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Condensation Symbols: Their Variety and Rhetorical Function in Political Discourse

David S. Kaufer and Kathleen M. Carley

All words are symbols, but are all symbols equal? Rhetorical and linguistic approaches to language divide on this issue because linguists tend to view symbols as democratically leveled through the technical notion of synchronic meaning, a word's standard sense and reference as acquired by some hypothetical competent language user. Rhetorical theorists, however, focus on the stratified impact of words in context, a stratification brought about by the fact that every word has a unique history of usage across populations of audiences who can continue to affect a word's impact in contemporaneous messages.

For the rhetorical theorist, high impact words evince a high degree of connectivity in context. Connectivity is used here to mean the number and strength of associations that link explicit utterances with the insider elaborations of their audiences. Words that are highly and richly connected to their audiences seem to function as more than "just words" and become consciously referred to as "symbols," aspects of language studied in a distinguished tradition from Cassirer to Burke. Among more recent studies (including those of Graber, Hudson, Geis, Boulding), McGee's offers an insightful analysis of symbols that function rhetorically, which are referred to as "ideographs." McGee (1980) contends that such symbols can't be fully understood or tracked as isolated atoms of meaning, but can be as clusters of related symbols:

Ideographs such as "rule of law" are meant to be taken together, as a working unit, with "public trust," "freedom of speech," "trial by jury," and any other slogan characteristic of the collective life. If all the ideographs used to justify a Whig/Liberal government were placed on a chart, they would form groups or clusters of words radiating from the slogans originally used to rationalize "popular sovereignty"—"religion," "liberty," and "property." (13)

McGee's point can be further refined to say that what is special about such symbols is not simply *that* they are networked with other concepts, but that they are (somehow) *well-connected* in a *network of meaning primed by the context*.¹ "Well-connected" should not be mistaken for a purely cognitive notion, as if to represent a fixed positioning of neuro-linguistic elements within neural networks (in the manner of Rumelhart [1979] on metaphor). The sense of connectedness at issue involves ties to situational and strategic notions as well, connections between words and specific rhetorical settings.

Take the expression *fat cat*.² *Fat cat* seems to have no special connectedness with historically rooted social beliefs when used as a reference to an obese feline, but much more so when used as a referring expression in a speech on behalf of the homeless. It's not that one dictionary sense of *fat cat* is more prominent than another. It's that one sense of *fat cat* compresses or condenses a network of historical meaning and the other does not. For this reason, some (Graber 1976) have described rhetorically important symbols as "condensation symbols," a term we shall use throughout this paper.

If this reasoning has merit, the natural question to raise is, what allows a word to be prominent or well-positioned among others in a network primed by context? To answer this question, we require dimensions or parameters within which to describe a word or phrase's "well-connectedness in context." The next section introduces three parameters (situational conductivity, situational density, and situational consensus) that will help us dimensionalize our understanding of linguistic "well-connectness."³

Three dimensions for understanding how symbols can be "well-connected" in context

Let us say that symbols are well-connected just in case they are at least high in situational conductivity, or situational density, or situational consensus. The remainder of this section defines each of these dimensions of well-connectedness.

Situational conductivity

Situational conductivity refers to the capacity of a linguistic concept both to elaborate and to be elaborated by other concepts in a particular context of use. Like an electronic gateway carrying cur-

rent in both directions, a word with high situational conductivity provides a ready conduit of information because it has many subject and predicate ties to many other situation-specific concepts. Given its central ties to many other situation-specific concepts, a highly conductive concept is situationally suited to carry the focus of discussion in a particular situation. Put another way, through its central association with other situation-specific concepts, a highly conductive concept is easily (relative to other concepts) introduced into the foreground of discussion.

Let's take an example. When speaking in a zoo context, we are likely to find *aardvarks* a more conductive concept than *ants*, one more likely to function as a two-way conduit of information. Consider that we might report an *aardvark eating ants*, but we aren't likely to go on elaborating information about ants (as subject). We are likely, however, to keep talking either about aardvarks (as subject), or in terms of them (as predicate). By contrast, in a picnic context, the concept of ants will be more centrally focal (and so more conductive) than aardvarks, and we are more likely to sustain discussion about them as either subject or predicate (even if we do note, as an aside, that aardvarks eat them!). To conduct an informed test for a concept's being highly conductive in its context of use is to consider its potential symmetry as a subject or predicate term, a term with a dual capacity for being elaborated by other situation-specific concepts and for elaborating them.

The thesarus provides a surprisingly rich vehicle for studying the conductivity of linguistic relationships in *conventionalized* contexts of use. Take the thesaurus entry for *drama*. In that entry, the concepts *tragedy* and *comedy* frequently elaborate and are frequently elaborated by other concepts—indicating that both *tragedy* and *comedy* are highly conductive concepts in a conventionalized context where drama is being discussed. By contrast, we find that *chuckle* seems not to be a good two-way conduit of information in a situation where *comedy* is focal. While one finds that most entries for *comedy* contain sparse references to *chuckle*, one won't find *comedy* in entries for *chuckle* (see, for example Crowell's *Roger's International* 874.4). This asymmetric distribution suggests that *chuckle* is only at the periphery of a network of words whose hub is *comedy* and so not highly conductive—not suited to carry the communicative focus—in a conventionalized discussion of comedy.

Situational density

Situational density refers to the frequency with which a linguistic item is used in relation to others, within a delineated context and social group. Density denotes how often a word or expression is likely to recur as parts of larger sentences, paragraphs, genres in context. Within a newspaper house, the word "headline" is sure to be more dense than the word "aardvark." The clichés of any situation (e.g., baseball broadcasting) enjoy great situational density. Density is bred by familiarity, which explains Whorf's common insight that *snow* is likely to be a much denser concept at the Arctic than at the equator.

Density and conductivity are independent properties, meaning that a word high in conductivity can have low density and a word high in density can have low conductivity. Vacuous and clichéd buzzwords (e.g., *synergy*, *dynamism*, *space age*) are often high in conductivity (everyone talks about them or in terms of them, and so they are good two-way conduits of information), and yet low in density (they aren't highly elaborated with other concepts). Allusions, stereotypes, and allegories are usually low in conductivity (they elaborate a focus, not carry it), yet high in density (connected to many other concepts), and so are often used to fill in a rich background for describing a focal subject. More on these categories appears below.

