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A Functional Analysis of French and South Korean Political Leaders' Debates

Yun Son Choi
William L. Benoit

Abstract

This study reports two replications of research employing the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse, analyzing political leaders' debates from one European and one Asian country. French political debates from 1988 and 1995 and South Korean debates from 1997 and 2002 were content analyzed using the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse. Acclaims were the most common function, followed by attacks and then defenses, in both French and South Korean debates. Policy was discussed more often than character in French and South Korean debates. In France, but not in South Korea, incumbent party candidates acclaimed significantly more and attacked less than challengers. Similarly, in France, but not South Korea, incumbents used past deeds significantly more often to acclaim—and less to attack—than challengers. Finally, general goals and ideals were used more as the basis for acclaims than attacks in French and South Korean debates. Implications of these results are discussed.

Introduction

Most research on political debates has focused on American presidential debates (books on presidential debates include Benoit et al., 2002; Benoit & Wells, 1996; Bishop, Meadow, & Jackson-Beeck, 1980; Bitzer & Rueter, 1980; Carlin & McKinney, 1994; Dailey, Hinck, & Hinck, 2008; Friedenberg, 1994, 1997; Hellweg, Pfau, & Brydon, 1992; Hinck, 1993; Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988; Kraus, 1962, 1979, 2000; Lanoue & Schrott, 1991; Martel, 1983; Schroeder, 2000; or Swerdlow, 1987). However, debates among candidates for countries' leaders (e.g., presidents, chancellors, prime minister) have occurred around the world in such countries as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Israel, New Zealand, Scotland, South Korea, Sweden, Poland, Taiwan, and the Ukraine. In fact, Asard and Gronbeck (2000) observe that Swedish leaders' debates have taken place since 1948 (the year of the first American presidential primary debate; Benoit et al., 2002). Ward and Walsh (2000) noted that a political debate was televised in Australia in 1958, two years before the U.S. Nixon-Kennedy debates (although this Australian debate did not feature the leaders of the two major parties).

Televised political debates have several important advantages as a medium for campaign communication. Coleman (2000) offers several reasons underlying the importance of these events:

Firstly, televised debates are the best way of reaching a large audience of voters. Most voters obtain their political information from television more than any other source. . . . Secondly, there is an impressive body of data to indicate that televised debates have an educational impact. . . . Thirdly, televised debates help to equalize access to the mass media. . . . Fourthly, televised debates allow the public to come as close as they can to auditioning the candidates for national leadership. . . . Another advantage to the democratic process of television debates is that they force rivals to know each other's positions. (pp. 9-11)

Nor are these the only reasons for the merit of political debates. Televised debates feature the leading candidates discussing many of the same topics simultaneously, which helps voters choose between those contenders. Most debates are 60 to 120 minutes in length, providing voters an extended opportunity to learn about the candidates. The fact that candidates can encounter an unanticipated question or remark from an opponent could mean that debates may provide a more candid view of the candidates than possible with other media. The direct confrontation afforded by a debate provides candidates with an opportunity to correct misstatements, intentional or unintentional, from opponents. Such clash could benefit voters. Another advantage of presidential debates is the huge audience: Tens of millions of voters tune in to American presidential debates. In Germany, 84% of voters watched one of the three debates in 1972 and nearly half watched all three (Baker & Norpoth, 1981); two-thirds of the public saw at least one of the two 2002 chancellor debates and 41% watched both encounters (Faas & Maier, 2004). Finally, research establishes that American presidential debates have important effects on voters, creating issue knowledge, influencing perceptions of the candidates' character, and at times altering vote choice (Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003). Research confirms effects of debates on issues (Jorgensen, Kock, & Rorbeck, 1998) and between candidates (Baker & Norpoth, 1981; Blais & Boyer, 1996; Faas & Maier, 2004; Lanoue, 1991; Schrott, 1990; Schrott & Lanoue, 1992) in other countries. For these reasons, political debates around the world certainly merit scholarly attention.

Literature Review

Several studies have investigated the nature of non-U.S. political advertising (Chang, 2000; Kaid, 1999; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Lee & Benoit, 2004; Tak, Kaid, & Lee, 1997; Wen, Benoit, & Wu, 2004). Unfortunately, content analysis of non-U.S. political debates is relatively rare, despite the fact that debates have occurred in many other countries as indicated earlier. Baker and Norpoth (1981) analyzed the 1972 West German parliamentary debates (featuring the leaders of the four parties of the Bundestag). They report that the "central focus" of the debates was primarily "issues and, secondarily, ethics [character]" (p. 237). They also reported that the debates were a "struggle between the government spokesmen (SPD and FDP) defending the record of their government and the opposition (CDU and CSU) spokesman attacking the record" (p. 336).

