

THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC FRAMING IN POLITICAL MESSAGING AND PROPAGANDA

Ion GUȚU

asistent universitar, doctorand

Universitatea de Stat din Moldova, Facultatea de Litere
Departamentul Limbă Engleză și Limbă Franceză de Specialitate
0000-0002-8975-3353

Political messaging and propaganda have always been intertwined with language, but the study of the linguistic framing in political discourse is a relatively recent field. This article explores the role of linguistic framing in political messaging and propaganda, investigating its influence on public perception and its implications for democratic processes. Linguistic framing involves strategically using language to shape the interpretation and understanding of information. The article begins by examining the theoretical foundations of linguistic framing, drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives such as framing theory, agenda-setting, and constructivism. It then delves into the application of linguistic framing in political communication, focusing on issue framing, value framing, metaphorical framing, narrative framing, and visual framing. Subsequently, it discusses the impact of linguistic framing on public perception and opinion, emphasizing frame resonance and frame competition. Lastly, the article addresses the ethical considerations and potential manipulation inherent in linguistic framing, emphasizing the importance of understanding and critically analyzing framing techniques for a well-functioning democratic society.

Keywords: *linguistic framing, political messaging, propaganda, public perception, democratic processes, framing theory, agenda-setting, constructivism.*

Introduction

Language and politics are intricately intertwined, with political messaging and propaganda heavily relying on language to convey messages, sway public opinion, and influence behavior. The strategic use of

linguistic framing plays a pivotal role in shaping political discourse and manipulating public perception. By selecting specific words, phrases, and metaphors, political actors frame information to influence its interpretation and impact. This article explores the theoretical underpinnings of linguistic framing, its application in political communication, and its effect on public perception. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, including framing theory, agenda-setting, and constructivism, we examine the power of linguistic framing in shaping political narratives and its implications for democratic processes. By understanding the role of linguistic framing, scholars and practitioners can navigate the complex landscape of modern politics with greater awareness and insight.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Linguistic Framing

Linguistic framing finds its roots in the broader concept of framing, which has been extensively studied across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and communication studies. Framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality to promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations [2]. Within the realm of political messaging and propaganda, linguistic framing strategically employs language to shape audience perception and understanding. This can encompass the choice of words, phrases, metaphors, narratives, syntax, and tone to convey a particular message or perspective. Theoretical perspectives such as frame analysis, agenda-setting, and constructivism provide valuable insights into the cognitive, media-driven, and social aspects of framing.

One significant theoretical perspective on framing is the “frame analysis” approach developed by Goffman, which considers frames as cognitive schemata enabling individuals to interpret and label events within their environment [6]. Framing, in this sense, is a cognitive process that organizes and interprets information based on pre-existing mental structures or frames. The “agenda-setting” approach highlights the media’s role in shaping public opinion and political discourse, determining which issues gain attention and the range of policy options considered acceptable [10].

A constructivist perspective views framing as a social construction process that uses language and other symbolic forms to create and disseminate shared meanings and interpretations of reality [12]. Framing, in this view, involves negotiation and contestation among different actors and groups, extending beyond cognitive processes to encompass social and political dynamics.

Application of Linguistic Framing in Political Communication: Linguistic framing plays a pivotal role in political communication, particularly in the context of political campaigns and propaganda. One key aspect is “issue framing,” whereby an issue is presented in a manner that resonates with the target audience and serves the communicator’s political objectives [4]. It entails emphasizing specific aspects of an issue, such as its moral, economic, or security implications, while downplaying or disregarding others.

For instance, in a political campaign, a candidate might frame the controversial issue of immigration in terms of its economic benefits, highlighting job creation and increased tax revenues to appeal to voters concerned about the economy. Alternatively, the candidate might frame the issue in terms of cultural or national security implications to appeal to voters concerned about preserving national identity and addressing terrorism. Through linguistic framing, the communicator shapes the audience’s perception and understanding of the issue, advancing their political goals.