What we standardly refer to as "models," "tools," and "frameworks" also constitute expressions that are situationally dense, but often just in the background to the communicative focus, and so they are low in conductivity. Among experts in behavioral science, ideas and expressions centered around *regression analysis* are likely to be dense. But unless they are trying to advance statistical method itself, behavioral scientists will rarely use *regression analysis* to elaborate other concepts. They will want their study to be understood *in terms of regression analysis*, but they won't want it understood as being *about* it.

Situational consensus

Situational consensus refers to the extent to which a concept is elaborated in *similar ways* across a given population in a given context. Within a group of 100 Democrats, let us say that 50 would elaborate *George Bush* with the descriptor *enjoys sports*. This means that there is a 50% level of consensus on the statement *George Bush enjoys sports* with respect to that group. It also means

that any speaker addressing that group with that statement would find half of the members of the audience nodding in agreement.

For obvious reasons, as the situations of interest implicate larger and more diverse populations, it's much more difficult to estimate situational consensus. Nonetheless, besides Gallup Polls, there are implicit measures with which to tap into situational consensus at the cultural level. For example, thesauri often adopt conventions to signal estimates of situational consensus with reference to words in the basic lexicon of English. Words are given special marking (often italics or bold) when they are judged to form common, highly agreed upon, associates with the index word.

A taxonomy of condensation symbols

A condensation symbol differs from ordinary symbols (i.e., ordinary words) by being well-connected in its context of meaning. We have argued that well-connectedness can be factored on the dimensions of situational conductivity, density, and consensus. To be a condensation symbol, a word must be high on at least one of these dimensions; but some condensation symbols are high on more than one. By studying patterns of high and low on each of these three dimensions, we can construct a rhetorical taxonomy of 2³ (=8) condensation symbols. Our taxonomy is an adaptation of one first described by Carley (1987) in her quantitative study of linguistic networks.⁴ (Please see table 1, top of next page.)

We refer the reader to Carley's original work for a mathematical derivation of this table. It is clear, however, that if these categories are to have explanatory value for rhetoric, they must also be given an independent motivation as rhetorical devices. That is the purpose of this paper, which describes each of these categories as specimens of condensation symbols.

We only pursue six of these eight categories as condensation symbols. The category of ordinary words is omitted because ordinary words (i.e., words with low connectivity on all three dimensions) do not compress information and so do not function, in any interesting rhetorical sense, as condensation symbols. Furthermore, factoids, words that have very few widely agreed-upon connections (e.g., *Ozzie*, *Harriet*; *Columbus*, 1492) make good material for trivia games, but are not interesting rhetorical devices.

Let's now turn to the six categories that do function as interesting condensation symbols.

TABLE 1

Category	Conductivity	Density	Consensus
Buzzwords	High	Low	Low
Pregnant Place-Holders	High	High	Low
Emblems	High	Low	High
Standard Symbols	High	High	High
Allusions	Low	High	Low
Stereotypes	Low	High	High
Ordinary Words	Low	Low	Low
Factoids	Low	Low	High

Buzzwords

Buzzwords are high in situational conductivity but low in situational density and consensus. They are labels for containers whose contents remain a foggy aspiration. The boss's favorite saying is that the company needs more *synergy* and *dynamism*. Everyone thinks these words, signaling without really pointing out goals of the organization, are important, and so they linger on the tip of everyone's tongue. Yet they are often also uttered with tongue in cheek, for there is low situational consensus about what they mean. Furthermore, no one knows exactly how to relate these words to other, more familiar, terms with concrete referents. Buzzwords are thus also low in situational density. They are words that lie at the hub of semantic networks and that are acknowledged to have high conductive value (hence, the air of excitement they generate); but the networks to which they form the hub remain ill-defined and elusive.

Buzzwords characteristically express long-term objectives and goals before they become attached to criteria or consequences. Often when they are pinned down to concrete referents (stripping them of their capacity to elaborate or evoke a diffuse assortment of loosely related concepts), they are unmasked to reveal a reality more banal and less flattering. Analyzing the new buzzwords of education, for example, Joan Beck (1989) turns her attention to words like *choice* and *empowerment*. According to Beck, *choice* is a shorthand for policies that allow children to attend any school in a given district that has space to accept them. On the surface, these policies send a favorable message to parents—making it appear that parents can shop for schools in a free market and thus pressure the schools to satisfy their customers. Educational *choice* thus

becomes positioned at the center of a loose and vaguely defined (nondense and nonconsensual) network of concepts that reinforces the preachings of a capitalist economy. Yet, as Beck notes, when one attaches real criteria and consequences to "choice" programs, one often finds that *choice* is a mask for the rich and well-to-do to educationally segregate their children from schools that accept minorities. Buzzwords are not necessarily neologisms, but, as we can see from words like *choice* and *empowerment* in education, they are typically words with new elaborations.⁵

Pregnant place-holders

Pregnant place-holders are words that, like buzzwords, are both high in situational conductivity and low in consensus. Unlike buzzwords, they are also high in density, that is, they are highly connected to other concepts, meaning that as rhetorical devices, they have more staying power than buzzwords. Buzzwords begin to lose their magic with too much elaboration. They are names for words that are, symbolically at least, too hot to handle. The significant property of pregnant place-holders, on the other hand, is that they can sustain a great deal of elaboration in the absence of consensus. They function as "cool" handles for a network of ideas considered to be "hot" and "in vogue."

As buzzwords name loosely framed goals, aspirations and ideas that spark excitement but await elaboration and specification, pregnant place-holders typically name concepts that already carry the assumption of having been elaborated—theories, programs, protocols—without the concomitant assumption that the elaboration has been sorted into strands gaining wide adherence. Pregnant place-holders, in other words, name overarching handles for hot clusters of ideas whose details have yet to be ironed out or agreed upon.