Gilbert (1982) discussed presidential debates in the US (1960, 1976, 1980) and France (1981), considering context, highlights of the debates, and public opinion poll data. Some research on non-U.S. debates, as noted earlier, investigates audience effects (Jorgensen, Kock, & Rorbeck, 1998; Schrott & Lanoue, 1992). Much research (e.g., many of the chapters in Coleman, 2000; Asard & Gronbeck, 2000) is designed as historical or conceptual treatments rather than analyses of the content of these encounters. Galasinski (1998) identified strategies employed to break the rules of Polish debates in 1995 (e.g., candidates were expected to respond only to questions, not to address one another directly). Matsaganis and Weingarten (2001) compared the 2000 Greek prime minister debate with the first 2000 American presidential debate, discussing issues, strategy, and style.

Recently Functional Theory has been extended to political leaders' debates in other countries: Israeli debates (Benoit & Sheaffer, 2006), Ukrainian debates (Benoit & Klyukovski, 2006), and Taiwanese debates (Benoit, Wen, & Yu, 2007). Acclaims outnumbered attacks, which in turn were more common than defenses in Israel. One of the two candidates in the Ukraine and Taiwanese debates also acclaimed more than they attacked (challengers sometimes attacked more than they acclaimed; as we shall see, challengers tend to attack more than incumbents). In all three countries, policy comments were more common in debates than utterances about character and the incumbent acclaimed more and attacked less than the challenger. It is clear that some characteristics of the content of political leaders' debates have been found in several countries. It is important to understand that replication is an essential component of the research process because it offers higher levels of confidence in the findings obtained from scholarship (Rosenthal, 1991). Lamal (1991) noted that replication is "necessary because our knowledge is corrigible" (p. 31). In a similar vein, Boster (2002) observed that communication "scholars pay relatively little attention to replication" (p. 477). Replication is even more important in cross-cultural studies. Lustig and Anderson (1991) argued that "The fact that many social research results fail to generalize across international cultural boundaries has become a widely accepted principle (for example, see the essays in Samovar & Porter, 1988) (p. 298). Thus, this study extends existing research on Functional Theory by content analyzing French and South Korean debates. Given research on debates in Israel, Taiwan, the Ukraine and the United States (Benoit et al., 2003, 2005, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Wells, 1999) using Functional Theory, it will be useful to content analyze French and South Korean debates from the same point of view.

Theoretical Underpinning

Benoit's (1999, 2007) Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse will provide the theoretical grounding for this investigation. Benoit articulates several basic propositions in his theory. First, he posits that voting is a comparative act. All that is necessary for a political candidate to obtain a citizen's vote (if a vote is cast) is to be perceived as *preferable* to one's opponents. This means, second, that candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents; one

cannot be preferable to another candidate if the two contenders are indistinguishable. Of course, candidates strive to capture the votes of citizens who are undecided or independent, whose beliefs frequently lie in the middle of the political spectrum (see, e.g., Downs, 1958). This leads them to take some similar positions as they seek the support of the same voters. For example, Page (1978) noted that Downs'

economic theory of democracy calls for a candidate's policy stands to echo the policy preferences of the public, and many spatial models—especially those of the public opinion variety—predict that the midpoint of public opinion on issues has an important influence upon the stands that a candidate takes. (p. 29)

Page found that in 1968 “Across a wide variety of issues, then, both Humphrey and Nixon took positions which corresponded fairly closely with what the average American favored” (p. 47). Importantly, Page also reported that the two candidates *disagreed* with the mid-point of public opinion on 15% of the 72 issues he examined: Humphrey was more liberal and Nixon was more conservative on some issues. So, although candidates adopt similar positions on many issues, there must be some distinctions or voters would have no basis for preferring one candidate over the other.

Third, political campaign messages are the means for establishing distinctions between candidates. Benoit's fourth assumption is that campaign discourse can establish preferability via three functions: acclaims (positive statements about oneself), attacks (criticisms of one's opponent), and defenses (refutations of attacks from an opponent). These three functions work as a rough form of cost-benefit analysis as citizens compare candidates: acclaims can increase one's own benefits, attacks can increase an opponent's costs, and defenses can reduce one's alleged costs (this should not be taken to imply that voters quantify costs or benefits or engage in mathematical calculations; the point is that acclaims tend to increase perceived benefits, attacks have a tendency to increase apparent costs, and defenses are capable of reducing costs). Benoit (2007) also postulates that these three functions can occur on two potential topics, policy and character.

