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## **ECHO AND IRONY: WEAPONS IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS**

**Abstract:** The theory of relevance presented by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1995) is a general theory of communication which has been developing over the past decades and apart from the theoretical developments it has been implemented as a tool for various analyses of discourse. The aim of the paper is to present a relevance theoretic account of a special kind of attributive use of campaign material which was employed by candidates in TV advertisements for the US presidential election campaign in 2012. Candidates use this special kind, echoic use, implementing it not only to criticise the opponent but also to justify their negative attitude towards the material mentioned. Echoic use proves to be a powerful tool not only to criticise and maintain credibility, but also allow irony which seems to be, along with discrediting the rival, the most powerful weapon at a politician's disposal.

**Key words:** relevance theory, attributive use, echoic use, TV campaign advertisements, US presidential election campaign

### **Theory of relevance: a brief outline**

Sperber and Wilson's (1995) account of verbal (and nonverbal) communication is based on the assumption that humans are relevance oriented. A viewer watching a campaign advertisement may happen to pay close attention to it, but most probably he or she can be distracted by other stimuli coming from their immediate surroundings, or may also be entertaining more personal thoughts which happen to be more relevant at the time than the campaign advertisement. We not only notice information that is relevant to us, but also use relevance as a criterion to decide whether a given interpretation of an utterance is the intended interpretation (Sperber and Wilson 1987). Assuming that the viewer pays attention, at least in the

main part, to the advertisement he or she interprets it along lines which the authors of the advertisement would find to be relevant for the viewer. However, in the inferential process the linguistic meaning of the words decoded by the receiver is just one of many inputs that can affect interpretation. There are also contextual assumptions either provided by the speaker or supplied by the hearer (constructed or retrieved from memory). The viewer is believed to be able to retrieve from memory some assumptions necessary for the interpretation of the advertisement. In other cases the authors provide the necessary assumptions, when they suspect that it may be difficult for the audience to recall particular information leading to a downgrading effect on relevance.

The process of inference is relevance guided which in turn is defined in terms of contextual effects and processing effort. Contextual effect can be of three kinds, all arising from the interaction of new information with a context of existing assumptions. It can be either strengthening of an assumption that already exists, or contradiction that leads to elimination of an existing assumption, or producing contextual implication from combining the new information and an existing assumption. This logical implication is not derivable from the new information or the existing assumption alone. The new information is relevant in a given context as long as it gains contextual effects in the context; the greater the contextual effects the greater the relevance. However, the cost of the contextual effects is the mental effort of producing them; the greater the mental effort the lower the relevance achieved by the utterance (Wilson 1994).

In the case of campaign advertisements the viewer, as a result of the comprehension process, may arrive at contextual effects that strengthen an already existing assumption, e.g. that a given candidate presents good solutions for the country and should become president. Alternatively, contextual effects may contradict and eliminate the assumption that the rival candidate presents good solutions for the country and should become president. The viewer may also, using his/her assumptions about his/her preferences as to, for example, the tax system together with new information coming from the advertisement about the tax plans of the candidate, come to the conclusion that the candidate in his/her opinion is (or is not) a good candidate for president.

The above part of the section presents just the essential points of the theory in order to proceed to the part that is central to the present analysis of the campaign advertisements; that is the echoic use of utterances. Sperber and Wilson distinguish between interpretative and descriptive use of language, first introduced as the use/mention distinction (Sperber and Wilson 1981) later developed as echoic mention (Wilson and Sperber 1992) and echoic use (Wilson 2006). Every utterance may be interpreted as a descriptive use or an attributive use of language. In descriptive uses of language the candidate presents his/her own thoughts about actual or possible states of affairs; whereas in attributive use of language a thought the speaker presents “is not directly about a state of affairs, but about another

thought that it resembles in content, which the speaker attributes to some source other than him/herself at the current time” (Wilson and Sperber 2012: 128).

The relevance theoretic framework specifies a subtype of an attributive use, i.e. echoic use. However, the attributive function of echoic use is its secondary one; the primary function being the indication of the speaker's attitude to the content echoed. “The main point of an echoic use of language is not simply to report the content of the attributed thought or utterance, but to show that the speaker is thinking about it and wants to inform the hearer of her own reaction to it” (Wilson 2006: 1734). The attitudes conveyed by echoic utterances vary from very positive, as endorsement of the attributed thought, to negative, e.g. rejection. The speaker may give more or less overt clues as to the intended attitude or may rely on the hearer to infer the attitude from either the paralinguistic properties of the utterance or from the context. Echo as a technical term is deliberately broad and covers not only direct and immediate echoes as well as echoes of (real or imaginary) attributed thoughts and echoes of norms or standard expectations (Sperber and Wilson 1998: 283).

