linguistic encoded literal meaning. According to relevance theorists, this contains matters that fall under such labels as approximation metaphors and hyperbole. Approximation means the word falls outside the linguistically- specified denotation.

(3) My room is square.

the geometrical figure encoded by square is used to mean that the shape of the room doesn't fit the

standards of accuracy required for geometrical figures.

3. Metaphor

Metaphor means that the literal encoded meaning is substituted by a related figurative meaning. Metaphors are sharp violations (flouting) of the rule of conversation that enjoins us to be truthful (the maxim of quality: 'Do not say what you believe to be false'). For example, the utterance

(4) Politics is a game

is false and trigger for a subsitutional interpretation that makes meaning in context. This theory assumes that metaphor involves an element of indirectness, something which may not always accord with our intuitions. Some new theories of metaphor propose that metaphorical expressions are immediately understood with a relevant occasion-specific meaning, different from, but linked to their literal meaning. (Pouscoulous & Dulcinati, 2019: 299-300).

On Election Slogans

Barry (1998: 161) defines political slogan as a rallying cry or catchphrase associated with a political party or other group. A slogan usually comes from the president or a member of the administration, its efficacy is determined by public acceptance and usage. It's worth noting that Barry's association of a slogan with a political party has its root. Slogans have the potential to cross party lines and be adopted by the entire country. Although the roots of a slogan may be traced back to a specific event or administration, the most successful slogans do not have to be permanently associated with a single political party.

In function, political slogans are usually a short declaration of a single thought. They're easy to repeat and recall because they express "single ideas." Slogans will come to define the thoughts of those who use them. Slogans have remained important in the discourse between the American government and its citizens, particularly as communication mediums have changed due to technological advancements. Commentators compete to be the first to identify the catch word after big speeches or addresses by political

leaders. Everyone is looking for something that will stick in the listener's mind. Slogans are a way for the general public to share their views on important topics or issues. Also catch phrases or mottos are about the only way for a significant number of people to demonstrate their personal and repeated support for or opposition to specific politicians or proposals (Newsome 2002: 21-23).

The Adopted Model

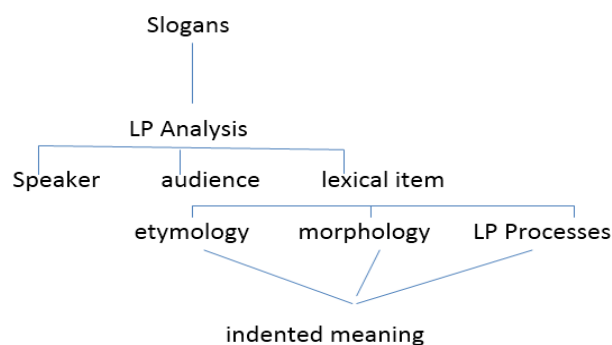The following eclectic model is adopted for the analysis of the selected slogans:

Figure 1. The Adopted Model

Method of Analysis

In analyzing every lexical item in the selected slogans, first the researchers will take into consideration (1) the context of the speaker (the candidate), and (2) the audience that he is addressing, whether they belong to his party or the opposition party. Second, the lexical item itself will be analyzed including features like etymology, morphology, and LP processes. Based on this analysis, the intended meaning of the slogans will be inferred.

Date Collection

The selected sample of the present study consists of four slogans used by democratic candidates in presidential election campaigns. The slogans are quoted from U.S. News & World Report, Washington Times and NPR.

Data Analysis

1. Analysis of Slogan No. 1 ″Build Back Better ″(BBB).

Figure 2. Democratic candidate Joe Biden speaks about his economic plan

1.1. The Speaker

This slogan is used by democratic candidate Joe Biden during the 2020 election campaign.

1.2. The Audience

Joe Biden addressed all people in America. He used this slogan in a speech on Thursday 2020 at McGregor Industries in Dunmore, pa.

1.3. Analysis of Lexical Items

1.3.1. Etymology

The word (Build) is from middle English bilden which means to cause to be constructed. It is from Old English byldan; akin to Old English būan to dwel. The word (Back) is from middle English which means having returned or been returned. It is from Old English bæc; akin to Old High German bah back, Old Norse bak. The word (Better) is from Middle English bettre which means in a superior way. It is from Old English betera; akin to Old English bōt remedy, Sanskrit bhadra fortunate.

1.3.2. Morphology

In this slogan, the words build and back are free morphemes because they are without inflectional or derivational suffixation, while the word better is a comparative degree of the word good.