Functional theory also further sub-divides each policy utterance into three variants: past deeds (accomplishments or failures), future plans (specific campaign promises) and general goals (objectives). Character comments are divided into three forms: personal qualities (personality traits), leadership ability (experience in office), and ideals (values or principles). Examples of attacks and acclaims on the various forms of policy and character can be found in Benoit and Brazeal (2002) or Benoit and Harthcock (1999).

Acclaims, in principle, have no drawbacks. That is, it is possible for a particular acclaim to be offensive to voters, the act of identifying a candidate's desirable quality is not offensive. Attacks, on the other hand, could generate some backlash because many voters report that they do not like mudslinging (Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975). Finally, defenses have three potential drawbacks (Benoit,

2007). They usually occur in a candidate's weaker area, so responding to them takes the candidate off-message. They may foster the impression that the candidate is reactive instead of proactive. Finally, one must identify the attack to refute it in a defense. This means that a defense may remind or inform voters of a potential weakness (this drawback is less of a concern in debates because voters probably just say the opponent attacked the defending candidate). The first prediction is that acclaims will be more common than attacks and attacks will outnumber defenses.

H1. Acclaims will be the most frequent theme defenses the least common theme.

Furthermore, public opinion poll data shows that, at least in America, more voters say that policy is a more important determinant of their vote than character (Benoit, 2003). Because we expect candidates to attempt to adapt their messages to audience preferences, we expect that:

H2. Policy themes will be more common than character themes.

Incumbents usually have various advantages, such as greater name recognition than the opponent, greater ability to attract media coverage, and the ability to provide governmental largess to certain areas of the country. Some voters need to have a reason to "change horses in the middle of the stream" or switch from the incumbent to another president. This means that challengers tend to attack more, and acclaim less, than incumbents.

H3. Incumbent party candidates will use more acclaiming themes, and fewer attacking themes, than challengers.

Functional Theory highlights the incumbent's record as a resource that both candidates use, although in quite different ways. The incumbent looks for successes during the first term in office and uses those accomplishments as the basis for acclaims. The challenger, on the other hand, looks for failures and uses them as the basis for attacks. Of course, the challenger usually has a record in office, but the incumbent's record, *as president*, is arguably the better evidence for evaluating a person running for president than a challenger's record in a different office (e.g., governors and mayors have little foreign policy experience; senators do not have executive branch experience). So, although the records of both candidates are discussed, there is a tendency to discuss the incumbent's record even more than the challenger's, and we predict:

H4. Incumbent candidates will use past deeds more for acclaiming themes, and less for attacking themes, than challengers.

Finally, both general goals and ideals are easier to acclaim than to attack (Benoit, 2007). Few would disagree with the goal of creating more jobs or making the country safe from terrorists. Who could dispute ideals such as freedom or justice? We predict that both general goals and ideals will be used more to acclaim than to attack.

H5. General goals will be used more frequently in acclaiming than attacking themes.

H6. Ideals will be used more frequently in acclaiming than attacking themes.

Although this study does not collect data on effects of political campaign messages, reason exists to believe that the functions and topics of these messages merit scholarly attention. Reinneman and Maurer (2005) report evidence that viewers of German debates respond differently to acclaims than attacks. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) contend that negative campaigns (where attacks are more common than acclaims) can decrease turnout by voters. Benoit (2003) found that American presidential candidates who discuss policy more, and character less, than opponents are more likely to win elections. This theory concerns concepts that matter in election campaign messages.

Context

Readers may not be equally familiar with the political systems of France, South Korea, and the United States. Obviously these three cultures have differences. However, the key assumptions of Functional Theory apply in all three countries: Candidates who seek political office (and are not running only to raise an issue) do so by persuading voters that they are preferable to opponents; Candidates for public office can argue for preferability on grounds of policy and character.

Two rounds of voting occur in France; the top two candidates in the first round compete again in a second election. The term of office was seven years until 2002 when it was reduced to five years. There is no limit on the number of terms a candidate may serve if re-elected. Televised debates began in France in the 1974 presidential election (although in 2002 Chirac refused to debate his opponent because his opponent was too extreme). French debates occur between the first and second votes so only two candidates participate in these debates. One debate of two hours (it sometimes runs 10-20 minutes longer) addresses four topics: politics, economy, social issues, and foreign policy. The format in France is confrontational, with both candidates sitting at the same table facing one another. The French joke that the candidates are “near enough to slap the opponent’s face,” although they have yet to come to blows. Moderators have a very limited role, introducing the candidates, describing the format, and shifting the topic (they only occasionally ask questions). Candidates are free to ask questions of their opponents, answer questions, attack their opponents, or rebut attacks from opponents. Debates were held in 1974, 1981, 1988, 1995, and 2007 but the texts of only 1988 and 1995 are available. In 1988, Francois Mitterrand was the incumbent party candidate and Jacques Chirac the challenger. In 1995, Lionel Jospin was the incumbent party candidate and Chirac the challenger.

