

The Forensic

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Cultural Perspective on the Analyses of Interaction in
Presidential Debates – Comparing Two Models
PEKKA ISOTALUS, UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE, FINLAND

Burke and the End of Days: The Impious Power of Apocalyptic
Symbolism as Commentary on Cultural and Social
Destabilization
CARLY GEISLER, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Forum Piece

Does “Coming to Jesus” Do More Harm Than Good? Exploring
the Psychological Capital of Forensics Competitors
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The *Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta* invites authors to submit manuscripts related to scholarship, pedagogy, research and administration in competitive and non-competitive debate. The Editor and Editorial Board especially seek articles that are especially about ways to increase diversity in forensics. The Editorial Board will consider manuscripts of this nature of top priority. Manuscripts submitted by undergraduate students and previously unpublished scholars will also receive serious consideration.

This journal reflects the values of its supporting organization, *Pi Kappa Delta*, which is committed to promoting *the art of persuasion, beautiful and just*. The journal seeks to promote serious scholarly discussion of issues connected to making competitive debate and individual events a powerful tool for teaching students the skills necessary for becoming articulate citizens. The journal seeks essays reflecting perspectives from all current debate and individual events forms, including, but not limited to: NDT, CEDA, NEDA, NPDA, Lincoln-Douglas debate, as well as NIET, NFA, and nontraditional individual events.

Reviews of books, activities, and other educational materials will be published periodically (as submitted), and those submissions are also sought. Potential authors should contact the Editor regarding the choice of materials for review.

All works must be original and not under review by other publishers. Submissions should conform to APA guidelines (Most recent edition). **Authors should E-mail submissions in Word format only with no specialized formatting.** (Hard copy submissions are acceptable; contact editor for directions for these submissions.) Manuscripts should not exceed 25 double-spaced typed pages, exclusive of tables and references; books reviews and educational materials should be 4-5 double-spaced pages. The title page should include the title, author(s), correspondence address, e-mail address, and telephone numbers. The second page should include an abstract of 75-100 words. The text of the manuscript (including its title) should begin on the next page (with no reference to author), with the remaining pages numbered consecutively. Avoid self-identification in the text of the manuscript. Notes and references should be typed and double spaced on pages following the text of the manuscript. Tables should be clearly marked regarding their placement in the manuscript.

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Editor's Note: As forensic educators, it is hoped that we are able to expand our applications of theories across various contexts. As editor, it has always been my desire to expand those horizons. In keeping with that philosophy, this article is an intercultural debate analysis of Presidential campaigning in Finland.

Cultural Perspective on the Analyses of Interaction in Presidential Debates – Comparing Two Models

PEKKA ISOTALUS

Abstract: One of the most widely used theories in the research on political debates is the functional theory of campaign discourse. Some scholars have criticized this theory, because it does not take account of possible cultural differences in debates. The Finnish scholars have developed a new model to analyze political television discussions in multi-party systems. In this article, the functional theory and the Finnish model are used to analyze interaction in a presidential debate in Finland. The goal of the article is to compare the results which these two models give. The method is a quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

Nearly everywhere voters can evaluate political candidates thanks to special television programs. These televised election debates have assumed a central role in political campaigning all over the world. In many countries, they are the most frequently followed events of election campaigns, and they have also been found to affect voters differently. Presidential debates especially can be seen as a cross-cultural television format. On the other hand, these debates may be quite different in different countries. The whole political system seems to have a marked influence on political discussions on television. Further, the influences of each communication culture can also be found in the television appearances of politicians of different countries. Therefore, the forms of interaction in presidential debates may vary quite a lot in different cultures.

In Finland, television debates have also established their position in election campaigns. Viewers are very interested in these television programs, and they are reported in the media without exception (e.g., Tiittula, Nuolijärvi & Isotalus, 2007). These programs are also often called debates, although their form of interaction is far from that of a traditional debate or, for example, the well-known American presidential debates (see Isotalus & Aarnio, 2006). To be able to develop

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theories and analysis models which could be used in different countries for analyzing the interaction in presidential debates, a cultural perspective is needed.