The following sections present echoic use in three different functions illustrated by three Obama campaign advertisements. The advertisements were chosen to present the three ways (out of potentially many) in which echoic use may be used, which are: echoic use of opponent's material to present a reliable criticism, echoic use of opponent's material for ironic criticism, and echoic use of opponent's material incorporated with new material for strong ironic criticism.

### **Echo used for criticism**

Candidates in political campaigns need to appear (among other qualities) credible and at the same time discredit and criticise the rival (D'Errico and Poggi 2012). In political campaign advertisements there is a common practice of using one advertisement (usually a rival's one) as a part of a candidate's advertisement. Such taking over of a part of an advertisement can be regarded as a case of mention, i.e. an attributive use of language, the same way reported speech is classified. In political campaign advertisements such attributive use is a special kind. The authors use the exact material of the opponent's advertisement, though it can be presented in a smaller sized picture or in black and white, or just a single mode is used, e.g. only the voice. The modifications are to indicate that this is a case of an attributive use (and echoic use for that matter) and to additionally indicate the negative attitude of the speaker to the material used. The case of echo is here a very direct one, and as far as the linguistic content is concerned it is an exact one, even though it would not have to be. The reason is quite obvious, the candidate wants to maintain credibility and not even come close to any case of manipulation of the text itself, as the main reason is to lower the processing effort

in order to supply the viewers with the utterance needed for further reference and expression of the candidate's attitude. The motivation to classify such direct cases as echo (rather than as an attributive use of language) is the primary statutory property of echo; that is, the expression of the attitude of the speaker to the utterance echoed, which is the very reason for one candidate to echo the opponent.

This section concentrates on one of the common practices during election campaigns: incorporating a fragment of an opponent's advertisement into one's own advertisement in order to refer to it and express rejection and criticism. Candidates often engage in a form of dialogue carried out by exchange of campaign advertisements. In such cases it is necessary to point to the utterance one wants to relate to, as in the vast amount of daily news, even only that connected with the election campaign, finding the intended one would be too effort-consuming and would finally result in very low or no relevance to the target audience. Such incorporation of a part of an advertisement can be regarded as a case in point, i.e. an echoic use of language, not only to lower the processing costs and enhance relevance but also to maintain credibility by presenting the exact, unmodified, material of the opponent and finally criticise the opponent by presenting some contrary information. The mechanism can well be seen in the following example:

- (1) Barack Obama for President 2012 Advertisement *Revealed* – Virginia (CampaignAdCentral 2012d)
  - (a) “*President Romney's first 100 days; creating thousands of new jobs for Virginians.*”
  - (b) *But would he?*
  - (c) *The Washington Post has just revealed that Romney's companies were pioneers in shipping jobs overseas, investing in firms that “specialized in relocating jobs done by American workers to new facilities in low-wage countries like China and India.”*
  - (d) *Does Virginia really want an outsourcer-in-chief in the White House?*

In his advertisement *Revealed* – Virginia (CampaignAdCentral 2012d) Barack Obama uses a carefully selected fragment of Mitt Romney's advertisement *First 100 Days* – Virginia (CampaignAdCentral 2012a). The echo of what Mitt Romney said in his own TV advertisement is used in Obama's advertisement (1a) just to supply background context in which the rest of Obama's advertisement is to be processed; it lowers the processing effort (by saving the effort for the hearers to select and recall the right assumption the speaker has intended). As a result the utterance is easier to process and its relevance is higher (Rut-Kluz 2014). Moreover the speaker may be sure that the intended interpretation is highly accessible, which is crucial in public communication. The very fact that the use of the material is echoic is clearly indicated by the form of the picture that starts the advertisement for Obama. It shows Mitt Romney's head on a black background (captioned Mitt Romney) and a TV screen presenting the exact<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The beginning part of the picture of Romney's advertisement is exactly reproduced, though the part presented by voice omits a quite considerable middle part which is critical of Obama.

advertisement also captioned *Romney TV ad*. The material echoed is presented together with clues expressing the attitude conveyed; the subtler ones include a small sized TV screen and the face of Mitt Romney looking a little surprised. This is followed with the more obvious clue in the form of the rhetorical question (1b) to convey the attitude of doubt.