South Korea only uses one “round” of voting and in some years more than two candidates competes. The term of office has been five years since 1992. No candidate is allowed more than one term in office, and there is no Vice President for South Korea; these two factors may limit the effects of incumbency. This

means there is never incumbent candidate who seeks re-election; candidates run as members of the party of the president. Official televised debates first occurred in 1997 in South Korea (Hoi-Chang Lee was the incumbent party candidate; Dae-Jung Kim and In-Jae Lee were challengers) and were held again in 2002 (Moo-Hyuan Noh was the incumbent party candidate; Dae-Jung Kim and Hoi-Chang Lee were challengers). Three debates were held in both elections. The first debate concerned politics, foreign policy, and national security. Debate two focused on the economy. The final debate concerned such topics as social issues, culture, and education. Because there can be multiple candidates, popularity requirements determine who is permitted to debate. As in the United States, the moderator plays a larger role in controlling the content of debates. So far, the “town hall” format used in some recent U.S. presidential debates has not been used in South Korea.

The president of the United States is elected every four years; presidents are limited to two terms. The two major political parties in America are Republican and Democratic. General campaign debates have been held in 1960 and from 1976-2004. The debates of only one year included a third party candidate, Ross Perot in 1992 (eligibility is determined by the popularity of candidates as determined by public opinion polls and the Commission for Presidential Debates); we chose to focus on the candidates from the two major political parties in America. The number of debates featuring the two major party candidates has varied from one (1980) to four (1960), with most years having two or three debates. After 1960, when the four debates were one hour long, all presidential debates have been for ninety minutes. A moderator controls the format and asks questions or controls questions from journalists or, occasionally, voters. Candidates are usually limited to ninety seconds or less for each statement (answer to a question or response). Some years included opening or closing statements from the candidates. See the Appendix for a list of all candidates, incumbency, and election outcomes.

Sample

This study analyzed political candidate debates in two countries other than the United States. France and South Korea were selected for this study. First, we wanted to examine debates from a European country and from an Asian country to provide diverse texts for analysis. Second, we wanted to use countries that were not too dissimilar from the U.S. in order to facilitate comparison. Furthermore, our choices were severely limited by (1) the availability of texts of political leaders debates and (2) the availability of transcripts in languages with which the audiences were familiar (English, French, Korean). In all three countries (America, France, South Korea) the president is elected directly by citizens; in contrast, for example, in other countries such as Germany or Canada, voters do not cast ballots for the chancellor but for representatives from competing political parties to the Bundestag; the party or coalition of parties after the election then in control selects the chancellor or prime minister. Finally, we were able to obtain transcripts of debates from two different elections in both countries: 1988 and 1995 in France, and 1997 and 2002 in South Korea. Although debates have

been held in other years, we were unable to obtain transcripts of other debates from these countries. Data from content analysis of American presidential debates (Benoit et al., 2005, 2005; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Benoit & Wells, 1996; Wells, 1999) will also be reported to provide a point of comparison for the new data from France and South Korea.

Method

Content analysis was employed to test the predictions advanced here. The procedures replicated exactly the method employed in previous work applying Functional Theory to political campaign debates (Benoit, 2007). First, the unit of analysis was the theme, so each debate was unitized into themes (we also use the terms assertion and claim as synonyms). Berelson (1952) explained that a theme is “an assertion about a subject” (p. 18); Holsti (1969) defined a theme as “a single assertion about some subject” (p. 116). A theme is therefore a argument (argument_i; see O’Keefe, 1977) about the candidates (or parties). Because rhetoric is enthymematic, themes vary in length from a phrase to several sentences. Second, each theme was classified by function (acclaim, attack, or defense). The third step was to identify the topic of each theme as either policy or character. Next, the form of policy (past deed, future plan, general goal) or of character (personal quality, leadership ability, ideals) was identified. Two coders who were fluent in French and two who were fluent in Korean were trained to use the Functional approach and independently coded these debates (each coded about 55% of the text, providing a 10% overlap for calculating inter-coder reliability). 1168 themes were identified in the two French debates (584 themes per debate), 1982 themes were found in the six South Korean debates (315 themes per debate), and 7155 themes were located in the 23 American debates (311 themes per debate); recall that French debates tend to be longer than debates in the other countries. Inter-coder reliability was quantified using Cohen’s (1960) *kappa* using a random sample of approximately 10% of each debate transcript. For the French debates, reliability was .82 for functions, 1.0 for topics, .92 for form of policy, and .83 for form of character. For the South Korean debates, reliability was .87 for functions, .80 for topics, .86 for form of policy, and .90 for form of character. These levels are acceptable: Landis and Koch (1977) indicate that *kappas* of over .80 are “almost perfect” (p. 165). These relatively high figures for reliability may indicate that these variables (tone, topic) are more manifest than latent. Because the content analysis produces frequency data, *chi-square* goodness of fit tests will be used for hypotheses 1, 2, 5, and 6, and 2x2 *chi-square* for cross-categorized data will be employed for statistical analysis.