The word *grammar* is a pregnant place-holder for what linguists study. While *grammar* for almost every linguist is conducive and highly connected to other concepts, there is no agreed upon network of ideas for what one studies when one studies grammar. The same is true for *rhetoric*, of course, to the chagrin of many who would like to see it better defined. While buzzwords can keep a word "hot" and in vogue for a period of time, pregnant place-holders can keep entire areas of activity (e.g., *cold fusion*) in vogue. Annual themes of conventions, it might be noted, can be either buzzwords or pregnant place-holders, de-

pending on the structure of the ideas around which people happen to be converging.

Emblems

Emblems are words that are high in situational conductivity (like buzzwords and pregnant place-holders), low in density (like buzzwords), but also high in consensus. The semantic content of an emblem is highly consented to—whether or not the consensus reflects reality. Because emblems are not dense (have few connections with other points of reference in their contexts of use), they function as conductive points of consensus at a distance from other focal points, islands of focal agreement.

The clearest example of an emblem, perhaps, is the academic citation. This is especially true of citation in the natural sciences where there is likely to be relative consensus about the content of a contribution (e.g., *Einstein 1905*). In academic writing, citations to previous authors (e.g., *Chomsky 1957*) function as emblems so long as the contribution has high consensus. Insofar as the cited author is working in the same relevant area as the citing author and there is some consensus about the cited author's contribution, the citation is an emblem of the cited author's contribution. Citations, as emblems, function rhetorically in helping a citing author characterize previous knowledge. Academic conventions for setting up the introduction of a paper (e.g., "It is widely believed/not yet known that . . . [but] in this paper we wish to show . . .") demand that writers present a prevailing consensus that they then go on to break (Kaufer and Geisler 1989). The relatively low density of the citation gives the citing author a reasonably wide latitude within which to report the state of prior consensual knowledge and so conform to these written conventions.

The academic author must, of course, respect some firm connections with previous literature in representing "what everyone knows," but can interpret and even invent other connections as a harbinger of his or her own contribution. Gilbert and Mulikay (1984, chapter 5) go into some depth about how scientists can manipulate citations in order to contrive a prevailing consensus, one their own work is designed to elaborate on or break. They go so far as to contend that scientific citation is just as often an act of *claiming* a consensus as of reporting one, allowing the scientific author to use a citation to "treat each scientist as committed, at any given time, to a single scientific point of view or belief," to "treat each viewpoint as

clearly evident in a scientist's written products," and to "treat each theoretical label as having clear, invariant meanings."⁶

Standard symbols

Standard symbols are words that are high in situational conductivity, situational density, and situational consensus. They are the concepts that best represent an entire web of meaning and so are the most rich of condensation symbols. While no word can perfectly convey the full web of situational meaning in which it is involved, words functioning as standard symbols will convey their implicit networks with the least distortion and loss of content in the same way that a map of intercity airline routes for a commercial airline could be "condensed" with least distortion and loss of content by depicting the traffic between its hub cities. Like buzzwords and pregnant place-holders, standard symbols lie at the hub of their implicit networks, but in the case of standard symbols, the spokes (related concepts) around these hubs are relatively well-defined and the sources of high situational consent.

The term "standard symbol" was coined by the anthropologist Edmund Leach. Leach believed that standard symbols are essential for the growth of a common culture through language. Leach's notion of "standard symbol" is not far afield from Henry Small's notion of "concept symbol" in science. And while Small (1978) links this notion explicitly with citation, he clearly believes that concept symbols are standard symbols (in our current sense) and that they underlie the growth of a common culture in science. Examples of standard symbols are the professional argot and jargon used by an insider community as shorthand for a dense network of shared content.⁷ What we would call terms of art that characterize the training of any profession are perhaps the best examples of standard symbols.

Thus far, all the condensation symbols we have considered draw on language that is high in situational conductivity. The remaining symbols draw on language that is low in situational conductivity, part of the background or the periphery of what is judged salient or of the foreground of the communicative event.

Allusions

Allusions are words that are low in situational conductivity and low in situational consensus, but claim interest as a rhetorical device for their high situational density. Allusions are useful for "mak-

ing connections" with listeners or readers, especially when there are no constraints on the relevance or even the credibility of the connections to be drawn. They are nonspecific references that direct a listener or reader's attention to another work, person, place, or event and invite the listener or reader into open-ended exploration. As we mentioned above, there is no consensus as to where this exploration is meant to end and no demand that it share the speaker's sense of the relevant. The literary allusion, used in criticism to spark the reader's interest in returning to the original, is a good case in point. In the literary allusion, the relationship between reference and referent can become very abstract since the reference is used to stimulate the reader's own capacity for seeing patterns, making analogies, drawing broader generalizations, creating worlds.

As an allusion increases in abstraction, it can function increasingly as a paradigm or a prototype of the abstraction itself, though not necessarily with convergent meanings. For example, the allusion to *Ulysses* has become a stock reference to cleverness or wisdom, though the cleverness of Ulysses is nothing like that of *Solomon*, another stock reference. Communal traditions that organize themselves around historical paradigms—religion, literature, law—rely on allusions not only to structure the past, but also to deliberate about the future.

The allusion presents challenges to communication. It lies at the periphery of a focal network and so is not highly conductive. And yet because it is dense, there is the danger that it will draw attention away from the focal concepts it is supposed to be elaborating. Hutchinson (1983) sees Eliot's *The Waste Land* as overtly self-conscious and pretentious because of its "seemingly gratuitous and unduly recondite references." J. L. Borges said of Eliot's work: "Most of those allusions and references are merely put there as a kind of private joke" (Hutchinson 1983, 78). When the insider nature of the allusion becomes more important than the message, the symbol becomes a kind of insider jargon or argot, a membership card—in short, some variety of dense expression (a pregnant place-holder, allusion, stereotype, or standard symbol) that significantly thins out in meaning as the audiences for it widen.

On the other hand, allusions are the source of many strategies used to hold together, by a thread, fragile coalitions, even to cultivate a false sense of consensus across diverse constituencies. This is because allusions, being dense and low in conductivity, are espe-

cially useful for "making contact" with the backgrounds of many diverse audiences in order to build solidarity on an immediately foregrounded belief or issue. For example, the right-to-life movement in the 1980s, by drawing allusions from the ecology movement (i.e., *abortion is environmental genocide*), began to broaden its constituency beyond the Church to attract traditional liberals. Walter Lippmann (1922) tells the story of how politicians opposed to the League of Nations during Woodrow Wilson's Presidency used the allusion to *Americanism* to mobilize a diverse constituency of isolationists, independents, and members of the electorate who chose to see Wilson as a tyrant (234).⁸

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are words that are low in situational conductivity, but high in situational density and situational consensus. In a sense, stereotypes result when the referents of allusions become widely agreed to within a specific group. In modern vernacular, stereotypes are often thought of as erroneous and prejudicial beliefs against a social group. This is a narrow construal of stereotypes and it is probably an outgrowth of a broader understanding that was introduced by Lippmann in his 1922 book *Public Opinion*.