The political communication research in general has noticed the cultural perspective. Although there are a great deal of similarities in the current development of political communication in different countries, it has been noticed that all these development trends also acquire characteristics specific to each culture. This development has also been considered theoretically from different perspectives and using different concepts. To name a few examples, the concepts Americanization, globalization, mediatization, modernization, professionalization, emotionalization and personalization have been used to describe the general development of political communication in different democracies from various perspectives (e.g., Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2007; Isotalus, 2001; Negrine, 2008; Richards, 2004; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). All these concepts are related to each other but partly describe different aspects of the ongoing development. Because of the cultural differences in these development trends, more attention is paid to political communication cultures (e.g., Gurevitch & Blumer, 2004; Pfetsch, 2004). In this way, it is possible to observe the unique features of each political communication culture as well as to develop theories of political communication with more inter-cultural validity.

Televised debates currently command a great deal of scholarly interest; however, most of the research is still American (see Benoit & Henson, 2007), although analysis of the debates has increasingly been conducted in other countries as well (e.g. Coleman, 2000). While the research is becoming more international, it still concentrates on countries with two-party systems. Moreover, the earlier research has mainly been interested in the effects of the debates. The other perspective on researching political debates, i.e., content analysis, has not been as popular as the research on effects (McKinney & Carlin, 2004). There are also a limited number of theoretical approaches to studying the content and forms of interaction in these debates.

One of the most widely used and systematically tested theories in the studies about the content of television debates has been the functional theory of campaign discourse (e.g., Benoit, 2007). The theory has been used in several studies on American presidential campaigns and debates. Later, it has also been applied to other countries, while on the other hand receiving criticism for being culturally too limited. Isotalus and Aarnio (2005; 2006), for example, have concluded that the theory was developed to analyze campaigns in a two-party system only and it is difficult to apply it to a multi-party system. Further, they have concluded that the theory is not equally suitable for the analysis of Finnish political television discussions; therefore, they have developed an analysis model based on the central features of televised Finnish political discussions.

In this article, these two models – the functional theory and the

Finnish model for televised election discussion – are applied to an analysis of a Finnish presidential debate. The goal of the article is to compare the results which these two models give and their applicability to a Finnish presidential debate. Additionally, the purpose is the further development of these models and to construct an approach with more intercultural validity to this area.

Functional Theory

One of the most widely used theories in the research on political debates is the functional theory of campaign discourse. Developed by William L. Benoit, it has been used especially in studies of American presidential campaigns. It has been used in analyses of the discourse of an entire campaign and most often in analyzing television debates. The theory sees campaign discourse as inherently instrumental, a means to a desired end: securing enough votes to win the election. Benoit (2003; 2007) defines five axioms which the functional theory is founded on:

1. Voting is a comparative act.
2. Candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents.
3. Political campaign messages allow candidates to distinguish themselves.
4. Candidates establish preferability through acclaiming, attacking, and defending.
5. Campaign discourse occurs on two topics: policy and character.

This means that a citizen makes a decision to choose between competing candidates, and this clearly entails a comparative judgment. Citizens have no reason to prefer one candidate over another if the candidates look the same; therefore, candidates must appear different from one another. It is essential for candidates in contested campaigns to develop distinctions between themselves and their opponents. Once a candidate decides which distinctions to underline to voters, he or she must convey that information to them. For this purpose a number of campaign messages are used (Benoit, 2007).

For the purposes of this paper, the fourth and fifth axioms of the functional theory are the most interesting. According to the fourth, the discourse can take only one of three forms: acclaim, attack, and defense. First, candidates may acclaim their positive characteristics or their policy positions. Second, candidates may attack their opponents by addressing an opponent's undesirable character or policy position. A successful attack increases the attacker's net favorability by reducing the desirability of an opponent. If a candidate decides to respond to attacks, he or she will mount a defense. Defense, then, is the third potential function of discourse. It attempts to restore or prevent additional damage to a candidate's perceived preferability. (Benoit & Hartcock, 1999; Benoit et al., 2003; Benoit, 2007).