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that acclaims would be more common than attacks and that defenses would be the least common function. This prediction was supported for French (acclaims: 61%, attacks: 33%, defenses: 6%; $\chi^2 [df = 2] = 542.64, p < .0001$), South Korean (acclaims: 55%, attacks: 35%, defenses:

10%; $\chi^2 [df = 2] = 595.15, p < .0001$), and American debates (acclaims: 57%, attacks: 35%, defenses: 8%; $\chi^2 [df = 2] = 2494.28, p < .0001$). For example, Mitterand offered this example of an acclaim in the French debate of 1988: "I propose a minimum guaranteed income for the poorest." Although this proposal is bound to be controversial with some voters, other voters do want to offer assistance to the poor. In contrast, Chirac criticized Mitterrand's record on crime in the same debate: "From 1981 to 1986, there were 600 more crimes and offenses more per day." Obviously, high crime rates are undesirable, making this statement an attack. Kim was accused of having broken his promise to not to run for office. He offered this illustration of a defense in a 1997 South Korean debate: "I have already made a public apology for breaking my word about retiring from the political world." As Table 1 reveals, acclaims in U.S. presidential debates ranged from 49%-74%, with a mean of 55%, the same as the mean for acclaims in South Korea and fairly close to the means for French (61%) acclaims. American debates used attacks in 24% to 42% of utterances, with a mean of 35%, which is the same as the mean in South Korean debates (35%) and very close to the means for attacks in French (33%) debates. Furthermore, defenses in U.S. debates varied from 2% to 14% with a mean of 10%. Again, this is the same proportion in South Korea (10%) and fairly close to the mean for French debates (6%). Clearly, the debates in all three countries employed acclaims most frequently and defenses least often.¹

Table 1. *Functions of French, South Korean, and American Debates*

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	$\chi^2 (df = 2)$
French				
1988	353 (59%)	219 (37%)	25 (4%)	542.64 $p < .0001$
1995	363 (64%)	167 (29%)	41 (7%)	
Total	716 (61%)	386 (33%)	66 (6%)	
South Korean				
1997	485 (54%)	323 (36%)	91 (10%)	595.15 $p < .0001$
2002	559 (56%)	345 (35%)	89 (9%)	
Total	1044 (55%)	668 (35%)	180 (10%)	
American				
1960	329 (49%)	258 (39%)	83 (12%)	2494.28 $p < .0001$
1976	363 (52%)	294 (42%)	47 (7%)	
1980	114 (50%)	88 (39%)	23 (10%)	
1984	239 (53%)	164 (36%)	51 (11%)	
1988	550 (59%)	301 (33%)	75 (8%)	
1992	309 (52%)	203 (34%)	85 (14%)	
1996	548 (56%)	346 (36%)	78 (8%)	
2000	860 (74%)	281 (24%)	24 (2%)	
2004	738 (51%)	566 (39%)	138 (10%)	
Total	4050 (57%)	2501 (35%)	604 (8%)	

Hypothesis two concerned the use of policy and character, predicting that policy would be more common than character. This prediction was also confirmed. In France, the debates discussed policy eight times as often as character (89% to 11%; $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 669.58, p < .0001$). The South Korean debates emphasized policy over five times as much as character (84% policy, 16% character; $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 803.7, p < .0001$). In the United States, policy was discussed three times as often as character (74% policy, 25% character; $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 1580.76, p < .0001$). In 1997, Kim offered this example of a statement on policy: “The issue is about international competitiveness. The best solution will be to maintain or improve international competitiveness, without lay-offs.” Clearly, international trade is a policy topic. In contrast, Lee discussed his leadership ability, or experience in office, illustrating a character comment: “I have 30 years of experience as a judge. I also held other public offices, such as the Chairman of the Board of Audit and Inspection and Prime Minister. I was also the President in the main political party” (2002). Policy in U.S. debates varied from 66% to 93% (mean of 76%), whereas character ranged from 7% to 34% (mean of 25%). Although debates in all three countries stressed policy more than character, statistical analysis reveals that American debates discussed character more, and policy less, than either French ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 141.84, p < .0001$) or South Korean ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 106.39, p < .0001$) debates.