In that treatise, Lippmann maintains that the human mind is "not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations" of experience (80). In response to this complexity, he contends, we form "habitats of simple apprehension" that define our reality before we see it. An advantage of stereotypes, Lippmann suggests, is their efficiency, their capacity to communicate even "to the hurried observer" through only "a slight connection" (87) mutually held across a population (e.g., *progress is good*). The disadvantage of stereotypes is that, in return for efficiency, they often propagate untruths that can remain unexposed. While *progress [is good]* is a stereotype for Americans, he notes, it leaves us inattentive to the sordid aspects of progress (e.g., *slums*) (110).

Lippmann notices that stereotypes also distort because they are a type of condensation symbol, in which "events have to be compressed into very short messages" (204). The distortions of stereotypes can nonetheless be self-correcting, Lippmann implies, if they are differentially distributed so that groups can identify and expose one another's stereotypes. The danger of the mass media, according to Lippmann, is to so completely homogenize stereotypes

across a culture that there are no groups left to oppose or correct them. While stereotypes dominate every culture in every era, they did so, according to Lippmann "with nothing like the speed, or elaboration, that has characterized the conditioning" of the current mass media (204).

Lippmann maintained that the greatest perpetrator of homogenized stereotypes was the (then) fledgling public relations industry, which sought to forge unbreakable associations in the public mind between corporations and positive values. For Lippman, there is nothing inherently bad or prejudicial about stereotypes. They become dangerous, however, when they are left unmonitored and allowed to forge dense networks of agreements beyond anyone's conscious monitoring and control. This danger is ever present, further, because stereotypes are dense and unexamined beliefs—outside the focus of communication—and so are difficult for people to monitor. Unlike allusions, they are widely agreed to and so are constantly reinforced whether they deserve to be or not.

Condensation symbols and rhetorical function

Thus far, we've discussed a taxonomy of condensation symbols whose variation relies on the dimensions of situational conductivity, situational density and situational consensus. For ease of exposition, we've based our discussion on simple albeit baroque examples abstracted from sustained rhetorical contexts. Consequently, we've yet to illustrate how the various symbols within this taxonomy interact when called upon as devices of rhetoric in contextually situated argument. While quantitative measures can be used to extract distributions of language use associated with each of these types, our aims in this paper are qualitative and designed to show how these categories provide descriptive tools for analyzing categories of political argument.

When applying this taxonomy to rhetorical analysis, we need to understand that a word's degree of situational conductivity, situational density, and situational consensus is *relativized to audience*. We must thus distinguish a word's "insider reference" connectivity (conductivity, density, consensus) from its "outsider reference" connectivity. Insider reference connectivity is the connectivity that applies to the real or implicit audiences who already share in the beliefs and values of the arguer. Outsider reference connectivity is

the connectivity that applies to the real or implicit audiences who stand outside that system of belief and value.

For different insider reference groups, the same concept can have different structural/rhetorical characteristics. For example, while *right-to-life* has virtually become a standard symbol (high in situational conductivity, density, and consensus) for pro-life groups, it has few of these cohesive characteristics within pro-choice groups.

We shall draw examples from a well-known exchange on affirmative action between Miro M. Todorovich and Howard A. Glickstein that was originally published in the *Civil Rights Digest*.⁹ Todorovich takes a traditional liberal stand on affirmative action: believing that only individuals (not groups) can be discriminated against and that to reverse past injustices, laws blind to the sex and color of the *individual* need to be enforced. Glickstein takes a more activist stand: insisting that groups can be discriminated against and that, to reverse past injustices, laws explicitly endorsing preferential treatment for groups—especially women and minorities—need to be enforced.

In their exchange, Todorovich and Glickstein are not so much engaged in persuasion as in the interactive presentation of their views. At the same time, their exchange conceals two speakers talking past one another and takes instead the appearance of an interactive argument, thanks in part to the insider and outsider reference connectivity of the words relied on by both participants.

Because Todorovich and Glickstein speak with different insider reference groups in mind, we should find that different concepts in their argument have different structural/rhetorical characteristics. Some concepts will be standard symbols, others stereotypes, others buzzwords, and so on. We should also find that a *single* concept has different structural/rhetorical characteristics depending upon the insider reference group to which it is addressed. A concept functioning, say, as a stereotype when addressed (by Todorovich) within one insider reference group may function as an altogether different stereotype (or some other category) when addressed (by Glickstein) within another.

Finally, it is possible that different categories play different rhetorical functions in argument. Some categories may be especially useful for building symbolic bridges across belief systems. Others may be especially useful for building solidarity within one. In the discussion below, we first examine categories (buzzwords, pregnant

place-holders, allusions) that seem especially suited for bridge work, categories that can create connections between speaker and interlocutor in the absence of consensus. We then turn to categories (stereotypes, emblems, standard symbols) that rely on insider consensus and so add to solidarity within like-minded constituencies.

Buzzwords: Connecting goals across disparate belief systems. A political argument would be less effectual were it openly poised only for the consumption of true believers. To live up to the prestige name "argument," it must gesture to outsiders and coax incipient insiders as well. But this means that the political arguer must define an "inside"—a common situational focus—that can accommodate opponents and the less committed as well as insiders. This is commonly accomplished through buzzwords by establishing common goals and values that carry the focus of discussion, but that do so in the absence of incriminating elaborations or specific presumptions of agreement.

