

THE TOOLS OF SOCIAL IMPACT USED IN POLITICAL SOCIAL ENGINEERING

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Abstract

No man is an solitary island, we are all social beings within our nature. We live amongst similar ones and we need interaction with other people. We revolve around mutual impacts, we are always both an actor and an audience, a sender and a recipient.

However, social impact is defined in different ways. It can be a conscious, intentional measure, it can also be an unconscious operation, it happens when the entity does not realize the fact that the behaviour influences a way of thinking, emotions or the behaviour of the other person. It can be a positive influence, as well as the negative one depending on intention of the exerting subject.

The mechanism of the social impact is triggered by special tools. The recognition of the categories of these tools makes us aware of why we act in certain situations in the specific way. It lets us see that we often use shortcuts in thinking and decision making process, we use automatically triggered reactions, we rely on habits, settled categorizations and stereotypes. Often such a strategy turns out to be effective, but very often it turns us into an easy prey for people who want to manipulate us for their self-interests. The knowledge about the tools applied by them, perhaps will not save us from dangers, but will certainly draw attention to such a possibility and perhaps will give us pause for thought.

The tools of the social impact are particularly used in politics, therefore the present article is devoted to this problem.

Key words: social engineering, sociotechnics, the tools of the social impact, language of the politics, political speech, image, “ mirror stage theory”, body language, public surveys.

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1. Language as the tool of the social impact

The number of the influence tools, as well as places and situations, in which it is possible to apply them is huge, moreover, the new ones come into existence relentlessly. One of the basic tools used in the social engineering is a language. Manipulating the language is widespread in politics and we deal with this fact the moment the politician thinks of which kind of language to use in order to effectively get his message through to the audience.

Defining the language of the politics is a difficult task, because of the fact that it is diverse and dynamic language. It is commonplace to state, in accordance with Bogdan Walczak, that the language of politics is the language used by people who write or talk about politics, namely politicians, their advisers, spokesmen, the social engineering, propaganda and advertisement specialists but also political scientists and journalists². The same author notes that the language of politics is a functional variant of general language, applied in texts of which politicians or the subjects associated with politics are the authors, intentionally addressed to all users of general language, concerning the sphere of the politics and it is also characterized by the dominance of the persuasive function³.

Psychologists claim that language stabilizes information about the world more than our senses. When we somehow name reality for our purposes, then these names are our indicators, according to which we can move around – claims a linguist professor Jerzy Bralczyk. He also draws attention to the fact that the politicians speak stabilized language, so they use the cliché, a template, and they do not deliberate how to precisely and adequately express things they perceive⁴.

Basic tasks of the political speech comprise conducting the directive and persuasive function. The politician who wants to impel the receiver to perform any action, first has to form and influence his beliefs in some way. Therefore, in their speeches politicians appeal to certain values and want to rouse the awareness amongst the recipients so that they believe their attitudes are right⁵.

² See: B. Walczak, *Co to jest język polityki* [in:] *Język a kultura. Język polityki a współczesna kultura polityczna*, tome XI, red. J. Anusiewicz, B. Siciński, Wydawca Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 1994, p. 16.

³ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴ See: W. Gałązka, A. Krywicki, *Nie wystarczy być, czyli od zera do lidera*, Oficyna Wydawnicza MAK, Wrocław 2002, p. 43.

⁵ See: J. Barański, *Socjotechnika – między magią a analogią. Szkice o masowej perswazji w PRL-u i III RP*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2001, p. 47.

The next feature is diversifying of the language, not only on account of the political leaning whose supporters apply the language. While formulating political messages, politicians take into account the social group of the recipient, the educational background, the place of residence, the sex. Social communication specialists effectively advise the politicians, what words one should avoid in the communication with women and how to build the sentences during debate with poor people⁶.

The language not only communicates literal contents. Presuppositions are the hidden undertones which the recipient guesses during the interpretation of the message. The more surprising event is being described by the sender, the more limited undertone will appear in the mind of the recipient⁷.

Slanders play an important role in the political linguistic manipulation. The purpose of slanders is “to hurt the opponent, to stick some mud and to make him vulnerable, to deprive him of any dignity and honorary laws, to make him defenceless against the chortle and derision of the rabble”⁸.

In democratic conditions language is a tool of political strife, gaining the elector, unmasking or ridiculing and deprecating the opponent. The language of public life often consists of stereotypes, notional clichés and the words which completely change their primal meanings for the interim purposes. It makes the language stop being a normal language in which the culturally determined referent corresponds to the notion, regardless of the speaker’s intention. Certainly, it is true that the language is metaphorical so it is ambiguous in its nature. “Nobody can be sure that he properly understands what somebody else says to him, or that the other person properly understands what he says himself”⁹.

2. The image of the candidate

The image of the candidate is another essential tool of the social engineering impact. During the election campaign, it is a priority to show the candidate in the best possible light. The image of the politician can be artificially formed in its entirety. The staff works on that aspect and takes care

⁶ See: M. Pabijańska, *Psychomanipulacja w polityce. Metody, techniki, przykłady*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM, Wrocław 2007, p. 129.

⁷ See: M. Tokarz, *Argumentacja, perswazja, manipulacja*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2006, p. 60.

⁸ M. Janicki, W. Władyka, *Łże – prawdy*, „Polityka” 2006, no 35, p. 20.

⁹ J. Bralczyk, *O języku polskiej polityki lat osiemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych*, Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warszawa 2003, p. 47.

that during public appearances the candidate assumes the best position for him and emphasizes his best features¹⁰.

Since the majority of voters is not able to appropriately identify and interpret complex political issues, it turns out that an image and actions of the leader seem more important. Consequently, it becomes the central element conditioning the electoral decision¹¹.

It is often demonstrated that campaign teams which create the media image of the candidate and define his program, encode definite contents and next for the purpose of the political campaign, through the appropriately selected media channels, deliver these contents to electors. In other words, citizens receive stimuli from the sender (political messages) and make decisions¹².

According to the “mirror stage theory” representatives of the nation should reflect the features of the society¹³. It means that we are more prone to vote for person who is similar to us in some respect. The image of the politician is the phenomenon of the situation – its content and the quality change depending on the character of the recipient, his likes and needs¹⁴. One should remember that if the tastes of electors are changing, one should change the image of the politician as well.

There is a certain set of features which is independent of the very politician, however, the features can disqualify him as a sender of the message or seriously limit the effectiveness of his message. It is connected with a set of physical features of the individual such as: height, corpulence, general appearance and the fitness as well. Physical features influence the evaluation of the sender’s personality in the special way, and at the same time they influence the assessment of his arguments, especially during the first meeting with the audience¹⁵.

The neat appearance of the politician namely splendid teeth, good-looking build, groomed nails, cut hair, the skin colour, the right smell, clothes and other requisites have tremendous importance for the assessment of the politician.

¹⁰ See: M. Pabijańska, *Psychomanipulacja w polityce...*, p. 91-92.

¹¹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski, *Teoria komunikowania publicznego i politycznego*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM, Wrocław 2002, p. 170.

¹² R. Wiszniowski, *Strategie w kampaniach wyborczych* [in:] *Dlaczego i jak w wyborach samorządowych* (ed. H. Lisicka), Wydawnictwo Prawo Ochrony Środowiska, Wrocław 1994, p. 130.

¹³ D. M. Olson, *Demokratyczne instytucje legislacyjne*, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa 1998, p. 36.

¹⁴ M. Cichosz, *Wizerunek lidera politycznego* [in:] *Marketing polityczny – w poszukiwaniu wyborczego sukcesu* (ed. M. Jeziński), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2005, p. 81.

¹⁵ L. Wojtasik, *Psychologia propagandy politycznej*, PWN, Warszawa 1986, p. 200.

Politicians who are sensible and take care of their image try to use the assistance of the stylists and creation specialists. Specialists from this field, above all, have psychological abilities. They also have knowledge in the range of anatomy, dietetics, hairdressing, cosmetic, fashion, photography and media. Almost every detail must be perfectly fine-tuned so that the voters notice what is wanted to be noticed. Thanks to the work of these people, the politician can put words of wisdom into practice, according to which it is better to be beautiful, healthy, young, rich and clever than ugly, ill, poor, old and stupid¹⁶. The younger, handsome, energetic people who are able to attract the considerable electorate due to their beneficial non-verbal features often replace the tired, obese, physically unattractive leaders of the political scene, being based largely on their own beneficial non-verbal features¹⁷.

3. Self-presentation

The issue the self-presentation cannot disappear from view. Self-presentation, also called the manipulating of the impression¹⁸, consists in the proper selection of information about oneself and passing them through to the electors. Taking above mentioned measures must be connected with a great self-identity which lets avoid undesirable effects.

During self-presentation actions we can use various requisites (e.g. clothes), altering the appearance (e.g. physical attractiveness), proper behaviours (e.g. good manners), expressing the various emotions or finally the verbal actions¹⁹. Although people sometimes introduce themselves in the completely false light, manipulating of created impression usually consists in showing the real features only a little bit coloured with intentional accents spreading, the tone of the voice, or leaving some things unsaid²⁰.

4. The body language that is the non-verbal communication

Body language is another tool which can influence the electorate's behaviours. Many specialists claim that body language constitutes as many as

¹⁶ W. Gałązka, A. Krywicki, *Nie wystarczy być...*, p. 65.

¹⁷ M. L. Knapp, J. A. Hall, *Komunikacja niewerbalna w interakcjach międzyludzkich*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM, Wrocław 1997, p. 52.

¹⁸ M. Leary, *Wywieranie wrażenia na innych. O sztuce autoprezentacji*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, p. 14.

¹⁹ M. Kuziak, *Sztuka mówienia*, Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN, Warszawa – Bielsko Biała 2008, p. 55-56.

²⁰ See: M. Leary, *Wywieranie wrażenia...*, p. 17.

55 per cent of the impression the person makes on the audience, only 7 per cent comes from the verbal messages²¹.

Consequently, non-verbal communication is spreading information without using the spoken and written words or word-like codes, with the usage of static and dynamic properties of the human body when message is delivered between two or more people²². Body language includes all meaningful behaviours, i.e. interpreted by the sender and the recipient as the messages (facial expression, bodily contact, poses of the body, spatial relations – on the audit, visual and audio grounds)²³.

It is difficult for many people to accept that biologically we are only animals. *Homo sapiens* is a primate species, hairless ape which learnt to walk on two legs and has advanced, well-developed and educable brain. Similarly to other species, we are dominated by biological rules which control our behaviours, reactions, body language and gestures²⁴.

There are two types of non-verbal messages: body movements such as the facial expression, gestures and the posture as well as spatial relations, i.e. distance we keep between ourselves and the others²⁵.

Body is directly immersed in politics, where the relations of power and the authority are decisive. These relations are the ones which invest in the body, block, mark and shape it, torture and force it perform various tasks, different ceremonies and demand signs from it. That political blocking of the body is connected on the basis of complicated and mutual relations with its economical application²⁶.

Many politicians are specialists in distorting the body language in order to convince the electors e.g. to support an electoral programme. It is said that the ones who apply it successfully have “charisma”. People who lie professionally e.g. politicians, lawyers, actors or television announcers make use of the refined body language so it is hard to spot their lie²⁷.

²¹ See: L. Tkaczyk, *Komunikacja niewerbalna. Postawa, mimika, gest*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM, Wrocław 1998, p. 8.

²² Cz. Matuszewicz, *Komunikacja niewerbalna*, „Przegląd Psychologiczny” 1979, no 2, p. 319.

²³ M. Brocki, *Język ciała w ujęciu antropologicznym*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM, Wrocław 2001, p. 74.

²⁴ A. Pease, *Mowa ciała. Jak odczytywać myśli innych ludzi z ich gestów*, Wydawnictwo Jedność, Kielce 2005, p. 10.

²⁵ M. McKay, M. Davis, P. Fanning, *Sztuka skutecznego porozumiewania się*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2004, p. 59.

²⁶ M. Foucault, *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia*, Wydawnictwo Aletheia, Warszawa 1993, p. 32.

²⁷ A. Pease, *Mowa ciała...*, p. 19.

Body as a whole is still a victimised element in our culture, in general we believe in the honesty of the politician, when he is looking us straight in the eyes from the TV screen. In this case the verbal message is not as convincing as controlled tricks of posture of the body which have influence rather on a consciousness than the unconsciousness²⁸. Television seems to be particularly useful for the politician who is able to make a good impression in spite of the lack of any ideas. Spectators are interested mainly in the personality of the politician. It is easy to measure the success or defeat. It will be sufficient to realize how often a given politician is invited to the TV studio. If often enough, then the purpose is achieved, a given person turns from a “politician” into a “celebrity”²⁹.

Television, through the message in form of the image, sound, intonation of the voice, induces chemical reactions in the spectator’s body by freeing chemical transmitters which motivate the mechanism to perform action. Above all, it takes place in the eyes, where focusing without the context shows up which leads to the destruction of the meaning, pressing the “keys”, resulting in triggering of a process in the body and it is not used to perform real actions. It leads to mental deprivation and as a consequence produces aggressive “lurking” behaviours. People cannot remember what was sown in their minds, despite this fact “it” sticks in them and acts secretly, it is “lurking”³⁰.

It is possible to point out negative consequences which the manipulative media social engineering can have on the election processes. Leaving unsaid inconvenient information for the candidate results in higher support for him, than in the situation when facts would be known for the public opinion. On the other hand, highlighting unverified information can weaken the chances of the candidate³¹.

5. Public surveys

Public surveys are unquestionable tools of the influence on the society. One should consider the manipulating of surveys on two levels: manipulation

²⁸ J. Benthall, *The Body Electric: Patterns of Western Industrial Culture*, The Thames & Hudson Publisher, London 1976, p. 92.

²⁹ M. L. Knapp, J. A. Hall, *Komunikacja niewerbalna...*, p. 53.

³⁰ E. Białek, B. Krygier, *Jakość medialnego obrazu w ujęciu psychosyntezy*, „Studia Medioznawcze” 2002, no 4, p. 75.

³¹ A. Jaskiernia, *Metody socjotechniczne a problem autonomii mediów masowych* [in:] *Socjotechnika w polityce – wczoraj i dziś*, tome I (ed. A. Kasińska-Metryka), Uniwersytet Przyrodniczo-Humanistyczny w Kielcach, p. 131.

while creating the surveys and manipulation of their results³². Well constructed and diligently conducted survey is a rich source of information about trends prevailing in the society³³.

Polish people present mutually contradictory attitudes towards surveys. On one hand, they do not respect them by accusing researchers of “survey lie”, on the other they are clearly interested in or even fascinated by the surveys. It is commonplace to refuse to participate in surveys. People think that they are a great manipulation of very researchers, politicians or media, however they fall under their influence³⁴.

The directions of this influence were confirmed by researchers numerous times, however, to this day it cannot be fully predicted, as it is not possible to measure them. Model reactions of electors to surveys include: bandwagon effect³⁵, it consists in the fact that revealing some trends, prior to elections, strengthens them. It is so-called imitation effect. If one party leads in an election campaign, the undecided will vote for it³⁶, the underdog effect means the reluctance to the sweeping victory of the party which leads in the polls for a very long time, momentum effect translates into transferring the votes to the small party, when its support suddenly grew, house effect is a trust for the results of surveys carried out by renowned research centres, spiral of silence which takes form of underrepresentation of opinions contrary to the political correctness or also an ideological correctness in surveys, the conformism, i.e. the dislike of being in an isolation, amongst the minority or wasting the vote³⁷.

The results of public opinions surveys provide the politicians with arguments. When they are in accordance with their point of view, they are willingly quoted in order to show that given political grouping is the best exponent of the “will of the people”. The results also constitute the base of “trying to meet” the demands of the society³⁸.

³² See: M. Pabijańska, *Psychomanipulacja w polityce...*, p. 83.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³⁴ J. Kowalik, *Demokracja sondażowa czy sondowanie demokracji?* [in:] *Polacy wobec wyborów 2005 roku*, red. A. Kasińska-Metryka, Wydawnictwo Akademii Świętokrzyskiej, Kielce 2007, p. 137.

³⁵ E. Noelle-Neumann, *Spirala milczenia. Opinia publiczna – nasza skóra społeczna*, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2004, p. 82.

³⁶ M. Mazur, *Marketing polityczny. Studium porównawcze prezydenckich kampanii wyborczych w USA i w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2002, p. 295.

³⁷ E. Noelle-Neumann, *Spirala milczenia...*, p. 82.

³⁸ W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, *Marketing polityczny, perspektywa psychologiczna*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, p. 514.

Conclusions

The omnipresence and the specificity of tools of the social impact which aim at influencing behaviours of other people have been the object of many researches over the years. People from the world of the politics increasingly often appeal to this type of behaviours, perceiving them as interpenetrating professional relations and accompanying the aspirations to achieve success.

It is easy to come to the conclusion that politicians thanks to the tools of the social impact, try to sell their best image and be perceived in the best way by their voters. However, their image will only turn out to be successful, when is accepted and regarded as being credible.

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