Value framing is another significant aspect of linguistic framing in political communication, involving linking issues or policies to the values and beliefs of the target audience [5]. This can be accomplished by using value-laden language, metaphors, and narratives that evoke emotions and create associations between the issue and the audience’s values. For instance, a communicator may frame a policy issue like climate change in terms of its moral implications, emphasizing responsibility to future generations and Earth stewardship, to resonate with environmentally conscious voters. Alternatively, the communicator may frame the issue in terms of its economic implications, highlighting job creation and technological innovation to appeal to voters prioritizing economic growth.

In addition to issue and value framing, political communicators employ various other linguistic framing techniques, including metaphorical framing, which uses metaphors and analogies to create vivid and memorable images conveying specific messages or perspectives [9]. Narrative framing involves the use of stories and narratives to construct coherent and compelling accounts of events or issues [11]. Lastly, visual framing employs visual images and symbols to convey particular messages or perspectives [13].

The Impact of Linguistic Framing on Public Perception

Research has demonstrated that linguistic framing significantly influences public perception and opinion. Framing an issue in different ways can lead to diverse policy preferences and attitudes. Frame resonance, which measures the alignment between frames and audience values, and frame competition, which explores the contestation between frames for dominance, play pivotal roles in determining the effectiveness of framing. Linguistic framing not only shapes public opinion but also influences the broader political discourse, defining the agenda and terms of the debate. By strategically framing issues, political actors exert influence over the issues that are discussed, the policy options that are considered legitimate, and the overall quality and diversity of political discourse.

The deliberate use of language to manipulate public opinion is often subtle and unobtrusive, making it more insidious and effective. Well-known public figures, such as politicians, have an advantage in spreading specific linguistic frames because their words are disseminated and repeated by mass media. An example of this linguistic framing is the deliberate use of the term “Democrat Party” instead of “Democratic Party” by certain politicians and media outlets, a seemingly minor change that alters the connotations associated with the party’s name and subtly frames the party in a different light [7].

Politicians use language as a tool for persuasion, often aiming to introduce new terms or phrases into the cultural lexicon and thereby influence the public’s perception of certain issues or ideas. Language, according to Daniel T. Rodgers, is viewed in the political sphere as a field of

combat, with words serving as weapons to be used and battlegrounds to be conquered or defended [1].

The introduction of a new term or phrase, or neologism, relies on several factors, often summarized as FUDGE: Frequency, Unobtrusiveness, Diversity, Generating new forms and meanings, and Endurance. These elements contribute to the likelihood of a new term being adopted and enduring in language:

1. **Frequency:** The term should be used repeatedly.
2. **Unobtrusiveness:** The term shouldn't be too noticeably strange, so it's easy to pick up.
3. **Diversity:** The term should be used across different groups.
4. **Generating new forms and meanings:** The term should be able to be used flexibly in different ways.
5. **Endurance:** The concept the term refers to should be long-lasting . [1]

The strategic use of linguistic framing in political messaging and propaganda has a significant impact on public perception and opinion. Research has shown that framing can influence how audiences interpret and evaluate political issues, as well as their attitudes and policy preferences [14]. For example, framing an issue in terms of its economic consequences can lead to different policy preferences compared to framing it in terms of moral or security implications [14].

Linguistic framing also shapes the broader political discourse and the way issues are debated and discussed in the public sphere. By framing issues in a particular way, political actors can set the agenda and define the terms of the debate, influencing the range of policy options considered legitimate and acceptable [5].

The process of frame resonance plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of framing. Frame resonance refers to the extent to which a particular frame aligns with the values, beliefs, and experiences of the target audience [13]. To achieve frame resonance, political communicators must ensure that their frames are consistent with the audience's pre-existing beliefs, values, and socio-cultural context.