Table 2. *Topics of French, South Korean, and American Debates*

	Policy	Character	$\chi^2 (df = 1)$
French			
1988	498 (87%)	74 (13%)	
1995	483 (91%)	47 (8%)	669.58
Total	981 (89%)	121 (11%)	$p < .0001$
South Korean			
1997	666 (82%)	142 (18%)	
2002	777 (86%)	127 (14%)	803.7
Total	1443 (84%)	269 (16%)	$p < .0001$
American			
1960	458 (78%)	129 (22%)	
1976	565 (86%)	92 (14%)	
1980	188 (93%)	14 (7%)	
1984	321 (80%)	82 (28%)	
1988	561 (66%)	290 (34%)	1580.76 $p < .0001$
1992	374 (73%)	138 (27%)	
1996	620 (69%)	274 (31%)	
2000	865 (76%)	276 (24%)	
2004	933 (72%)	371 (28%)	
Total	4885 (75%)	1666 (25%)	

The third hypothesis predicted that incumbents would acclaim more, and attack less, than challengers. In the French debates this prediction was confirmed, with incumbents acclaiming more (69% to 62%), and attacking less (31% to 38%) than challengers ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 4.6, p < .05, V = .07$). Although the proportions of acclaims and attacks were ordered in the predicted direction in South Korea, the frequency of use of acclaims and attacks by incumbents and challengers was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 1.7, ns$). The difference was significant for American debates, with incumbents acclaiming more (72% to 54%) and attacking less (28%, 46%) than challengers ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 235.88, p < .0001, V = .19$). See Table 3 for these data. Notice, however, that the effect size for the relationship between incumbency and function in American debates is noticeably larger ($V = .19$) than in France ($V = .07$).

Table 3. *Acclaims and Attacks by Incumbents versus Challengers in French, Korean, and American Debates*

	Acclaims	Attacks	$\chi^2 (df = 1)$
French Debates (1988, 1995)			
Incumbents	377 (69%)	171 (31%)	4.6, $p < .05, V = .07$
Challengers	341 (62%)	205 (38%)	
South Korean Debates (1997, 2002)			
Incumbents	304 (64%)	174 (36%)	1.7, <i>ns</i>
Challengers	742 (60%)	494 (40%)	
American Debates (1960, 1976-2004)			
Incumbents	2082 (72%)	800 (28%)	235.88, $p < .0001, V = .19$
Challengers	1968 (54%)	1702 (46%)	

The fourth prediction held that incumbent party candidates would utilize past deeds more as the basis for acclaims, and less for attacks, than challengers. This hypothesis was confirmed in the French debates, with the incumbent candidate acclaiming more (44% to 18%) and attacking less (56% to 82%) on past deeds than challengers ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 28.73, p < .0001, V = .26$). However, this hypothesis was not confirmed in the South Korean debates (the difference insignificant: $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 1.39, ns$). American debates revealed the predicted pattern, with incumbents acclaiming more (72% to 18%) and attacking less (28% to 82%) than challengers on past deeds ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 687.78, p < .00001, V = .55$). The effect size for this relationship in American debates was larger than in French debates ($V = .55, V = .26$, respectively). These data are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. *Acclaims and Attacks on Past Deeds by Incumbents versus Challengers in French, Korean, and American Debates*

	Acclaims	Attacks	χ^2 ($df = 1$)
French Debates (1988, 1995)			
Incumbents	45 (44%)	57 (56%)	28.73, $p < .0001$ $V = .26$
Challengers	60 (18%)	279 (82%)	
South Korean Debates (1997, 2002)			
Incumbents	75 (46%)	88 (54%)	1.39, <i>ns</i>
Challengers	126 (52.5%)	114 (47.5%)	
American Debates (1960, 1976-2004)			
Incumbents	737 (72%)	284 (28%)	687.78, $p < .0001$ $V = .55$
Challengers	225 (18%)	1046 (82%)	