The echoed material (1a) and the expression of doubt (1b) is followed with some new information (1c) which the speaker also echoes, this time turning to The Washington Post report on the methods of employment used in companies that Mitt Romney invests in. The critical attitude expressed by The Washington Post directed towards Mitt Romney is echoed and endorsed in the Obama advertisement which is signalled by the tone of voice. The evident contrast between the campaign advertisement of Mitt Romney promising new jobs and the news about the outsourcing implemented in business he invests in produces a number of strong implicatures such as (2a)-(2e) that intend to criticise and discredit Mitt Romney. The form of the echo adds substantially to the strongly implied credibility and objectivism implicating (2f)-(2i).

(2) Implicatures

- (a) What Mitt Romney declares in his advertisements is in obvious contrast to what he actually does in his business.
- (b) Mitt Romney is criticized for investing in companies that moved jobs overseas.
- (c) Mitt Romney is saying one thing and doing another.
- (d) Mitt Romney cannot be trusted.
- (e) Mitt Romney is not a good candidate for president.
- (f) We repeat what Mitt Romney and a renowned newspaper The Washington Post say.
- (g) It is not our opinion.
- (h) Those are facts about Mitt Romney.
- (i) We are credible.
- (j) It is possible that Mitt Romney is not going to care about employment of Americans if he becomes the president.
- (k) It is probable that Mitt Romney is going to support outsourcing jobs when he becomes the president.

The last line in the Obama advertisement (1d) has the form of a rhetorical question, which is quite strong, not only to make an impression on the viewers but also to ensure the right interpretation of the whole message. The utterance involves a metaphor referring to Mitt Romney as *an outsourcer-in-chief in the White House* which needs ad hoc concept<sup>2</sup> construction (Carston 2002, 2010) denoting a person who propagates outsourcing on the national level. The ad hoc

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<sup>2</sup> An ad hoc concept is constructed from lexically encoded concepts present in the logical form. It is a process of pragmatic adjustment bridging the gap between a concept encoded by a lexical item and a concept that is inferentially communicated. The process may consist of narrowing, loosening or a combination of the two, or the denotation of the item may partially overlap with the denotation of the concept communicated.

concept leads to a number of weak implicatures (2j)-(2k) regarding Mitt Romney neglecting employment on the national level if he became the US president.

### Echo used for ironical criticism

In the second advertisement selected for analysis, similarly, a fragment of a previous campaign advertisement for Mitt Romney is used in the advertisement for Barack Obama (CampaignAdCentral 2012c), though here echo is used to express irony. As mentioned above an echoic utterance may express various attitudes, some of which may be dissociative (varying from amused tolerance through disappointment to disgust, outrage or scorn) (Wilson and Sperber 2012: 130). Relevance theory presents an echoic account of verbal irony defining it as “echoing a tacitly attributed thought or utterance with a tacitly dissociative attitude.” (Wilson and Sperber 2004: 634). Within the framework irony is not treated as a natural kind, but it undergoes the same procedures and mechanisms as a basic use of language in its specific interpretive use, here echoic use.

The fragment of Romney's advertisement that starts Obama's advertisement comes from 2002 in which Romney is speaking at a public meeting before the elections for the Governor of Massachusetts.

- (3) Barack Obama for President 2012 Advertisement *Mosaic* (CampaignAdCentral 2012c)
  - (a) “*I’m gonna reduce taxes I’m gonna ...*”
  - (b) *As governor Mitt Romney **did** cut taxes on millionaires like himself.*
  - (c) *But he raised taxes and fees on everyone else. 1.5 billion over 1000 fee hikes; on healthcare, on school bus rides, on milk [...]*
  - (d) *1.5 billion over 1000 fee hikes.*
  - (e) *Massachusetts Regulations; Massachusetts general laws, 2003-2006.*

The picture is changed into black and white indicating the negative attitude of the speaker to the echoed utterance. The part of Mitt Romney's advertisement echoed (3a), as in the previous case, supplies background context in which the utterance is to be processed, and also lowers the processing effort, which in turn ensures higher relevance and provides better accessibility of the intended interpretation. Moreover the effect is stronger than just reporting Mitt Romney's words; viewers can see and hear him say the promises that are shown to have been broken in the next part of the Obama advertisement.