Buzzwords in this capacity are seductive invitations to enter a house that has been designed without doors or windows—at least doors or windows that the opponent is willing to accept as legitimate openings. Both Todorovich and Glickstein find a common goal orientation in the buzzwords *justice* and *equality* (goals to which both are quick to rally, but reluctant to specify). Both claim that the issue of affirmative action (as they see it) has placed *justice* and *equality* in jeopardy. Both claim, moreover, to have entered the issue in order to restore these values. As Todorovich says at one point, "I would wish to try a variety of approaches both to increase the supply and to see justice done speedily for all individuals who may have suffered from discrimination."

When we read further, however, we discover that the common focus structured by these buzzwords is fleeting, and, more, that it is a thin cover for difference. The participants attach (*in/justice* and (*in/equality* to very different events. Glickstein attaches these buzzwords to historical discrimination; he insists that, though there may be abuses in affirmative action programs, these "pale . . . into insignificance when compared to the shameful injustices toward which affirmative-action programs are directed." Todorovich attaches the *injustice* to the results of affirmative action programs, saying that these programs have caused "no little injustice" and have caused more "injustice" than they have relieved.

While *equality* and *justice* are probably the dominant buzzwords

in the discussion, there are other buzzwords as well, notably *original intent*. Both writers want to claim that their political stand is consistent with protecting the "original intent" of anti-discrimination laws. But this commonality is fractured when they each briefly elaborate how *original intent* translates into actual intent. First, Glickstein lectures Todorovich on *original intent*:

The language from Title VII and Executive Order 11246 which is cited has been interpreted consistently by the courts to permit affirmative-action plans and policies which are designed to remedy the present effects of past discrimination. Merely citing the language of a statute or executive order tells only part of the story; it is essential that the purpose and judicial interpretations of the language in question also be considered.

Then Todorovich lectures him:

You say in your letter that the language of a statute tells only part of the story and that one needs to consult the purpose as well. Had you taken the advice you so graciously proffered me you might have discovered by consulting the Congressional Record on the debates on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that the proponents of the bill laughed off as imaginary horrors the very interpretations you so piously defend. We refer you in particular to Dr. Paul Seabury's article in *Commentary* of February 1972. Nor does the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act in any way either by language or intent justify discriminatory racial quotas.

For all of Glickstein's and Todorovich's posturing about "justice," "equality," and "original intent," these terms remain relatively unelaborated throughout their discussion.¹⁰ Glickstein and Todorovich rely on these words for the common ground needed to coax each other to the center of the ring, but, once they are there, they use none of these words to sustain the fight—which is one way one can know these words function in the argument as buzzwords and not as pregnant place-holders.

The differences in Glickstein's and Todorovich's construals of affirmative action buzzwords should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the issue. What is a bit surprising is that the buzzwords themselves lend an appearance of "common goals" that each arguer can then accuse the other of snubbing. Buzzwords, with the weight of air, can nonetheless be held over the opponent's neck with the weight of an albatross. Too much investment in elaboration might free this weight from the opponent. This is not to suggest that arguers always retreat from exposing their buzz-

words for what they are, it simply means there are incentives for their not doing so.

Pregnant place-holders: Implying common topics across disparate belief systems

Pregnant place-holders, as we have seen, being more densely elaborated than buzzwords, are also better suited to sustain a common focus across positions. In Todorovich and Glickstein's discussion, *educational hiring* seems to be the dominant pregnant place-holder, the cool handle used to pass back and forth the potentially explosive and inflammatory issues of affirmative action. If buzzwords enable arguers to make gestures toward binding goals, pregnant place-holders enable them to work under the guise of common topics and common rules for maintaining topical relevance. Amongst Todorovich and Glickstein, "educational hiring" is the acknowledged topic of discussion, the one to which each assumes the other can be drawn back should the other's statements stray off course—at least both agree throughout their discussion that the issue of "educational hiring" is the one on the table.

As objects of low consensus, however, pregnant place-holders relax the strict enforcement of topic and relevance maintenance. When *educational hiring* means different things to interlocutors, one person's interpretation of staying on or straying from the subject will differ from another's. These gaps of understanding are only exacerbated, furthermore, when matters of staying or straying are rooted in ideological differences, when it is part of one political stand to assume that two concerns are best bundled into the same topic and part of another to assume that the same two concerns differentiate topics.

Ideological differences of this sort affect the perception of topic identity and maintenance in the affirmative action debate. Glickstein does not believe that academic institutions are fundamentally different from any ordinary institution of employment or vocational concern, including labor unions. Thus, for him, one does not jettison the topic of "educational hiring" by shifting to trade and union hiring in general. Todorovich, on the other hand, believes that academic institutions are *sui generis*, that the issues that arise for affirmative action in higher education are separate from issues that arise in other venues of employment. Consequently, by his own lights, Glickstein never violates rules of topic relevance by

collapsing these venues. Yet, by Todorovich's, Glickstein wanders off the topic whenever he insists on collapsing them:

You . . . quote certain lower-court decisions . . . where previous discrimination had been proved [in labor hiring]. However you disregard entirely the sentence in our letter which points out that no proof of need or statistical data was presented to justify instituting these programs in the field of higher education.

Both buzzwords and pregnant place-holders function as tissues of commonality that frame incentives for sparring as well as words within which to spar. The tissue is thin and easily torn, especially when the interlocutors realize—or are willing to admit—that neither the incentives nor the words are binding. But at the very least, buzzwords and pregnant place-holders expose some meager connectivity across opposing belief systems. Both types of symbols broaden a speaker's subjective perspective in ways that superficially accommodate the opponent's. With respect to affirmative action, for example, Todorovich and Glickstein ultimately disagree on concepts like *justice* in *educational hiring*. But they at least agree enough to have an argument about them.

Allusions: Implying common evidence across disparate belief systems

If they are to flesh out their positions with substance, political arguers can't simply use conductive language that carries the focus in the manner of buzzwords and pregnant place-holders. They must also use language equipped to elaborate the focus, from the background. That is, they need to flesh out their focus with support, examples, illustrations, and other background devices of argument—a package that is loosely called "evidence." In normative argument theory, arguers are proscribed against choosing evidence that is biased in favor of their own case. It is urged that the evidence be "independent." Yet in descriptive argument, this turns out to be a hard rule to follow since what counts as legitimate background for an argument depends on what the arguer counts as the legitimate fix on the situation to begin with—and this never qualifies as independent. The evidence does not support the argument disinterestedly, as a table supports a typewriter. Rather, the evidence is already imbued with a set of interests and the arguer seeks to control the discussion by admitting evidence that is in line with his or her argumentative interests. In this sense, arguers must

give support to their evidence much more than their evidence to them.

