

# A Sign of the Times: Jimmy Carter's National Energy Policy Speech and Syntagmatic Confusion

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**Abstract:** *The need for a speaker to adapt to various audiences relates well to the need for the debater to adapt to the critic. This article examines the code switching of former President Jimmy Carter and then relates those techniques to competitive use. Looking at code switching as Carter did from preacher, to everyman, to authoritative figure, may allow debaters to understand and to address a multitude of critics and audiences in one speech.*

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On April 5, 1979, President Jimmy Carter asserted the need for a national energy policy. The speech included policy ideas for the government and requested lifestyle changes from the American people. This article, in order to demonstrate the possible utility of techniques in debate, reviews the speech through a semiotic lens using independent close readings to delineate the appearance of syntagmatic confusion enabled by the speech. The article also offers an application of this perspective for ways in which modern debaters may use code switching to sharpen forensics skills.

Semiotics is a well-established approach for the analysis of the rhetorical function of images and visual symbols. This rhetorical function may include the study of how signs are organized and analyzed. Fiske (1990) posits that a paradigm is the set of signs whose use is chosen by a person. Subdivisions of large paradigms, such as languages, include elements of syntactical structures and may be grouped into professional paradigms, such as medical or legal, in addition to

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cultural or regional paradigms. As Borchers (2006) notes, "To use rhetoric effectively, the rhetor must choose the signs from the appropriate paradigm" (p. 269).

Signs are also classified into syntagms or meaningful combinations. These combinations may include letters into words, words into sentences, and sentences into larger units such as newspapers, or as discussed here, speeches. If, as Berger (2005) discusses, the paradigmatic or syntagmatic elements of the codes may cause code confusion, it is reasonable to expect a message to fail, or in this case a speech may fail. We argue syntagmatic confusion may explain the failure of the National Energy Policy speech to create a populist groundswell of support for Carter and his proposed policy. This confusion may then have also contributed to his more famous speech chastising the American people, commonly known as the Malaise Speech.

While the American public appeared to have been confused by policy and leadership role shifts, therefore rejecting the overall message, the general idea of paradigmatic confusion could be turned into a technique for debate. Focusing then on the idea of paradigmatic confusion, Carter's speech from April 1979 becomes a model for analysis if read through a lens of modern parliamentary debate. Operating from the locus of net benefits and comparative advantages as the dominant paradigms of modern parliamentary debate, this paper will examine the benefits of such paradigms in parliamentary debate when presented as through a judging paradigm for individual rounds. Currently, parliamentary debate stresses specific argumentation paradigms and may be therefore limiting and constraining, causing debate to look in traditionally perceived normative ways. That is, existing parliamentary debate limits the possibility for debaters to access real world rhetorical styles when choosing one paradigm to argue. Similarly, contests between available paradigms are decreasing as teams generally accept net benefits or comparative advantages in order to frame the debate around a race to the bottom pertaining to the impacts of various disadvantages and advantages. Examining the current forces of parliamentary debate and paradigmatic confusion, through the lens of semiotic construction of the debate round, we posit that paradigmatic confusion could change the framing of parliamentary debate rounds; the clear path to the bottom is complicated.

### **A Reading of the Elements in the National Energy Speech**

The collaborators on this paper undertook independent, close readings of President Carter's April 1979 energy speech. These readings, while expectedly varied in results, suggested three consistent ideas regarding the speech: Carter's discussion of the problem, the proclaimed use of equifinality, and the manifest use of authority. What also emerged were the particular rhetorical approaches Carter used throughout his speech. Carter's April 1979 energy address to the nation was about one of growing concerns for the future of the nation's sustainable energy reserves. In this speech Carter takes three



unique rhetorical approaches to the presentation of his speech: Carter the Southern preacher/savior, Carter the everyman, and Carter the leader of the nation. These paradigms, each present at different points in the speech, present unique rhetorical use of imagery, persuasive undertones, and calls to action. The following sections will provide a rhetorical analysis for each rhetorical style presented by Carter through our reading of the speech.

### Carter as the Preacher/Savior of the Nation

The first evidence of Carter as a preacher/savior of the nation came in the opening paragraphs of the speech, where Carter presented the terminal problem of declining energy reserves and the lack of access to plentiful markets. Carter utilized his podium as a pulpit, speaking as a concerned pastor to a nation wallowing in energy despair and crisis. Carter was quick to point out the failings of the nation when it came to accessing the resources that are abundant to the people. This call for public awareness of a major problem facing our nation serves as a preacher's call to awareness in the beginning of a sermon (Wilson, 1952). His use of imagery was simplistic in nature, yet graphic. Carter admonished the shortcomings of the bureaucratic nature of the federal government, the greed of the oil conglomerations, and the failings of the people to invest in alternatives to petroleum-based fuels.