In formulating the explicature (3a) for viewers, in order to arrive at the intended interpretation, need to activate a general assumption (4) and extend *Reduce taxes* to mean ‘Reduce taxes for the average citizen or the poor’.

- (4) Every citizen should be able to benefit from reducing taxes or at least the poorest (not the rich only).

The next utterance (3b) calls upon the already activated contextual assumption (who should receive tax cuts). The utterance echoes the thought attributed to Mitt Romney about reducing taxes, but immediately dissociates from the fact of who actually benefited from the cuts, which gives rise to the ironic interpretation. The dissociative attitude is indicated by the emphasis expressed by the very form and the stressing of *did* and the contrast between the general assumption of who should be granted tax reductions and who actually did benefit from them. The phrase *like himself* makes the assumption about the wealth of Mitt Romney more manifest and invites an implicature that he lowered the taxes for millionaires and for his own benefit as well, suggesting that his decisions are based on his own needs more than on the needs of the citizens.

The next part of the advertisement (3c) brings contrast: thirteen fee hikes are enumerated, each illustrated with a stock picture and accompanied with the subtitle (3d) and a slightly smaller subtitle (3e) indicating not only the source but also the credibility of the information. The fact that those who should have benefited actually lost money creates a clear contrast producing a sharp criticism of Mitt Romney, making the irony stronger. The advertisement is structured to first present the promises of Mitt Romney, then the promises are given an ironic comment and followed with some facts on the tax policy implemented by Romney as a Governor which strongly imply that he has broken the promises. The following implicatures (7a)-(7b) are part of the intended interpretation of the advertisement for Barack Obama given that the target audience of Obama would mostly see themselves as poor or average citizens and entreating the general assumptions (5)-(6). Consequently, a further set of implicatures (7c)-(7d) becomes available and most probably intended after accessing general assumptions (5)-(6) which are themselves highly manifest in the context of presidential campaign.

- (5) A good president cares about the needs of average or poor citizens.
- (6) A good president assures equal opportunities for all citizens.
- (7) Implicatures:
  - (a) Mitt Romney's past promises did not help the average or the poor citizens but the rich like himself.
  - (b) Mitt Romney's decisions are based on his own needs more than on the needs of the citizens.
  - (c) Mitt Romney is not a good candidate for president
  - (d) Mitt Romney is not going to be a good president.

The strength of a campaign advertisement structured in the above-presented manner lies in the very mechanism of irony and criticism it often involves. It is common that ironical utterances are directed at a particular target or victim. "The targets are the originators of the utterances or opinions being echoed, since it is

from them that the speaker dissociates himself.” (Sperber and Wilson 1981: 560)  
 When additionally the utterance is critical the irony is even stronger.

### Echo used for strong ironical criticism

The last campaign advertisement selected for analysis is constructed in two disjoined layers (with the exception of the first 4 seconds of the advertisement, (8a)). The voice on one hand and the picture with subtitles on the other provide evidence for opposing propositions. The first seconds of the advertisement present Mitt Romney singing (not accompanied by any instrument) the famous patriotic song “O beautiful for spacious skies” at a public meeting in The Villages, Florida as the subtitle (8a) indicates, (again providing the necessary contextual information for the intended interpretation of the advertisement). In the remaining part of the advertisement the voice of Mitt Romney singing continues; however, the pictures first show deserted work places, factories and offices (8b)-(8d), then change to a Swiss landscape with a Swiss flag in the wind in the foreground (8e), and finally to palm trees and a sandy beach (8f)-(8g). The last lines (8h)-(8i) are presented on a black background.

(8) Barack Obama for President 2012 Advertisement *Firms* (CampaignAdCentral 2012b)

VOICE	SUBTITLES
a) <i>‘O beautiful for spacious skies,</i>	<i>The Villages, FL 1/30/12</i>
b) <i>For amber waves of grain,</i>	<b><i>In business,</i></b> <b><i>Mitt Romney’s firms shipped jobs to Mexico.</i></b> <i>Los Angeles Times 6/2/00</i>
c) <i>For purple mountain majesties</i>	<b><i>In business,</i></b> <b><i>Mitt Romney’s firms shipped jobs to Mexico.</i></b> <b><i>And China.</i></b> <i>Los Angeles Times 6/2/00</i>
d) <i>Above the fruited plain!</i>	<b><i>As Governor, Romney outsourced jobs to</i></b> <b><i>India.</i></b> <i>The Boston Globe 5/1/12</i>
e) <i>America!</i>	<b><i>He had millions in a Swiss bank account.</i></b> <i>ABC NEWS 1/26/12</i>
f) <i>America!</i>	<b><i>Tax havens like Bermuda...</i></b> <i>Vanity Fair August 2012</i>
g) <i>God shed His grace</i>	<b><i>And the Cayman Islands.</i></b> <i>ABC NEWS 1/18/12</i>
h) <i>on thee,</i>	<b><i>MITT ROMNEY’S NOT A SOLUTION</i></b>
i) <i>And crown thy good with</i> <i>brotherhood’</i>	<b><i>HE’S THE PROBLEM.</i></b>