The functional theory argues that these three functions – acclaim, attack, and defense – are likely to occur with different frequencies. The theory makes two predictions about the functions of political

campaign discourse. First, it is expected that candidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks. Secondly, political candidates will use attacks more frequently than defenses. (Benoit, 2007). These predictions have also received support in several studies (e.g., Benoit & Hartcock, 1999; Benoit et al., 2003; Benoit & Airne, 2005).

The fifth principle of the theory is that the campaign discourse may occur on both policy (issue) and character (image) grounds. In other words, candidates try to persuade voters of their preferability on policy and character. The functional theory predicts that policy comments will be more frequent than character comments in presidential campaign discourse.

Further, the policy utterances may address three topics: past deeds, future plans, and general goals. Past deeds concern outcomes or effects of action taken by a candidate. Future plans are a means to an end, specific proposals for policy action. Unlike future plans, general goals refer to ends rather than means. The character utterances, in turn, occur on personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals. The functional theory also makes three predictions as to how these sub-forms are used. First, general goals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack. Secondly, ideals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack. Thirdly, general goals will be used more frequently than future plans. (Benoit & Hartcock, 1999; Benoit et al., 2003; Benoit, 2007.)

The functional theory also predicts differences in the discourse of incumbent and challenger candidates (Benoit, 2007; Benoit & Henson, 2007). It makes five predictions about incumbents and challengers. The theory predicts that incumbents acclaim more and attack less than challengers. Further it is predicted that incumbents defend more than challengers. It is also expected that challengers discuss character more, and policy less than incumbents. The fourth prediction is that incumbents acclaim more on past deeds than challengers and challengers attack more on past deeds than incumbents. The last prediction is that incumbents attack more on future plans than challengers, and challengers acclaim more on future plans than incumbents.

The functional theory is mainly used to study American presidential campaigns; however, it has recently also been applied to other cultures. It has been used to analyze, for example, presidential debates in Korea, Ukraine, Taiwan, Canada and Australia, and the prime ministerial debates in Israel ((Lee & Benoit, 2005; Benoit & Klyukovski, 2006; Benoit & Henson, 2007; Benoit, Wen, & Yu, 2007; and Benoit & Sheaffer, 2006). The idea in all these studies has been to apply the functional theory to the debates and to compare the analysis results to the earlier results from American presidential debates. In all of these studies, numerous similarities with the American results have been reported, but also some cultural differences in all of them. The main conclusion, however, has been that some features of political campaign discourse cross national borders and cultures. The studies

have also supported the idea that the functional theory has some applicability beyond American politics.

The functional theory serves well the simplifying of the forms of campaign discourse and has proved an excellent analytical tool. It has been used successfully in numerous studies. It has been shown to be practical and able to predict forms of campaign discourse. Benoit (2007) considers that one advantage of the functional theory is that it categorizes statements according to more criteria than many other models. Another advantage is that it uses the theme as the coding unit. Further, it can be applied to a variety of political campaign messages: televised political spots, radio spots, debates, talk radio appearances, television talk show appearances, web pages, and nominating convention speeches; however, other scholars have criticized the functional theory for not being equally suitable to all cultures.

The Finnish Model Televised Election Discussion

Isotalus and Aarnio (2005; 2006) claim that the functional theory is not equally suitable for analyzing political campaign discourses in all cultures. They find that the functional theory has been developed to analyze campaigns such as presidential campaigns, where the character of a candidate is crucial. In parliamentary debates, for example, the character of a party leader is not as crucial as the character of a presidential candidate. Further, the theory seems to be more appropriate in a two-party system. It seems to provide a limited perspective for a multi-party system, because the discourse in these debates is more wide-ranging. The main principle of the theory about winning the elections reveals that it is better suited to a two-party system, where the winner is always definite, but in a multi-party system it may sometimes be difficult to find only one unambiguous winner. Additionally, it seems to include implications of forms of interaction which are culturally bound. Isotalus and Aarnio (2005; 2006) claim that attack and defense are apparently not basic forms of communication in Finnish political campaigns.