The fifth hypothesis predicted that general goals would be used more frequently to acclaim than to attack. This expectation was confirmed in French (326 acclaims and 71 attacks on general goals; χ^2 [$df = 1$] = 162.5, $p < .0001$), South Korean (511 acclaims and 92 attacks on general goals; χ^2 [$df = 1$] = 289.76, $p < .0001$), and American (1349 acclaims and 230 attacks on general goals; χ^2 [$df = 1$] = 791.6, $p < .0001$) debates. These data are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. *Forms of Policy in French, South Korean, and American Debates*

	Past Deeds		Future Plans		General Goals	
French						
1988 Mitterrand (I)	41	58	18	8	74	10
Chirac (C)	105	73	27	13	58	13
1995 Jospin (I)	34	30	57	10	109	22
Chirac (C)	21	41	19	29	85	26
Total	201	202	121	60	326	71
South Korean						
1997 Lee (I)	18	26	33	13	79	17
Kim	21	69	55	7	92	10
Lee	12	59	54	14	76	11
2002 Lee	13	41	57	16	98	13
Noh (I)	27	31	47	19	68	18
Kwon	14	110	64	20	98	23
Total	105	336	310	89	511	92
American (1960, 1976-2004)						
Incumbents	737	284	318	158	575	119
Challengers	225	1046	404	134	774	111

French debates: acclaims versus attacks on general goals $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 162.5, p < .0001$.

South Korean debates: acclaims versus attacks on general goals $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 289.76, p < .0001$.

American Debates: acclaims versus attacks on general goals $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 791.6, p < .0001$.

The last hypothesis predicted that, as with general goals, ideals would be used more frequently to acclaim than to attack. Only three utterances concerned ideals in the two French debates analyzed here; all were acclaims. This is certainly in the predicted direction but with the number of ideals so small it cannot be considered to be very strong support. Somewhat strong evidence for H6 can be found in South Korean debates: 68 acclaims and 1 attack on ideals ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 63.14, p < .0001$). Candidates in U.S. presidential debates followed this pattern, with 413 acclaims and 91 attacks on ideals ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 204.44, p < .0001$). These data are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. *Forms of Character in French, South Korean, and American Debates*

	Personal Qualities		Leadership Ability		Ideals	
French						
1988 Mitterrand (I)	9	24	6	2	0	0
Chirac (C)	10	16	4	2	1	0
1995 Jospin (I)	19	7	7	0	1	0
Chirac (C)	7	2	3	0	1	0
Total	45	49	20	4	3	0
South Korean						
1997 Lee (I)	2	29	2	1	10	0
Kim	3	26	6	8	6	0
Lee	2	28	5	4	9	1
2002 Lee	9	16	6	1	10	0
Noh (I)	7	17	4	3	7	0
Kwon	4	17	0	0	26	0
Total	27	133	23	17	68	1
American (1960, 1976-2004)						
Incumbents	143	138	108	47	201	54
Challengers	178	225	175	118	212	37

French debates: too few instances to calculate acclaims versus attacks on ideals.
 South Korean debates: acclaims versus attacks on ideals $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 63.14, p < .0001$.

American debates: acclaims versus attacks on ideals $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 204.44, p < .0001$.

Implications

The two replications reported here provide support for the claim that some factors influencing the production of political campaign discourse work across cultures. Overall, acclaims are the most common function, attacks are the second most frequent function, and defenses are the least used function in France, South Korea, Israel (Benoit & Sheaffer, 2006), and the U.S. Functional Theory explains that these three functions have different drawbacks which lead to this distribution of functions. Attacks may upset those voters who profess to dislike mud-slinging. Defenses, in contrast, have three drawbacks (two most applicable to debates). First, one is usually attacked in an area of weakness, so defending against an attack is likely to take a candidate “off-message.” Second, defenses may encourage the impression that a candidate is reactive rather than proactive. Third, if there is a chance the audience is not aware of an attack, or has forgotten it, a defense could inform or remind voters of a potential weakness (although this not likely to be a concern in debates). For these reasons, we expect acclaims to outnumber attacks and defenses to be the least common function. It is clear that some attributes of political campaign messages occur across countries (although of course we cannot from these data conclude that these relationships will hold true in all countries).

Second, Functional Theory predicts that policy will be more common than character because public opinion poll data reveals that more American voters report that policy is a more important determinant of their vote for president than character. Although we do not have comparable public opinion data from France, South Korea, or Israel (Benoit & Sheaffer, 2006), content analysis of their debates reveal that these candidates emphasized policy more than character. Another similarity is the emphasis on policy over character in political debates. The results on topic emphasis from these countries are also consistent with Baker and Norpath’s (1981) study of the 1972 German debates. Of course we cannot be sure this pattern will replicate in other countries (or in every debate), but so far discussion of policy is more common than character in debates in several countries.