1.3.3. LP Process

This slogan involves narrowing. The word (build) is the verb, (back) is the problem and (better) is the solution. The intended meaning of this slogan is that he will rebuild the country which Trump destroyed. He will rebuild the economy and Health care including Covid-19 and future Pandemics. ″Biden on Thursday in battleground Pennsylvania announced a new buy-American economic plan, pledging to spend $700 billion in federal monies in four years on infrastructure, national security and technology to create jobs″. Biden's economic plan, which will be presented in stages, involves a $400 billion investment in American-made products, materials, and services over four years to renew infrastructure and improve national security. Another $300 billion would be spent on technological research and development, according to the campaign, which would result in the creation of 3 million employment and "historic investments in communities of color." His campaign hopes the plan will land with particular resonance during a pandemic that has severely affected of millions of American families. So Biden gives man ways that the country will be built again and better than it was previously. By utilizing this motto, he goes beyond resolving the current crisis to leave a lasting legacy that he will assist the US respond better to future crises.

2. Analysis of Slogan No. 2 ″ Battle for the Soul of the Nation″

Figure 3. Biden's speech at Gettsburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania

2.1. The Speaker

Democratic nominee Joseph R. Biden during the 2020th U.S. presidential race. He sticks with this basic slogan which is considered very smart throughout the campaign.

2.2. The Audience

The supporters of the Democratic Party in Georgia.

2.3. Analysis of Lexical Items

2.3.1. Etymology

The word (Battle) is from middle English (batel) which means facing between armies, ships of war, or aircraft. It is traced to the Anglo-French bataille battle, battalion, from Late Latin battalia combat, alteration of battualia fencing exercises, from Latin battuere to beat. The word (Soul) is from middle English soule which means spiritual part of a human being that is separate from the physical body. It is from Old English sāwol; akin to Old High German sēula soul. The word (Nation) is from Middle English nacioun which means a group of group made up of one or more nationalities with a more or less defined territory and government. It is from Anglo-French naciun, from Latin nation-, natio birth, race, nation, from nasci to be born; akin to Latin gignere to beget.

2.3.2. Morphology

Battle, soul and nation are free morphemes because we can understand it alone and they are without affixation. For is a preposition, the is definite article the is used before noun.

2.3.3. LP Process

This slogan shows a clear example of broadening. Biden says ″ this is our opportunity to leave the dark angry politics of the past four years behind us to choose hope over fear, science over fiction. I believe it is time to unite the country and come together as a nation, but I can't do it without you, so I am asking for your vote. Together with your help that a battle we will win″. This slogan was

used by Biden to emphasize the necessity of preventing president Trump from reelection. Biden tries to broaden Trump's failure and misadministration to all aspects of Americans' life even including the soul of the nation.

3. Analysis of Slogan No. 3 ″Stronger Together ″

Figure 4. Delegates holding posters during the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia

3.1. The Speaker

The Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, in the 2016 US Presidential election campaign.

3.2. The Audience

Her supporters (Democratic Party).

3.3. Analyses of Lexical Items

3.3.1. Etymology

The word (Stronger) is from middle English which means having greater physical, moral or intellectual power. It is from Old English strang; akin to Old High German strengi strong, Latin stringere to bind tight. The word (Together) is from middle English togedere which means with one another. It is from Old English togædere, from tō to + gædere together; akin to Middle High German gater together, Old English gaderian to gather.

3.3.2. Morphology

The word Stronger consists of adjective + suffix (er) which forms a comparative adjective. While

the word (Together) is an adverb which is a free morpheme.

3.3.3. LP Process

Broadening is used here. Hillary rejects 84 proposed campaign slogans because none had staying power. Her team settled on "stronger together." It made an appearance in Clinton's speeches and on her campaign posters. It was a serviceable slogan, an official one with layered meaning. It became Clinton's response to Trump`s slogan 'Make America Great Again'. She was struggling in the Democratic primaries to identify a message and a tag line that summed up the purpose of her campaign″. The slogan is a broad statement. There is no call to action in this slogan, no noun and no verb, except the invisible, implicit "We are…" It means we are stronger as a nation when we are not divided. Some people say it is so boring but ″Clinton's campaign seems to be betting that steady and boring wins the race″.

4. Analysis of Slogan No. 5 ″Forward"

Figure 5. The slogan used in Obama's re-election campaign

4.1. The Speaker

The Democratic nominee Barack Obama, in the 2012 United States Presidential Election. This slogan appeared on bumper stickers, billboards websites, lawn signs, Facebook walls, and TV advertisements all across the U.S. Obama's opponent.

4.2. The Audience

Obama addresses his supporters (democratic party) in order to make them reelect him for the second term.