Another mechanism through which linguistic framing influences public perception is frame competition. Frame competition involves the

contestation between different frames for dominance and acceptance in the public sphere [13]. The success of framing contests depends on how well different frames are able to shape public opinion and political outcomes. Political communicators must develop persuasive frames while countering and undermining the frames of their opponents to succeed in frame competition.

Implications for Democratic Processes and Political Systems

The analysis of linguistic framing in political messaging and propaganda reveals several important implications for democratic processes and the functioning of political systems. These implications can be categorized into three main areas: the impact on public opinion and political outcomes, the role of the media in shaping political discourse, and the potential for manipulation and distortion of democratic processes.

Linguistic framing can significantly impact public opinion and political outcomes by shaping how issues are perceived and understood by audiences. By strategically framing issues in ways that resonate with the target audience and advance their political goals, political actors can influence the attitudes and policy preferences of voters, as well as the broader political discourse and debate. These effects can have profound consequences for democratic processes, influencing election outcomes, the formulation of public policy, and the allocation of resources and attention to different issues and concerns.

The media plays a critical role in the process of linguistic framing, serving as the primary conduit through which political messages and propaganda reach the public. As gatekeepers of information, the media have the power to select and emphasize certain issues and frames while downplaying or ignoring others, shaping the agenda for political debate and discussion. The media's role in framing influences the range of issues and policy options considered legitimate and acceptable, as well as the quality and diversity of political discourse in the public sphere.

Furthermore, the media actively participate in framing by constructing and disseminating their own frames and interpretations of events and issues. This involves editorial decisions, news values, and journalistic norms and practices to shape the presentation and interpretation of

information. The media's promotion of particular frames and perspectives through opinion pieces, editorials, and commentary can influence the public's understanding and interpretation of political issues. The media's dual role as both a conduit and constructor of linguistic frames has important implications for the functioning of democratic processes and political systems.

The strategic use of linguistic framing in political messaging and propaganda raises ethical and normative concerns, as it can involve the manipulation and distortion of information to advance political objectives. This potential manipulation and distortion can undermine the quality and integrity of political discourse, as well as the ability of citizens to make informed and rational decisions about political issues and candidates. As linguistic framing techniques become increasingly sophisticated, and with the proliferation of new media technologies and platforms, such as social media, the potential for manipulation and distortion in democratic processes intensifies. Consequently, it is essential for scholars, practitioners, and citizens to be aware of the role of linguistic framing in political communication and to develop strategies and tools for detecting, analyzing, and countering the potential negative effects of framing on democratic processes and political systems.

Linguistic framing is widely employed in political communication, particularly in the context of political campaigns and propaganda. Issue framing is a key aspect, involving the presentation of an issue in a way that resonates with the target audience and advances political goals. Value framing connects an issue or policy to the values and beliefs of the audience. Additional linguistic framing techniques include metaphorical framing, narrative framing, and visual framing. These techniques enable political communicators to shape perceptions, evoke emotions, and create associations between issues and audience values. The strategic use of framing techniques allows political actors to present issues in a manner that aligns with their goals and resonates with their target audience [14].

Conclusion

Linguistic framing serves as a powerful tool in political communication, influencing public perception, shaping the political discourse, and

raising ethical concerns. Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of framing, its application in political communication, and its impact on public perception is crucial for citizens, practitioners, and scholars alike. By recognizing the strategic use of language, individuals can critically evaluate political messages, navigate the complexities of democratic processes, and ensure the integrity of political systems. Ultimately, an informed understanding of linguistic framing enables active citizenship and the promotion of democratic values in an increasingly complex political landscape. The potential for manipulation and distortion of democratic processes is exacerbated by the increasing sophistication and complexity of linguistic framing techniques, as well as the growing influence of new media technologies and platforms, such as social media, which can facilitate the rapid and widespread dissemination of political messages and propaganda. In this context, it is essential for scholars, practitioners, and citizens alike to be aware of the role of linguistic framing in political communication and to develop strategies and tools for detecting, analyzing, and countering the potential negative effects of framing on democratic processes and political systems.

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