Arguers give support to their evidence because the evidence already has many connections that suggest the essential correctness of their argument. In this sense, evidence consists of allusive symbols, symbols that are highly connected to—though in contestable ways—the arguments put forward by those who utter them. Because evidence is contestable (potentially low in consensus, as any allusion), an opponent can block an argument by blocking evidence adduced in support of it, a commonplace in refutative argument. In the affirmative action debate, for instance, Todorovich and Glickstein invest some time confronting and trying to refute one another's evidence. Glickstein wants to argue that underrepresentation of minority and women faculty in universities is strong evidence of discrimination. Todorovich retorts that it is no evidence at all, since underrepresentation can just mean an undersupply of minority and woman Ph.D.'s.

But an equally common path in political argument is to take into account a second feature of allusion—the density of the opponent's evidence. Clever arguers often understand that trying to block the opponent's evidence will only escalate into trying to defeat the opponent's larger cluster of interests. Logic suggests that evidence can be removed from an argument in a single surgical stroke; reality suggests that the relation between evidence and argument is a complex thicket of ties and that serving some connections often just invites the opponent to think of more.

At the same time, prescriptions against question-begging and circularity require that any prior fraternization between the evidence and the argument be masked, that the evidence take the appearance of an independent auditor happening on the scene retroactively to render a "disinterested" judgment. Consequently, arguers will rely on the density of the allusion to evoke evidentiary connections that recommend their own argument. But they will also rely on the essential contestability (lack of consensus) of the allusion to maintain the impression that their evidence is, in fact, *common* evidence, one whose conclusions are unsettled and so as much open for the opponent to interpret as anyone within the insider reference group.

While never questioning, for example, that their evidence might *not* be self-selected or self-interested, Glickstein and Todorovich nonetheless select it from a disjoint set of possibilities. Glickstein

draws almost exclusively from federal, state, and executive rulings that associate underrepresentation in hiring as a manifestation of discrimination.¹¹ Todorovich, on the other hand, draws from stories of individual academicians who, as he describes, have been shut out of jobs because of federal quotas:

[Consider the] travails of one Martin Goldman, a qualified professor of Afro-American history, who had, in the year before the advent of the affirmative-action programs, received several offers of academic employment. Because of his race he now cannot find academic work. We can assure you that his case is not an exception. Paul Lammermeier, another specialist in Afro-American history, now works as a short-order cook in Mentor Ohio, because his skin is the wrong color.

Glickstein and Todorovich's contrasting evidentiary base gives rise to contrasting allusive symbols. For Todorovich, Martin Goldman, like *Ulysses*, is an allusive symbol—not for cleverness, of course, but for the harm of affirmative action. For Glickstein, the many court rulings against discrimination in hiring are allusive symbols for its benefits. One can't easily decide, whose evidence is better, who offers better support for the argument of affirmative action. One can more easily decide, what evidence the arguers must support (i.e., bring into the discussion) if the evidence is to support their arguments.

The symbols we have thus far considered establish connections across opposing belief systems. The remaining symbols are high in consensus (within an insider reference group), and so their function is more epideictic, to sharpen connections within that group.

Stereotypes: Stuffing insider belief systems into words

As devices, condensation symbols remain invisible because they frequently "make connections" within opposing belief systems and so seem indigenous to each. Being high in (insider and outsider group) density and (insider group) consensus, stereotypes are especially prone to falling into the woodwork of a belief system, providing different rallying points for different groups—but rallying points, nonetheless, much like tacitly shared premises.¹² Some of Todorovich and Glickstein's stereotypes—each directed to their own insider reference group—seem to surface in the concepts *competence* and *university*. Both arguers maintain that universities should hire faculty based on competence. The statement seems uncontroversial on its face, but in this context "on its face" means

taking *competence* and *university* as neutral pregnant place-holders, as a set of topics to be pursued irrespective of their specific ideological content. Moreover, the uncontroversial status of the statement can shift dramatically once we specify *competence* and *university* with such content—that is, once we interpret these words as stereotypes, as compressed expressions of implicit agreements among members of one or another political persuasion.

When that happens, we see that neither Todorovich nor Glickstein really takes the statement “universities should hire faculty based on competence” as a banal or uncontroversial truth. For Todorovich and the educators he claims to represent, holding a more traditional view toward universities, *universities* are sacred sanct institutions stereotypically tied to *learning*, *scholarship*, and negatively tied to *politics*, *social justice*, and *social activism*. For Glickstein and the affirmative action officers he claims to represent, holding a more social activist view of what universities should become (as opposed to what they have historically been), these stereotypic connections are reversed. Positive connections are made to the university as a political institution accountable to political goals.

As *universities* constitute rival stereotypes for Todorovich and Glickstein, so too does *competence*. For Todorovich, *competence* is the set of talents and training one acquires as a result of *learning*, *scholarship*, and *political disinterest*. His stereotype of *competence*, in other words, is linked with his (and for the most part, the historical) stereotype of *universities*. A similar linkage applies for Glickstein, with predictably different consequences. Glickstein wants to see *universities* adopt more accessible standards for *competence*, so that (in his view) marginalized populations have a better chance of acquiring it.

Todorovich and Glickstein can both immediately assent to the statement “universities should hire faculty based on competence” not because it is a trivial truth (it is not), but because, within their stereotypical models of the world, they can each construct a set of conditions in which the statement is true. But in assenting to the truth of the statement, they are assenting only to their own conditions for its truth, not to the other’s. On the conditions under which Glickstein judges the statement true, for example, it follows that “marginalized populations are under-represented in the university because of discriminatory practices.” This inference follows because Glickstein’s stereotype of *competence* is tied to an

implicit critique of current competency standards in the university as discriminatory. But on the conditions under which Todorovich judges it true, it only follows that “marginalized populations are under-represented.” Todorovich blocks the further inference Glickstein wants to make because his stereotype of *competence* is tied to an implicit defense of current standards, meaning that for Todorovich and his constituents, *under-representation* does not imply *discrimination*.¹³

Emblems: Making insider assignments of protagonists and antagonists

Many traditional and even nontraditional (i.e., rhetorical) logics, concerned with evidence, view argument as a primarily allusive undertaking, a way to search memory and to retrieve the “evidence” that is required to support a foregrounded claim or set of claims. But in the foreground of argument stand not only the claims at issue, but also the cast of characters who are represented as acting upon them. The cast is populated by heroes who wish to advance the argument (the arguer), villains who wish to block it (the opponent), accomplices who can be cited as helping the arguer (colleagues), conspirators who can be cited as helping the opponent (wrong-headed authorities).