The voice of Mitt Romney singing the patriotic song interpretatively resembles and echoes his expression of patriotic feelings, while the subtitles supported by the pictures provide evidence for what would rather be classified as his



unpatriotic activates. The pictures present deserted production halls, the surroundings of factories and meeting rooms providing suggestive illustration of the subtitles on shipping jobs and outsourcing arranged by Romney's firms. The subtitles (8b)-(8d) give a very limited amount of information; their interpretation is guided by the chosen pictures. The Swiss flag over a Swiss landscape and the ocean, palm trees and sandy beach provide illustration of Romney's overseas accounts. The content provided by the subtitles and strengthened by the pictures provides a unified criticism of Romney's actions and identify the attitude of the authors to the patriotic feelings echoed by Mitt Romney singing as dissociative. The picture and subtitles provide the dissociative attitude as well as the clues as to ways in which Mitt Romney is not patriotic. The overall contrast and intended clash of the visual and the audio modes are especially evident in lines (8b)-(8d) where the song praises America's natural resources while the pictures and subtitles present Mitt Romney using the resources of two foreign countries. And the lines (8e)-(8f) where the very name *America*, provided by the voice, clashes with *Swiss bank account*, *Bermuda* and *the Cayman Islands*, provided by the subtitles, give rise to a number of implicatures concerning ways in which Mitt Romney would like to be seen as loving the country and being patriotic by singing the song, but at the same time would not like to share his wealth by paying taxes which he can avoid. The strong irony makes the criticism stronger and evokes interpretation, i.e. strong implicatures (9a)-(9b), that Romney in his campaign is doing what it takes to win, and further implicatures (9c)-(9d) that he cannot be trusted and therefore is not a good candidate for US president.

- (9) Strong implicatures:
  - (a) Mitt Romney is not genuine but cynical.
  - (b) Mitt Romney makes people believe he is patriotic while his important decisions are not patriotic.
  - (c) Mitt Romney cannot be trusted.
  - (d) Mitt Romney is not a good candidate for US president.
- (10) A good candidate for president, like the President himself, should be patriotic, showing their patriotism in everyday activities and not just its tokens such as, for example, singing a patriotic song.

The criticism and resulting irony are that strong because they relate to the general assumption (10) about the very core qualities of a candidate who can become the president of a country, entertained by both the viewers and the candidates. The clashing materials of the audio and visual modes discredit Mitt Romney as a good candidate; they criticise and reject him as even a candidate.

The last two lines of subtitles (8h)-(8i) are another case of echo used for strong ironical criticism; however, here echo is not in the form of material taken over from an opponent's advertisement or other sources like newspaper's reports. In this case, what is echoed is a well-known paraphrase (12) of the quote attributed to

Eldridge Cleaver “There is no more neutrality in the world. You either have to be part of the solution or you are going to be part of the problem.” The words are linked to encouraging people to take action in social change or else they would be an obstacle in that change. The assumption (12) activated in the inferential process of subtitle (8h) is triggered by an ad hoc concept SOLUTION\* (11) constructed in processing of the statement to achieve optimal relevance (naturally the literal meaning would not yield a relevant interpretation). The slight pause after the statement gives enough time to formulate implicatures (13a)-(13f) and an ironic interpretation arising from the mismatch between the subtitle (8h) and the assumptions (14 a)-(14b), and in this way providing clues on the dissociative attitude of the authors towards the very assumption (entertained in Mitt Romney’s advertisement) that Mitt Romney might be regarded a good candidate for president. The speaker in the advertisement overtly states that Mitt Romney is not a SOLUTION\* expecting him (by modifying slightly the phrase echoed) to be more than just “a part of the solution” but “to be the solution” which hinges upon the assumption (10) and (14b).

(11) SOLUTION\* /ad hoc concept/ – a candidate for president who would support changes taking care of the citizens as well, a credible candidate for president, one should vote for.

(12) If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

(13) Strong implicatures:

- (a) Mitt Romney does not support change.
- (b) Mitt Romney wants to keep the status quo.
- (c) Mitt Romney is not a one who leads the SOLUTION\*.
- (d) One should search for/ pick a different candidate.
- (e) Mitt Romney is not a good candidate for president.
- (f) Mitt Romney is a bad candidate for president.

(14) Assumptions:

- (a) A candidate for president should be a SOLUTION\* for the country.
- (b) A candidate for president should not only be a part of the SOLUTION\*, but should lead the SOLUTION\*.

The very last line of subtitles (8i) presents an even stronger statement as the authors of the advertisement once more do not use a direct echo of the paraphrase (12), which would then be “he’s part of the problem”, but go a step further and use a more blunt statement “he’s the problem” producing a strong ironical criticism. Naturally, the stronger statement invites implicatures (16a) – (16b) constructed with the use of already active assumption (12) also containing an ad hoc concept (15), which shares with the literal interpretation the properties of being potentially harmful and one that should be avoided. In this way Mitt Romney is seen as a source of potential threat if elected as the US president. The strong ironic criticism arises from the clash between the general assumptions

about a candidate for the president (14 a) – (14b) and the statement (8i) together with the implicature (16a) which overtly indicates that the authors again dissociate themselves from the idea that Mitt Romney (or anyone else for that matter) regards him as a good candidate for US president.

(15) PROBLEM\* /ad hoc concept/ a candidate who opposes change and does not live up to his declarations, one should not vote for.

(16) Strong implicatures:

- (a) Mitt Romney is more than part of the PROBLEM\*, he is the source/core of the PROBLEM\*.
- (b) One should not only abandon Mitt Romney as a candidate and pick a different candidate for president, one should rather avoid him, as potentially harmful; one should oppose him and find a solution.

The general conclusion which in relevance framework is termed overall or global relevance (Kitis 1999), and defined as the relevance of a longer piece of text (here a Barack Obama advertisement) to the hearer / viewer, is expressed in (16b).

The advertisement is regarded as one of the strongest ones, its undeniable power lies in the final lines which question and finally seek to deprive Mitt Romney of the very right to be a candidate for president of the US. The ad hoc concepts of SOLUTION\* and PROBLEM\* strongly emphasize the division into two camps, those who want to act the way they say and those who just want to keep the status quo and if they do make any declarations these are not supported by their actions. It is that fundamental criticism, strengthened by irony, that makes the advertisement so powerful and almost lethal.

## Conclusions

In political campaign advertisements echoed material taken from a rival's advertisement is used to exert a mild or a strong criticism on the rival. Its purpose is to present particular contextual assumptions about the opponent in the most evident way (i.e. the directly echoed linguistic material of the opponent's advertisements). Next the material echoed is contrasted with some new information; for example either the opponent's decisions are directly reported (e.g. tax rises) or reports of quality newspapers are echoed. The purpose of an advertisement constructed in such a way is to contrast the echoed opponent's promises with some opposite material (be it his own words, his deeds, or news reports). As a result of a regular comprehension process of such discrepancies the viewers arrive at the intended interpretation; that is, criticism of the rival candidate. The criticism is often pinpointed with a final phrase that functions as a coda and ensures the intended interpretation. At the same time the credibility of

the speaker is indicated and the responsibility for the criticism is on the opponent himself, as those are his own words confronted with some other objective data (their source is always presented in the advertisement). It is a strong mechanism used to discredit the rival.

In some cases the echo material is accompanied with a dissociative attitude of the speaker, which results in irony and ironical criticism. When it emerges its strength lies in the very mechanism of irony. The target of the irony is the originator of the echoed material; here in the material analysed it is the political opponent, Mitt Romney. Therefore, when accepted, irony makes the viewer stand on one side with the speaker and dissociate themselves from what is attributed to the target, excluding him from the group. In short, irony introduces a division line producing two groups: “us” and “them” (or “us” and “him”, the opponent). The opponent is no longer part of our group. This exclusion can be seen to be the core of the irony's strength. Some viewers may readily accept the irony and following the speaker dissociate themselves from the assumptions about the political opponent and exclude him from the group, and some would not accept the irony, but this issue, of whether the viewers accept what they interpret, is a subject for another study.

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