Leader election outcomes as contextual moderators explaining the different frequencies of action-oriented terms and negation terms used in inaugural speeches of effective versus ineffective leaders and charismatic versus non-charismatic leaders: Evidence from 30 U.S. presidents

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ABSTRACT

Psychologists have increasingly employed dictionary-based text analysis to examine the language of leadership, as leadership is embedded in a web of negotiated meanings and contextual factors. This research seeks to embed leaders' rhetorical influence in leader–follower relationships and identify contextual factors that explain the different patterns of effective versus ineffective leaders' and charismatic versus non-charismatic leaders' uses of action-oriented terms and negation terms in their inaugural speeches. By analyzing data of 30 U.S. presidents' inaugural addresses, presidential election outcomes, and leadership styles, I found that effective leaders used action-oriented terms more frequently in their inaugural speeches than ineffective leaders only when follower participation was low, whereas charismatic leaders used negation terms more frequently in their inaugural speeches than non-charismatic leaders only when follower endorsement was low. These findings suggest that effective leaders are attuned to action-related situational cues whereas charismatic leaders are attuned to value-related situational cues.

1. Introduction

Psychologists have been increasingly employing qualitative methods (e.g., dictionary-based content analysis) to examine the language of leadership (Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004a, 2004b; Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999; Mio, Riggio, Levin, & Reese, 2005; Seyranian & Bligh, 2008), as "leadership is a function of leaders and followers embedded in a rich web of negotiated meanings and contextual variables" (Bligh et al., 2004a, p. 562). An integration of qualitative methods and quantitative methods facilitates the discovery of "new facets of leadership that may be difficult to tap by using traditional quantitative methods" (Insch, Moore, & Murphy, 1997, p. 1) and advances the scientific knowledge of "leadership relationship within its immediate social, cultural, and political context" (Bligh et al., 2004a, p. 562). Computerized content analysis provides perfect stability of coding schemes, generates comparable results with perfect reliability, and facilitates the detection of co-occurrences of important factors (Morris, 1994). It benefits the inquiry of leadership processes, especially when there is a large

distance between leaders and followers and leaders' language is essential for shaping leader–follower interactions, framing/defining reality, and mobilizing followers (Conger, 1991; Insch et al., 1997; Smircich & Morgan, 1982; see Bligh et al., 2004a).

Action-oriented terms and negation terms are particularly important elements of leaders' language because they are related to mobility and identity. Action-oriented terms are bold and purposeful terms that emphasize action toward goal achievement (Schroedel, Bligh, Merolla, & Gonzalez, 2013; Seyranian & Bligh, 2008). Leaders need to mobilize followers into action (Fiol et al., 1999; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993) by conveying action orientation in their speeches (Bligh et al., 2004b). Negation terms, such as "nots", null sets, and negative function words, are used to derogate the status quo (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008). Seyranian and Bligh (2008) proposed that negation facilitates social identity framing— "an intragroup process consisting of interpretive schemas used by leaders to alter the group's values and identity to be compatible and supportive of the leader's vision of social change" (p. 68). Leaders use action-oriented terms to summarize the past and present achievements and motivate followers to achieve future goals (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008). Leaders' speeches denoting action orientation (e.g., achievement rather than hesitation) should increase

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followers' motivation to participate in activities and follow leaders' visions (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008; Shamir et al., 1993). Yet Seyranian and Bligh (2008) did not find any significant difference in charismatic versus non-charismatic leaders' uses of action-oriented terms. Leaders can use negation to neutralize conventional group values and motivate followers to adopt proposed changes while reducing their desires for convention (Fiol et al., 1999; Seyranian & Bligh, 2008). Leaders can use negation to make followers change or break their "frames" or schemas that guide followers' perceptions and behaviors (Fiol et al., 1999).