To better understand the motivation behind the structure of Carter's speech as a southern preacher, a brief examination of Carter's heritage and upbringing is useful. Carter was born into a lineage of middle-class working farmers with deep, Christian religious connections to the Southern Baptist church (Glad, 1980). Carter was born in Plains, Georgia, which is in what was at the time of his birth one of the poorest parts of nation (Meyer, 1978). In an interview with the magazine *Rolling Stone*, Carter discussed his religious roots and how they shaped the man that Carter was in office (Dawidoff, 2011). Historically, Carter admitted that he at times struggled with his faith, most notably in the November, 1976 *Playboy* magazine interview in which Carter confessed to having *lusted in his heart*. In an interview with *World Religious News* (1976), he openly acknowledged Jesus Christ as the most important thing in his life. Additionally, on several occasions Carter was confronted about the influence his religion had on the decisions he was making to which he would counter, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you..." (Carter & Richardson, 1998).

Carter still professes his faith to this day as being as strong as it was when he was president, if not stronger, remarking that he still reads the *Bible* for an hour every day with his wife, and he is still deeply influenced by sermons (Dawidoff, 2011). In fact, Carter further noted in his interview with Dawidoff (2011) that sermons influenced how Carter constructed his speech patterns and helped generate the passion with which he spoke to the American people. This declaration of faith provides insight into Carter as the preacher/savior in his 1979



energy speech. Sermonic discourse provides illumination of the reasons why Carter chose to construct the April 1979 energy speech in such a way to resemble the sermon of a southern preacher. Carter's speech patterns mimicked the sermon construction of simplistic, straightforward sentence structure as described by Scrambler (1944). Carter played upon dialectic of good and evil, of saving grace and being forsaken, throughout the first paragraphs of his speech. Carter created the mental imagery of himself as the preacher, instilling lessons to the people of the nation through his call to action. Carter called into question the relationship between himself, the nation, and our need to acquire more energy, mimicking the traditional sermon triad of God, the people, and society (McGuire & Patton, 1977). Carter established himself as both the preacher and the savior in this speech through careful sentence construction and examples.

Carter vividly described the nation slipping into the grips of energy despair from the standpoint of the watchful outsider, mimicking the indictment of the congregation by the preacher (Wilson, 1952). Carter quickly followed these indictments of actions with how he was going to take control of the situation and deliver the people of the nation from despair by lowering energy costs. This dialectic took place when Carter was addressing the creation of a windfall profits tax, which he planned to implement post-speech, in order to check the price gouging of the oil companies. Carter asked the nation to trust him in his efforts to combat the price gouging of the oil companies, to place their faith in him to protect the nation.

We found that the dialectic of Carter as the preacher/savior of the nation lead to Carter creating two outcomes of this paradigm. Carter's goals of the outcome of this paradigm were for the nation to set up control of the nation's energy future and to control the funding going into programs that Carter wanted to establish post-speech. Carter indicted the nation as being unable to solve this change without his vision for the future viability of the nation when it came to aggressively attacking the oil companies and fighting for the creation of new alternatives to petroleum-based fuels. Carter's intended outcomes mimicked those of a sermon when the preacher would direct the congregation to place their faith in God (Scrambler, 1944; Wilson, 1952). Carter, in the example, replaced the notion of God with his position as the figurehead of the nation he was addressing—the President of the United States. Through this rhetorical approach Carter spoke to the audience through multiple paradigms code switching, from Carter the preacher, to Carter the savior of the nation, to finally asking the public to put their faith in Carter through the concession of power and trust manifest in his position as leader of the United States.

Carter fulfilled the task of preacher and savior by creating a rhetorical vision of how Carter and Carter alone could save the nation from the trouble looming in the nation's energy future. Carter's rhetorical creation mandated and asked the public to give him the support necessary to generate the change that was needed to protect the



public. Carter maneuvered the public from being the victim of the oil companies to being pulled up from a major crisis by the guiding hand of Carter the savior, as long as the public allowed him to execute his plan to its fullest extent. Carter folded this idea of being the guiding light to the public into his second major paradigm of Carter as the everyman.