4.3. Analysis of Lexical Items

4.3.1. Etymology

The word (Forward) is from middle English which means moving toward the future or toward a more advanced state or condition. It is from Old English foreweard, from fore- + -weard –ward.

4.3.2. Morphology

Forward is a free morpheme because there is no suffix or affix.

4.3. LP Processes

Forward is a motion metaphor used by Obama to structure his messages in 2012. It implies hope and new opportunities.″ When Obama says he's about going Forward, he means the government is the thing that moves us all forward, that the State is the source of Progress. And obviously the government is a major driver of change, however change is a very different thing than progress. Sometimes, government bring good change, sometimes not. However, the more important point is that government is one of many sources of change″. So "Forward" is simply a summary of the progressive understanding of the State.

Discussion of Results

The analysis of the selected data manifests similarities and differences between Democrats' slogans used in political speeches and those used in posters. Democratic candidates depend heavily on broadening process. It is used in political speech and poster. The candidates employ broadening process when they want to get people involved in their collective ideas, and give rise to the imagination and expansion of the candidates' promises and future plans. Democratic candidates employ narrowing when they want to specifically express their opinions, ideas and future plans focuses on certain fields or areas Metaphor is used in election poster. Metaphor is the core of creativity; the candidates use it to attract the addressees' attention, and influence the way they think about a person or a topic, as well as

influencing people's feelings towards their election campaigns.

Conclusions

The findings of the study lead to the following conclusions:

1. The meaning of the slogan is not directly or easily understood. It depends on the extent that one succeeds in establishing a relationship between the literal meaning of the words on one hand, and how the words are modified in use on the other hand.

2. Slogans are very short formula, but very influencing communicative means. They are used by the candidates in their election campaign to convey their message.

3. Democrats' slogans used in political speeches are similar in terms of broadening process which is equally used.

4. The two groups of the selected slogans are similar in types of the employed LP processes, but they are different in terms of the frequency of each employed type.

References

[1] Barry III, H.E.R.B.E.R.T. (1998). *Function of Recent US Presidential Slogans.*

[2] *Beyond Public Speech and Symbols: Explorations in the Rhetoric of Politicians and the Media*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 161-9.

[3] Blutner, R. (1998). Lexical pragmatics. *Journal of semantics, 15*(2), 115-162.

[4] D'auriac, L.N.A. (2018). *The campaign slogans of 2008 and 2016: meta-analysis of the literature produced on political slogans with a view to establishing a protocol for analyzing the structure and rhetoric of Barack Obama's, John McCain's, Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's slogans*.

[5] Falkum, I.L. (2007). *A relevance-theoretic analysis of concept narrowing and broadening in English and Norwegian original texts and translations*. Languages in contrast, 7(2), 119-141.

[6] McCawley, J.D. (1978). *Conversational implicature and the lexicon*. In P. Cole (Ed.), *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, 245-259. New York: Academic Press.

[7] Newsome, C. (2002). *The use of slogans in political rhetoric.* The Corinthian, 4(1), 3.

[8] Pouscoulous, N., & Dulcinati, G. (2019). *'Metaphor'*, in Cummins, C., & Katsos, N. (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Experimental Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press, 298-315.

[9] Rebollar, B.E. (2013). *Lexical Pragmatics and the nature of word meaning*.

[10] Searle, J.R. (1980). *The background of meaning*. In J. Searle, F. Kiefer and M. Bierwisch (Eds.). *The background of meaning. Dordrecht:* Reidel.

[11] Taylor, J. (2017). *Lexical Semantics*. In B. Dancygier (Ed.). The Cambridge *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics, 246-261). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Wałaszewska, E. (2015). *Relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatics: Theory and applications*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

[12] Wilson, D. (2003). Relevance and lexical pragmatics. *Italian Journal of Linguistics, 15,* 273-292.

[13] Wilson, D., & Kolaiti, P. (2017). *Lexical pragmatics and implicit communication. Implicitness. From Lexis to Discourse/P*. Cap and M. Dynel (Eds.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 147-175.

[14] https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/articles/2020-07-09/bidens-build-back-better-plan-makes-play-for-trump-economy-voters

[15] https://m.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/oct/27/joe-biden-sticks-very-smart-message-start-finish/

[16] https://www.npr.org/2016/08/08/48913860
2/trump-comment-gives-clinton-a-
campaign-slogan-with-layered-meaning

[17] https://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/sc
ott-galupo/2012/05/02/what-barack-
obamas-forward-slogan-really-means.

[18] https://www.merriam-
webster.com/Dictionarty/