Within the insider reference group of each arguer, the cast is typically judged highly salient to the matter at hand and in agreed upon ways—much like the players whose roles evolve into stock characters. But the characters are also nondense, inasmuch as the argument is essentially about issues and claims and not *them*. This suggests that insider references to arguers, opponents, colleagues, and wrong-headed authorities are likely to have the distributional features of emblems.

Since the assignment of emblems and emblematic roles are a matter of insider viewpoint, it should hardly be a surprise that Todorovich and Glickstein proceed with different emblems. An important emblem for Glickstein is the *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, a group, for him, of pressing relevance and acknowledged standing to the issue and yet a group with seemingly reduced standing (i.e., the standing of a buzzword or perhaps just an ordinary word) for Todorovich. Todorovich’s emblems, on the other hand, are Supreme Court Justices (*Douglas*, *Burger*) and college officials (*Lester*, *Hester*) who have argued for “color-blind” educational recruitment laws. By questioning the interpretation of

some of these Justices and officials, Glickstein can be seen as trying to turn positive emblems into negative ones (good characters into villains); or trying to transform a positive emblem into an allusion, thereby increasing its density while at the same time banishing it from center stage and destroying its underlying consensus.

Emblems are not likely to have rhetorical impact through missed understandings or the multiplication of meanings—as is always true for those symbols that are either high in density or low in consensus. What emblematic representations do, rather, is turn ordinary words (names) into “sides” and “camps” that can efficiently summon friends and foes to battle.

Standard symbols: Compressing the insider reference group’s understanding of the problem and solution

Standard symbols, we have seen, are high on every dimension. They are highly conductive, highly elaborated and agreed to, at least within an insider reference group. They in effect “essentialize” the network of beliefs holding together the insider reference group. In issue-oriented argument, standard symbols allow group members to compress their image of the problem at the heart of the issue and solutions to it—often so thoroughly that their decisions about how to decide an issue frequently collapse into their decisions about how to name it. For example, the phrases *gun control*, *abortion*, and *capital punishment* all name issue conflicts, but from the bias of a specific resolution (compare alternative issue names like *gun freedom*, *fetus survival*, *life imprisonment*).

This is true for affirmative action as well. Glickstein, for example, an enthusiastic advocate of affirmative action, does not (and would never) identify the issue through the concept *reverse discrimination*. As Glickstein sees it, *reverse discrimination* does not condense the issue appropriately. The issue for him, the standard symbol that epitomizes the problem and paths to a solution, is simply *discrimination*. Yet Todorovich can’t accept this phrase as the symbol of the issue since, for him, *discrimination* is simply an emotionally loaded reference to an unfortunate but nonetheless benign *underrepresentation*.

By contrast, Todorovich’s standard symbol for the issue, *reverse discrimination*, is a term that Glickstein acknowledges only by transforming it into the pedestrian concept, *abuses in affirmative action programs*. What, for each arguer, is a standard symbol for the issue is just an incidental and ordinary phrase for the other,

meaning that words are sometimes “just words” and sometimes much more, and which is which depends very much on one’s ideological orientation.

Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to indicate the variety and rhetorical function of condensation symbols and to show that condensation symbols operate with distinctive rhetorical functions: some best designed for connecting ideas across reference groups, some for connecting ideas within them. As it happens, there is a thin line between speaking of condensation symbols as “devices” and as “beliefs.” Do Glickstein and Todorovich use rhetoric differently in the service of their different beliefs? Or do they simply believe different things and their language simply (and accurately) translates these differences? The first question implies that we are dealing with (artistic) devices driven by beliefs. The second question implies that we are dealing with (inartistic) beliefs channeled into routine linguistic expression.

Like active viruses on the border of organic and inorganic life, condensation symbols lie on the border of artistic and inartistic life. And because they live at the interface of language and belief in such a fundamental way, they offer useful inroads into fundamental questions about so-called rational discourse, questions our own analysis purposely suppressed. For example, to simplify the scope of our analysis, we have imposed a neat demarcation between patently political discourse and discourse with designs on rationality, that is, the formation of a disinterested consensus. We have assumed, that is, that the debate between Todorovich and Glickstein is not, fundamentally, a rational one, at least not one with designs on rational persuasion. We have further assumed that, while the extreme “connectivity” of condensation symbols is evident in rational discourse, arguers can somehow “see beyond” or “see through” this connectivity so that they can control it before it controls them (the abiding hope of Descartes in the world of thought and Lippmann in the world of politics).

It is clear, however, that these assumptions are, at best, simplistic and, at worst, false. Even were we able to expose all the condensation “devices” in political discourse, there would be plenty of “beliefs” (the flipside of the “device”). Rational discourse can do without “devices,” perhaps, but certainly not with-

out "beliefs." Many recent currents in poststructuralist literary theory—particularly deconstruction—have relied on some variation of a device/belief problematic (e.g., Derrida's premise that all signifiers are connected in some totality beyond the language user's control) to question the possibility of rational discourse(s). Yet there seems no discernable gain to assume that rational discourse is a chimera because of these problematics. It seems far more interesting to pursue the question, What can rational discourse be in light of them?

David S. Kaufe

*Department of English
Carnegie Mellon University*

Kathleen M. Carley

*Department of Social and Decision Science
Carnegie Mellon University*

Notes

1. By "contextually primed network," we mean a network of concepts whose structure can change radically from one context to another.
2. Henceforth, we shall denote through italics concepts whose network structure we are interested in discussing. We will use quotation to reference other words, terms, and concepts whose network structure is not at issue.
3. Kathleen Carley, on whose mathematical work the present paper builds, first defined these parameters quantitatively in her dissertation study of linguistic networks (Carley 1984, 1986, 1987; Kaufe and Carley 1990). In this paper we define and discuss them only qualitatively.
4. In network terms, concepts that are highly conducive have many two-way links (that is, "in" and "out" links) to other concepts. Concepts that are highly dense simply have many links to other concepts, regardless of direction. Concepts that are highly consensual are similarly elaborated across individual networks. For ease of exposition, we have renamed some of Carley's original categories. Our "conductivity" corresponds to her "transitivity." Our "pregnant place-holder" refers to her "place-holder." Our "standard symbol" corresponds to her "symbol." Our "allusions" corresponds to her "prototypes." Our "ordinary words" corresponds to her "prostitia." Our "factoids" corresponds to her "measures."
5. Neologisms need not be buzzwords, especially when their content is well delimited within a particular group. For example, divorce lawyers refer to a client on a second or third divorce as a "retread." (*Newsweek*, 17 July 1989, 6). This use started as a neologism among divorce lawyers, but, more important, it has come to function as a piece of professional argot—a way of keeping outsiders out. Argot is highly agreed to within the inside group, which is a sufficient criterion to distinguish it from buzzwords. Curiously, *Newsweek* reports these usages under a weekly byline called "Buzzwords," but these usages are in fact neologisms and argot, not buzzwords.
6. Countenancing academic citations as emblems presumes, of course, that citations are not dense, that their occurrence spawns only a few common connections in the minds of readers, and so permits scientific writers to represent as unities beliefs and positions that are less unified and harmonious than the appearance. Unities that serve as "emblems of prior progress" for the current author to build

upon and advance. However, for some readers in some contexts, a citation will be very dense—making it not an emblem but a standard symbol (see below). For other readers in other contexts, a citation will have low consensus (a trademark of much humanities and social science writing) and the citation will operate more as a buzzword if the author is hot, but still largely unknown or as an allusion (see below) if the author is well-known, but no longer as hot.

7. However, we need to distinguish intent and achievement here because the mere presence of jargon does not mean a truly insider culture of shared understanding. Jargon can simply indicate pockets of individual and interpersonal signification that its users aspire to extend further. Jargon becomes culpable when it is seen as having no insider function other than to exclude outsiders. In that case, jargon implies what "argot" originally meant—the language of thieves.

8. Lippmann (1922) incorrectly associates this usage of *Americanism* with stereotyping. However, he gets many other details of stereotyping right. See below.

9. Spring, 1975. Reprinted in Gross 1977, pp. 12–49.

10. We need to distinguish "elaborated in the head" from "elaborated in the text." Clearly, Glickstein and Todorovich are likely to have, in their head, dense networks associated with "justice," "equality," and "original intent" on the affirmative action issue. But here we are talking about "elaborated in the text" and the space of their public argument per se. There is very little of that going on and that's why these terms function as buzzwords.

11. *The United States v. IBEW Local 38*, v. *Iron Workers Local 86*, v. *Wood, Wire and Metal Lathers International Union No. 46 v. Detroit Edison Heat and Frost Workers*, v. *Sheet Metal Workers International Association*. The *Contractors Association of Eastern Pennsylvania v. Secretary of Labor*.

12. There are differences, however, between stereotypes and shared premises, at least as both are conventionally understood and discussed. Stereotypes follow a logic of symbolic association while shared premises follow a logic of utterances and the beliefs required to interpret them. Stereotypes, as discussed, tend to be dense and diffuse while shared premises, as discussed, tend to be enumerable and discrete. Stereotypes are typically understood as a condition of belief that places limits on communication; shared premises are typically understood as a condition of belief that makes communication possible. It seems perfectly reasonable to claim that understanding takes place only through shared premises; it seems similarly damning to claim that it takes place only through stereotypes. As a dense and diffuse background for understanding, stereotypes turn even "simple" messages into Gordian knots of intertwined ideological threads, difficult to cut.

13. We can see from this example that the issue of stereotypes as a scheme for understanding is not separate from, and actually renders problematic, the issue of background premises as an autonomous scheme. We have seen, for example, that an account that has Glickstein and Todorovich agreeing, on the basis of shared premises, that "universities should hire faculty based on competence" would miss the point. We need to invoke the symbolics of the stereotype to understand how they can agree to this statement and, simultaneously, disagree with one another. At the same time, we saw that, even within the associative apparatus of stereotypes, it is both possible and desirable to continue to speak of the propositional notions of truth and implication with respect to premises of understanding. What is needed is an integration of these very different ways of thinking about background understanding, but it is well beyond our present focus to attempt that here.

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Discussion Note

THE RHETORIC OF A "DIVINE MAN": APOLLONIUS OF TYANA AS CRITIC OF ORATORY AND AS ORATOR ACCORDING TO PHILOSTRATUS.¹

Alain Billault

If someone who is not a god, but more than a man, talks to other men, what kind of rhetoric will he use? This question arises when we consider an important tradition in the history of ancient philosophy and spirituality. In this tradition, the first place is held by philosophers who are supposed to do more than fulfill the wish that Plato expressed when he said, in his *Theaetetus*, that philosophers must become as godlike as humanity will allow (ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν)² and are really considered as divine beings. They belong to the type of philosopher, magician, and holy person known as the θεῖος ἄνθρωπος, who emerged in the third century A.D. as a complete model of wisdom in the Pythagorean Platonism that was then prominent in the philosophical field³ and was exemplified by men who often lived in the previous centuries. One of them was Apollonius of Tyana who lived in the first century A.D. In the third century, Philostratus wrote an admiring account of his life. In his *Lives of the Sophists*, Philostratus draws a picture of rhetoric in the early Roman Empire; he emphasizes a particular side of it in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Apollonius is an assiduous traveler, speaker, and miracle worker. He criticizes the rhetorical tradition and the oratory of his time and puts speech to a use of his own. He practices a rhetoric of authority and truth that implies a concept of teaching, morals, metaphysics, a whole worldview: in short, a philosophy.

According to Philostratus's *Life*, Apollonius, from youth upward, regards rhetoric as an inferior subject. In Tarsus, he attends the classes of the rhetor Euthydemus of Phoenicia. Euthydemus is a