### **Carter the Everyman: Help Me Help You**

The second major rhetorical paradigm created by Carter in his April 1979 energy speech was that Carter was a concerned citizen, just like the rest of the nation. Carter generated a “you/me” tension between the audience and himself when he delivered his speech as the southern preacher generating the image of Carter as the savior of the nation. Carter code switched and changed his rhetorical stance many times throughout the speech in order to use pathos to help attract the public’s interest in the goals that Carter was presenting in his speech. Carter utilized the idea of *communitas*, coupled with equifinality to ask the nation to help in the creation of a solution to the nation’s energy problems. Carter addressing the public from an organization standpoint rejected presidential cloister in favor of reaching more people by generating a presentation of Carter as the everyman. This section examines this paradigm from Carter’s rhetorical creation of his image as the everyman, to the generation of *communitas* between the public and the government, through the rhetorical call to action from Carter in the form of the public helping Carter so he could help the public.

All organizations face the challenges of generating messages for presentation to their multiple audiences (Cheney, 1991). Carter generated his message for multiple audiences by creating different paradigms through rhetorical construction in his energy speech. Carter began his speech by generating the idea that the American people are in this struggle for energy independence together: “We are wasting too much energy, we are buying too much oil from foreign countries and we are not producing enough oil, gas or coal in the United States” (n. p.). This quotation from the first paragraph, second line of the speech immediately directs the audience’s attention to a situation generated by the nation as a collective. Carter, however, immediately generated another call to the public as the everyman by identifying the incident at Three Mile Island as a warning sign that we were not ready to end the nation’s use of petroleum-based fuels.

Next, Carter’s speech generated a connection to the public placing him as the everyman, as part of the public life in the United States. “What can we do? We can solve these problems together” (n. p.). Carter created the connection with the audience generating a rhetorical locus of community through the creation of “we” in his speech. This rhetorical device allowed Carter to connect to the idea of community by addressing the nation as a group of concerned individuals (Cheney, 1991). Carter’s simplification of the organization of the



United States partnered with a community call for action further created the rhetorical imagery of "Carter the everyman," enabling him to code switch to being the concerned citizen.

### **Carter the President: Addressing the Nation**

The final rhetorical paradigm Carter generated in his speech was "Carter as the President," the leader of the nation. Carter created bleak imagery with this speech through the construction of a nation under attack from the high prices of unsustainable fuel sources. Carter continued this generation of imagery when he criticized the oil companies for windfall profits, constructing the rhetorical image of them stealing from the people of his great nation. In these rhetorical actions Carter composed the self-image that he was the President of the United States trying to help the people of the United States, and all Carter asked for in return was for the people to place their trust in him. This rhetorical imagery is most apparent on the second and third pages of his speech where Carter outlines the windfall profits tax.

Carter discussed a list of initiatives that were outlined in previous speeches and his attempts in order to change the energy outlook in the United States. Carter discussed his 1977 energy speech and then demonizes Congress, the Senate, and special interest groups for railroading the initiatives he wanted to establish. Carter follows this example with how he struggled on behalf of the people as their president to stop special interest groups and oil companies from further hurting the nation. His next exchange dealing with the windfalls profits tax demonstrated Carter as the leader of the nation.

Rhetorically, Carter used the imagery of the "I" throughout his exchanges of how he was going to shoulder the burden for the people by pushing through this windfall profit tax: "I will demand that they use their new income to develop energy for America, and not to buy department stores and hotels, as some have done in the past" (n. p.). This passage demonstrated Carter to be a unilateral leader in helping the people of the United States, as their president. "With new legal authority I can act without delay" (n. p.). In this small sentence Carter told the nation that he was going to fix the problems with the new legal authority he had been given as the President of the United States. Carter addressed the nation as a man determined to use his position of authority to fix the current situation and crisis. Carter used the "I" in this case to represent his authority over the nation and his ability to make unilateral change for the better. He constructed a rhetorical image of the president helping the people, helping the nation, and stopping the energy crisis.

Carter used his position as president to construct a speech heavily embedded with imagery of himself as the only individual who could stop the practices of the oil companies and fight congressional interest groups in order to correct the nation's woes. This speech was heavy with the use of "I," "you," and "we" to display the power relationship



of Carter to the people of the United States and to present a plan for securing the security of the country. Carter used this imagery as a call for the support and trust of the people; Carter endeared himself as the caring president looking out for the people.

In this speech we found that Carter managed to code switch throughout the speech and ultimately blended multiple paradigms in order to generate the rhetorical image of Carter as the right person to fix and solve the growing energy crisis. This speech utilized many different devices, but the largest underlying device present throughout the speech was for the nation to trust Carter to establish a plan to secure the natural energy resources and economy of the United States. Whether the nation listened to Carter the preacher/savior, Carter the everyman, or Carter the president, Carter attempted to convey a message for all people to understand and follow. The economic struggle of the past few years was not going to end overnight but the people of the United States lead by the President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, had the power to turn the entire source of events from bad to self-sustaining energy independence.

### **Code Switching in Modern Debate**

Modern debate, in all the various organizations (NPDA, CEDA, IPDA, and others), utilizes some form of code switching. In this way, debaters adapt to the various judges or panel of judges by “tweaking” or modifying their arguments and cases to best “fit” the audience receptiveness to the persuasion in the debate. If one thinks about Carter and his persuasive tactics, one can easily recognize his ability to code switch with various groups and speak to multiple audiences. Even today, Carter uses this rhetorical tool to be the best debater, best persuader, best facilitator, and best speaker. Not surprisingly, Carter, as well as any successful politician, must be able to craft words as an architect. Lee (1995) suggests that since the era of FDR, politicians have had to work doubly hard to create a sense of community.

Like Carter, a debater has to present his or her case with real-life problems, real-life impacts, and real-life implications. Whether the debate position is a critique about our environment, a disadvantage about oil prices, or a counterplan about North Korea, the speaker must “adapt” and use proper codes in the speech to influence the audience. In a way, the debater is using what Bormann refers to as fantasy vision; the ability of a person to create a shared vision or fantasy chain with his or her audience (Bormann, 1972). Code switching in debate is the application of that Bormann’s theory in a practical sense.

For Carter, his vision was to create a virtuous outsider to come to Washington, D.C. and clean house. In his bid for the presidency in 1976, Carter was able to successfully incorporate a small town coding system into his rhetoric, in his debates, in his press conferences, and in his one-on-one dialogue with the voting public (Lee, 1995). Similarly, the debater has to create a vision for the debate community.



This is the successful art of code switching in student forums, journal articles, conference papers, or web blogs on CEDA-I or NPDA-I.

One good example of this code switching occurred in the GPDA (Georgia Parliamentary Debate Association) student forum that was held at the 2013 state championship at Mercer University in Macon, GA. Students spoke in a forum where their voices were heard. Some judges were present as well. The controversy was about "speed of delivery." There were about one-half of the group in favor of quicker debater style of delivery; the other half preferred a slower rate of delivery. Each "side" had to use a form of code switching to "sell" their presentation. In this forum, debaters made statements like, "Well in high school I debated this way, and this speech rate is comfortable for me." Others made remarks such as "I think we should go as fast as we want as long as the judge does not mind." Yet another suggested that, "NPDA debate is supposed to be different- we are supposed to focus more on slow delivery and eloquence of style." In each of these examples, debaters used lexicon and vocabulary that were akin to their perspective or world view of debate. Additionally, the students' use of code switching also heavily influenced what coaches had to say in the forum. Coaches not only framed arguments suitable for other coaches, but they had to "code switch" by adapting their rhetorical word choice and strategy based on the student comments in the forum.

### Conclusion

Paradigmatic confusion not only changes the framing of parliamentary debate rounds but also expands upon the argumentation during rounds. Through careful analysis of the current practices of debate and argumentation in parliamentary debate, paradigmatic confusion could create a positive atmosphere in debate rounds. Code switching as Carter did from preacher, to everyman, to authoritative figure, may allow debaters to address a multitude of critics and audiences in one speech. Cross-applying paradigmatic confusion to individual team strategies, ground in debate is greatly increased as well as argumentation. The affirmative can now run non-traditional arguments against the negative using multiple evaluative paradigms on which the critic might weigh the round. This is similar to the negative side of the debate where a team could expand paradigms if limited by the affirmative, but it also gives the negative the unique ability to pare down paradigms to decrease the ground in the debate round in order to receive more in depth argumentation. Debaters are able to address multiple critics, generate new arguments, and establish new paradigms through the construction of the speeches given, just as Carter addressed multiple critics in one speech through paradigmatic confusion. Debaters should be able to generate new arguments through the expansion of the paradigms used from the current atmosphere of parliamentary debate.



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*Editor's Note:* I would like to thank Nina-Jo Moore, former Editor of *The Forensic*, for overseeing the peer review process of this paper, which was submitted under her tenure.





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# Re-balancing Inherency: *Can*, *Will*, and *Should*

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**Abstract:** *Inherency is an unloved and misunderstood stock issue in academic debate. This essay offers an analysis which offers suggestions for moving forward with a renewed understanding of this issue. It is argued that fiat is an ad hoc compensation resulting from a misunderstanding of the balance between should, can, and will and that depending on whether one takes a context-internal or context-external perspective, attitudinal inherency either disappears as a stock issue, or must face reasonable challenges in terms of the "should-would" question.*

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Inherency is probably the least-loved and most poorly understood of the traditional stock issues. Kerpen (1999) refers to it as "the abomination of debate theory" (p. 51). This dislike may explain why inherency has receded from view as a voting issue. Trumble (2010) notes that today inherency is argued for alternative purposes like securing topicality violations on policy resolutions that include words such as "significantly" and as an easy means to establish the uniqueness of disadvantages. Bates (2002) adds, "The other use for inherency today seems to be to waste as much of the Affirmative team's time as possible" (p. 16). This stock issue is awkwardly linked to fiat and the "should-would" problem. Inherency, or so it is thought, is the troublemaker that burdens us with the conceptual necessity of affirmative fiat. Although there have been calls over the years to eliminate fiat as a fiction, these calls cannot be effectively realized without addressing inherency.

The purpose of this essay is to rehabilitate inherency as a stock issue in debate theory. The first section offers a diagnostic of the problems associated with inherency analysis. Sorting out inherency means sorting out the troubling word *can*, understanding difficulties with the snugness between locus-of-control and locus-of-blame in relation to attitudinal inherency and the "should-would" question, and recognizing fiat as an *ad hoc* compensation. The second section builds on the first by offering two suggestions for moving forward. It is argued that debaters may either argue a context-internal position, which is a sort of fiction that eliminates the question of attitudinal inherency and concerns about "should-would," or from a context-external position which reintroduces the "should-would" question as one which favors the Affirmative in terms of presumption.

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In what follows, inherency will be discussed in the limited sense of establishing that the status quo, left to its own devices, will not take significant action in the direction of the resolution. In terms of LaGrave's (1983) classification, I am speaking here of inherency (roughly) in terms of *permanence* (of the problem/inaction), but not *causality* (i.e., identifying the root causes which the plan must not just ameliorate but solve), or *reform* (i.e., establishing that the plan is the only way to solve the problem).

### Locus of Blame, Locus of Control, and Can

A problem that immediately confronts Inherency analysis is that the problem and solution are linked to and flow from the same source, *the policy-making body* (usually the federal government) which is presently unable to respond to the problem, but which is also proposed as the solution to the problem. At times, the analogies we use to explain the concept of inherency to students mask this difficulty. Kruger (1960), for example, offers a familiar analogy that conceals as much as it reveals:

Suppose that my automobile had two flat tires, a dented fender, a set of faulty sparkplugs, and a broken window but was basically sound otherwise; would I be justified on the basis of these evils in getting another car? No. Why not repair these existing defects instead of going to a much greater expense of getting another car or taking the chance of getting a used car with an inferior motor? In other words, to justify a change, one must prove that the status quo cannot be repaired or is not worth repairing, that it is inherently defective or so bad that repairs would be impractical, that no amount of patching would eliminate the serious flaw. (p. 45)

The problem with this analogy is that the locus of control (the owner, the person who can make a change) is clearly separate from the locus of blame (the defective motor vehicle). In a debate which argues structural inherency, the metaphor works well enough because we can separate a given policy or lack of policy (the metaphorical car) from the policy making body (the metaphorical owner), but the metaphor breaks down in the case of attitudinal inherency. Policy debates do not really fit well in such analogies, because the very thing that is broken is so often implicated with that which is being called to correct the problem. Consider a reworking of Kruger's analogy, for example, where the car not only had to answer for its defects but was also responsible for fixing or even replacing itself.

A closer fitting analogy is that of everyday advertisements. Every advertisement attempts to convince its intended audience that it is not smart enough, pretty enough, young enough, happy enough, etc. It must also convince the audience that their lives will continue to suffer without a given product or service, and that, therefore, they should purchase the advertiser's product or service to cure what ails them. We should note what an advertisement never does; it never