Isotalus and Aarnio (2005, 2006) have developed a model for the analysis of televised election discussions. The main purpose of the model is to describe the main elements and their interrelationships in televised election discussions in a multi-party system. The model is based on the idea that the national political system and communication culture have a decisive effect on the nature of political discussions. The development of the model was based on Finnish television discussions.

The model developed is based on a criticism of earlier research of television debates, by arguing that the earlier research on the two-party system cannot describe the televised election discussions of a multi-party system. The main argument of the model is that in the Finnish system the televised election discussion is more a *discussion* than a *debate*. In the Finnish political discussions, the forms of interaction are seldom only attacks or defenses. Overt attacks are extreme-

ly rare in Finnish discussions. The absence of attacks is naturally also reflected in the non-occurrence of defenses. If there are no attacks, no defense is needed; therefore, the Finnish political discussions could not actually be called debates at all if the criterion for debate is that it consists of attacks and defenses. The televised American presidential debates have also been criticized by debate researchers as lacking the characteristics of a true debate (Jones, 2005).

Instead of attack and defense, the basic elements of interaction according to the model are expressions of agreement and disagreement. In the discussion, disagreements and agreements may be expressed directly or indirectly, both verbally or nonverbally. Thus the expressions of agreement and disagreement form the core of the model, to which other elements are added.

There seem to be three elements with a decisive influence on when to express agreements and disagreements. First, it is natural that politicians and parties should have disagreements. They result from different political views, and are likely to be based on the election or party manifestos or differing situational interpretations and reasoning. Secondly, one of the most significant factors for this is the political position of a party – whether it is a government or an opposition party. It seems typical that during the campaign the parties which are currently in the same government express more agreement with each other than with other parties. The agreement is based on the common government platform and common responsibility for the government's decisions. On the other hand, there are typically many disagreements between the opposition parties and the government parties. The opposition criticizes the government's decisions and tries to put forward new options, which the government, in turn, rejects. The third element apparently affecting disagreement and agreement is the personal relationships of the party leaders. If the party leaders are on good terms with each other, this is also apparent in how they address one another. Mutual discord is likewise reflected in their communication styles.

The televised election discussions also include other forms of interaction than agreement and disagreement. The three forms of discourse, which are at times combined, are also key elements in the televised election discussions. They are discourses oriented to past, present, or future situations. The discourse oriented to the past deals with past events and decisions. It is typical of the Finnish election discussions to refer to the government's earlier decisions or the reports of past political committees. The discourse oriented to the present analyzes the present political situation or society. It is typical of the discourse oriented to the present to stress a need for change in the present situation or to defend the present development. The discourse oriented to the future creates scenarios of the future of society or considers how this should be done. It is usual for the future-oriented discourse to present a vision of what should be done to solve a current social problem or what the party would do if it got into the government.

The model also emphasizes the importance of political memory in argumentation. Politicians differ in their ability to use political memory. This can be observed in how well and selectively the politicians can demonstrate who did what, when, and with what consequences in a way that best serves their interests. The use of political memory is closely related to the discourse oriented to the past. Additionally, all communication occurs in a context consisting of a social situation and the governmental vs. oppositional position of a party.

Isotalus (2009) has applied the model to analyzing the expressions of agreement and disagreement in two televised election discussions during parliamentary elections. The results confirm the main argument of the model that the basic elements of interaction in Finnish election discussions are expressions of agreement and disagreement. The Finnish election discussions do not consist only of disagreements; expressions of agreement also play a central role. The role of agreements illustrates the fact that in Finnish politics good relationships must be maintained with all other parties, because after the election they may be partners in cooperation. Furthermore, the analysis shows clearly how the position of a party influences the party leader's communication style. In both discussions analyzed, the party leader of the opposition party differed from party leaders of the parties in government in communication style.