Fiol et al.'s (1999) and Seyranian and Bligh's (2008) findings suggest that charismatic leaders use action-oriented terms as frequently as non-charismatic leaders but use negation more frequently than non-charismatic leaders. But these patterns only occur *during* social change. At the initial stage of social change, charismatic leaders use negation as frequently as non-charismatic leaders (Fiol et al., 1999) and sometimes less frequently than non-charismatic leaders (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008) in their inaugural speeches. Leaders' effective uses of these terms in their inaugural speeches can facilitate a smooth process of the change. It is important to understand why charismatic leaders and non-charismatic leaders did not differ in their uses of action-oriented terms and negation terms in their inaugural speeches. Is there any contextual factor that makes charismatic leaders use action-oriented or negation terms more frequently than non-charismatic leaders or vice versa? Leaders can also be differentiated in terms of their effectiveness. Do effective leaders use action-oriented or negation terms more frequently in their inaugural speeches than ineffective leaders or vice versa? If so, is there any contextual moderator for these relationships? The present research speaks to these questions.

2. Effective leaders and charismatic leaders

There is little consensus on the definition of an effective versus ineffective leader. According to path-goal theory, effective leaders are those who help their followers achieve goals (House, 1971, 1996). Whether leaders are deemed as effective or ineffective often depends on their performance (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991). In contrast, the definition of a charismatic versus non-charismatic leader has received more agreement, though a clearer definition of charismatic leadership is still needed (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). The word "charisma" refers to "a certain quality of an individual by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber, 1968, p. 241). Charismatic leaders, thus, are defined as individuals who "by the force of their personal abilities are capable of having profound and extraordinary effects on followers" (House & Baetz, 1979, p. 339).

Although charismatic leaders are often deemed as effective leaders or vice versa, they are not necessarily the same (House et al., 1991). Effective leaders can successfully lead followers to achieve goals or have good performance without being charismatic or having a profound influence on followers. Charismatic leaders can inspire followers while lacking focus on goal attainment and in the end fail to perform. Effective leaders are performance-oriented in that they focus on attaining goals and motivating followers to perform under given circumstances. They may also be visionary; they may persuade followers with their visions and use visions as motivators for followers' goal attainment. In contrast, charismatic leaders are vision-oriented in that they focus on inspiring followers with their extraordinary personal qualities and values (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Shamir et al., 1993; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Their visions are provided mainly to align followers' identities and values with theirs. Charismatic leaders can help followers achieve goals or perform by having a

profound and extraordinary influence on followers (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

3. Leader election outcomes as contextual moderators

Both effective leaders and charismatic leaders are claimed to be sensitive to their environment/followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, & Popper, 2007; Mio et al., 2005). They are likely to respond to their followers' behaviors and attitudes. Leader elections provide opportunities for elected leaders to observe their followers' behaviors and attitudes. After observing adverse behaviors or attitudes of their followers, effective leaders and charismatic leaders will attempt to modify these behaviors and attitudes through communication. Their inaugural speeches will be tailored to serve this purpose.

A leader election is often the first stage of social change. When effective leaders and charismatic leaders observe that many followers are not participating in leader elections, they may interpret this as followers' apathy or lack of involvement/engagement. Then they will use action-oriented terms frequently in their inaugural speeches to increase followers' participation (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008).

Hypothesis 1a. When follower participation is low, effective leaders will use action-oriented terms more frequently in their inaugural speeches than ineffective leaders, but this difference does not exist when follower participation is high.

Hypothesis 1b. When follower participation is low, charismatic leaders will use action-oriented terms more frequently in their inaugural speeches than non-charismatic leaders, but this difference does not exist when follower participation is high.

When effective leaders and charismatic leaders do not receive many popular votes, they are likely to interpret their unpopularity as an indicator of followers not endorsing their values or proposed change. As a response, they may employ negation frequently in their inaugural speeches to break their followers' "frames", modify their followers' attitudes toward their values, and change their followers' perceptions of the status quo (Fiol et al., 1999; Seyranian & Bligh, 2008).

Hypothesis 2a. When follower endorsement is low, effective leaders will use negation terms more frequently in their inaugural speeches than ineffective leaders, but this difference does not exist when follower endorsement is high.

Hypothesis 2b. When follower endorsement is low, charismatic leaders will use negation terms more frequently in their inaugural speeches than non-charismatic leaders, but this difference does not exist when follower endorsement is high.

4. Method

4.1. Sample

A total of 30 United States presidents from Andrew Jackson to Bill Clinton were included in the sample given that a complete set of data about them was available. The texts of their presidential inaugural addresses were retrieved from Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan (Janda, 2009). The data of their presidential elections were collected from the website of the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara.