



You can fool all the people some of the time

Description

The theories about metaphor of the American cognitive linguist George Lakoff have long informed my understanding of [language and of design](#). Lakoff also *weighs in* on US politics (to use a sporting metaphor).

His recent interview on a [podcast](#) and his [opinion piece](#) in the Guardian are of the moment. I quote [a passage about tweeting](#), where Lakoff denigrates Trump, but also castigates reporters who feel bound to report what Trump says, even as they are compelled to refute his falsehoods.

Trump's tweets are not random, they are strategic. There are four types: 1) Pre-emptive framing, to get a framing advantage. 2) Diversion, to divert attention when news could embarrass him. 3) Deflection: Shift the blame to others. And 4) trial balloon - test how much you can get away with. Reporting, and therefore repeating, Trump's tweets just gives him more power. There is an alternative. Report the true frames that he is trying to pre-empt. Report the truth that he is trying to divert attention from. Put the blame where it belongs. Bust the trial balloon. Report what the strategies are trying to hide.

Snake oil

Potent word combinations benefit their perpetrators and put the opposition off guard. Powerful metaphors circulate and frame people's expectations as they acquiesce slowly and inexorably to a particular point of view.

That's the art of persuasion. Lakoff argues that the people most interested in his theories about framing and metaphor are advertisers and others whose job is to sell.

Both honourable and unscrupulous salespersons and politicians purvey catchy [memes](#) that repeat, circulate and imprint themselves into our daily dealings.

Memes can also backfire. Lakoff shows that when Richard Nixon asserted "I am not a crook," that sentiment circulated more readily as "I am a crook" which by all accounts happened to be

true. I suspect thatâ??s happening to some contemporary memes: â??thereâ??s been no collusion,â??
â??no obstruction of justice.â??

Any skilled educator, manager, counsellor or guardian knows the power of positive and well chosen
word combinations that encourage, persuade and edify. We also know how stock phrases can divide,
discourage and oppress.

I like Lakoffâ??s analysis of the unpresidential rallying cries and tweets, the perils wrought upon the
world, and his suggestions about how to ameliorate their effects.

Truth will out

But there are countervailing forces not least the scorn and derision by some at least in the population
who are equally knowing, who resist, who are alert to deception, who refuse to enter the mirky waters of
rank dishonesty, and who retain a sense of the absurd â?? and a sense of humour.

â??You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you
cannot fool all the people all the time.â??

Thatâ??s a nineteenth century US advertising motto, [often attributed to Abraham Lincoln](#) â?? falsely I
think. â??Truth will outâ?? wrote William Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*.



References

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Category

1. Metaphor

Tags

1. Lakoff
2. media
3. trump
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