This model was, however, developed to analyze televised election discussions during parliamentary elections. It is reasonable, therefore, to ask how well it is suited to a debate between two participants and to the context of presidential elections. The role of expressions of agreement, for example, may be quite different between two presidential candidates than between party leaders before the parliamentary elections in a multi-party system.

The Context of the Finnish Presidential Debate

According to the Finnish Constitution, the President of the Republic is elected for a term of six years. The same person may be elected President for no more than two consecutive terms of office. The President is elected by a direct vote, if necessary in two rounds. If one of the candidates receives more than half of the votes cast in the first round, he or she is elected President. If none of the candidates receives a majority of the votes cast, a new round must be held between the two candidates receiving the most votes in the first election. The candidate receiving the most votes in the second round is elected President.

In 2006, the president was elected for the third time by direct vote in Finland, but it was the first time when an incumbent was a candidate in a direct vote. There were eight candidates in the first round, and the second round was between challenger Mr. Sauli Niinistö (the candidate of the National Coalition Party) and the incumbent Mrs. Tarja Halonen (the candidate of the Finnish Social Democratic Party).

Finally, Tarja Halonen won the election and was elected for the second consecutive term of office. In the second round, Tarja Halonen received 51.8 percent of all votes and Sauli Niinistö 48.2 percent. The participation in this election was 77.2%. From the late 1980s onwards the turnout has remained about 10 percentage points higher in presidential elections than in parliamentary elections (Moring, 2008, 51).

Generally, political campaigning in Finland has followed the same trends as in other democracies all over the world. The development has been called Americanization, mediatization, or modernization (Herkman, 2008; Isotalus, 2001; 2007). This entails among other things the professionalism of political communication, the growing importance of the media (especially television), the increasing news value of polls, the personalization and increased entertainment features of politics and the growing importance of images. Many of these trends are also connected to the television debates and thus serve to emphasize their role in campaigns.

In Finland, as in most other countries, television debates have become a crucial part of campaigning. However, some researchers have suggested that it would be better to talk about discussions than debates in Finland, because the interaction between the participants seldom resembles a traditional debate (Isotalus & Aarnio, 2006). Further, in the Finnish political television discussions the moderators usually take a more prominent role than, for example, in the American presidential debates (Isotalus, 2009). The role of moderators may even resemble that of an interviewer, and in these cases a debate between the politicians is virtually non-existent. Additionally, turn-taking between the candidates is not so structured; they are more free to comment informally and interrupt each other than in the American presidential debates.

In the 2006 Finnish presidential campaign, too, the debates played a prominent role. The media generated a great deal of anticipation and it was supposed that the TV debates would even amount to a decisive factor in the election. Both the candidates and the television companies paid them a great deal of attention and other media covered them extensively. The second round lasted two weeks and included five television debates between the two candidates. All these debates were also among the most widely viewed television programs during this period in Finland.

In the second round, Tarja Halonen as the incumbent was in the role of a defendant in the debates. Both journalists and the challenger candidate Sauli Niinistö criticized her. She was often seen as responsible for many aspects of the current state of Finnish society and especially foreign policy. Moreover, in the media reports on the debates, Niinistö was presented in a more positive light (Tiittula, Nuolijärvi, & Isotalus, 2007). In their study, Tiittula et al. (2007) considered that the communication styles of Halonen and Niinistö were very different in the debates. Halonen's communication style was more colloquial and characterized by rapid turn-taking. She also had

plenty of variation in her nonverbal communication. Niinistö, by contrast, was characterized by indirect formulations and hesitation in verbal style. His language was also more literary and nonverbal communication less varied.

The Purpose and Method of this Article

In this article, both the functional theory of campaign discourse (Benoit, 2007) and the Finnish model televised election discussion (Isotalus & Aarnio, 2005) were used to analyze interaction in a televised election discussion during the 2006 presidential elections in Finland. The aim of the article is to compare these models and evaluate their applicability in this context.

The first goal is to ascertain the extent to which the models can be applied to a Finnish presidential debate. The second goal is to consider what kinds of results are obtained with the models, namely, how they describe the debating styles of the candidates. The third goal is to pay attention to turns which do not seem to fit into the categories of the models. Finally, the results and applications of the models are compared. The purpose is also to get ideas for developing the models further.

In this article, a debate from the second round of the 2006 Finnish presidential campaign is analyzed. It was the first debate between Halonen and Niinistö and was broadcast on 18 January on YLE (Finnish public service broadcasting company) TV1. There were two moderators in the program and it lasted an hour. This program was chosen because it included more disagreements between the candidates than some other debates, and the setting is closer to that of a traditional debate: the candidates stood opposite each other with the moderators between them. This program may be more comparable with debates from other cultures than other programs that were available. First, the debate was transcribed in detail. After that, the transcription was coded using the QSR N'Vivo7 software.

In applying the functional theory, the first step in the content analysis was to classify the utterances by thematic function: acclaims, attacks, and defenses. After that a coder classified the topic of each theme: policy or character. Then the coder identified which of the three forms of policy (past deeds, future plans, general goals) or the three forms of character (personal qualities, leadership ability, ideals) was used in each theme. In this analysis, however, it was possible to leave utterances uncoded if they did not fit into any of the possible categories, in order to find out if there were passages which did not follow the categories of the functional theory. The text was analyzed by the researcher alone.

After the categorization, the division of the utterances into different categories was considered and the results between the candidates were compared. The contents of each category were also considered more carefully to gain a better picture of what kind of utterances they

included. After that, the utterances so far uncoded were also considered. The procedure of the functional theory is based on quantitative content analysis, but in addition to this the categories were also analyzed qualitatively and evaluated critically.

In applying the Finnish model televised election discussion, the first step in the content analysis was to classify the utterances into expressions of agreement and disagreement and into discourses oriented to past, present, or future situations. In this analysis it was possible to leave utterances uncoded if they did not fit any of the possible categories, in order to find what kind of discourse remained outside the categories.

After the categorization, the division of the utterances into different categories was considered and the results between the candidates were compared. The contents of each category were also considered more carefully to gain a better picture of what kind of utterances they included. After that, the utterances so far uncoded were also considered. The procedure is based on quantitative content analysis, but in addition to this the categories were also analyzed qualitatively and evaluated critically. After these separate analyses, the results were compared and the applicability of the models evaluated.

Results

Functional Theory

Most of the turns of the candidates in the debate could be coded according to the main functions of the functional theory. A total of 238 turns of the candidates in the debate were coded; however, 21% of turns could not be assigned to the three main classes. The most common turns were defenses, 35%, followed by attacks, 28%, and acclaims, 16% of turns. All turns which were coded to the three main functions could be coded to the topics, policies, or character. Further, all turns about character were classified into three forms: personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals. Not all turns about policy, however, could be coded to the subcategories past deeds, future plans, or general goals. 13% of the policy turns remained outside these subcategories. Ultimately, most of the discourse in the debate could be assigned to the categories of the functional theory, but a notable amount could not be coded into these categories, although the categories were defined with latitude in the analysis.

Both of the candidates used more defenses than other kinds of turns. Of Halonen's turns 41% were defenses, while Niinistö had 30 %. Niinistö had nearly as many attacks (29%) as defenses, but Halonen had clearly fewer attacks (27%); however, the candidates used approximately the same number of attacks. Both of them had more uncoded turns than acclaims. Halonen had acclaims in 14% of her turns and Niinistö in 18%; therefore Halonen as the incumbent had more defenses than the challenger Niinistö, just as the functional theory predicts, but concerning the number of acclaims and attacks the relation between incumbent and challenger was contrary to what the theory predicts.