In fact, the emphasis on policy was significantly greater in both France and South Korea than in the United States or Israel (Benoit & Sheaffer, 2006). If candidates are responding to the interests of their electorates, this could mean that character is even less important (or important to even fewer voters) in those two countries than in America or Israel. The tradition of quite sharp political party ideological differences in France may be one reason policy is emphasized so much more in France than in the United States.

Third, predictions for incumbency (H3 and H4) were upheld in France, the United States, and Israel (Benoit & Sheaffer, 2006) but not South Korea. In France, candidates from the incumbent party acclaim more, and attack less, than challengers. Incumbent party candidates in that country are also more likely to use past deeds for acclaims (and less for attacks) than challengers. This is reasonable because, as the theory posits, only the incumbent party candidate has a recent record in the office sought. That record provides a resource (past deeds)

which incumbents can use to acclaim (but not to attack) and challengers can use to attack (but not to acclaim). Of course, challengers can acclaim records in other offices, and incumbents can attack the challenger's record in other offices, but the record in the presidency is more relevant to the vote choice for president. Similarly, the leaders of the challenging parties in the 1972 German debates tended to attack the incumbent party's record, which the incumbent party candidates defended (Baker & Norpoth, 1981). In contrast, no candidate in South Korea had a record in the office sought, a key element of incumbency in functional theory. Interestingly, this prediction was upheld overall in Israel, but not in 1988. However, the close election results in 1984 led to a unity governing from 1984-1988 in which the prime minister was from one major party from 1984-1986 and the other major party from 1986-1988. Thus, Functional Theory acknowledges that when neither candidate, or both candidates, have a record in office, this situation influences production of messages by incumbents and challengers. Of course, it is possible that other factors, such as cultural differences between countries, contextual differences, or individual tendencies of particular candidates, could account for contrasting results.

The situation in France underscores the importance of understanding the specific political context when interpreting data on such variables as incumbency. France has both a president (elected by direct vote of the people) and a prime minister (who represents the party or coalition of parties with the most seats in the assembly). In 1988, Mitterand was the president and his opponent, Chirac, was the prime minister. In 1995, neither Chirac nor Jospin served as president or prime minister. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that past deeds (most of which are acclaims or attacks on the incumbent party candidate's record) were employed much more frequently in 1988 (when the candidates were a president and a prime minister) than in 1995 (when neither candidate was a president or a prime minister): 277 to 126. The candidates apparently shifted to more discussion of general goals in the latter debates (242 in 1995, up from 155 in 1988).

This generally consistent relationship between incumbency and function, however, did not occur in South Korean debates. This difference could arise from several factors. First, candidates are limited to a single term in office, so no sitting incumbent president may run for reelection in South Korea. Furthermore, the South Korean government does not have a vice president. In the U.S., vice presidents (e.g., the first George H. W. Bush and Al Gore, for example) usually run for the presidency when their running-mate cannot run again. Third, political parties may be less well-established in South Korea (South Korea's two political parties have not existed for as long as the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S.), weakening the incumbent party ties. The fact that both debates featured three candidates (two "challengers") may also have influenced the results (in the United States, only one campaign, 1992, featured three candidates). Incumbency appears to have a larger influence on political debates in America and France than in South Korea. This underscores the importance of understanding the differences in political systems of the countries from which political campaign messages are being investigated.

Finally, candidates in political debates use general goals and ideas much more often as the basis for acclaims than for attacks. So many goals, values, and principles are considered desirable (e.g., creating jobs, equality) by most voters that it is much easier to acclaim than attack with these message forms. This suggests that all forms of political campaign discourse (e.g., general goals, ideals) are not equally easy for candidates to use for acclaims *and* attacks.

We believe it is important to acknowledge limitations of this analysis. First, it includes only three countries. Second, in two of those countries, France and South Korea, only two campaigns are represented. Finally, we do not attempt to answer every potential question about these debates. However, these replications add to our understanding of political leaders' debates around the world.

Conclusion

This replication of research on political campaign messages in France and South Korea, two different contexts, extends our cross-cultural understanding of an increasingly important message form: political leaders debates. The analysis reveals both similarities and differences across culture. It seems clear that additional research will help clarify the nature of political campaign research in the many countries which elect their leaders via political campaigns. It is possible that other factors, such as historical or cultural differences, influenced the nature and content of these debates. And, of course, the questions asked in debates encourage the candidates to address particular topics. However, regardless of what factor or factors influenced the content of these messages, this is the content that was available to voters and the news media for their consideration. One obvious need is for research on televised political debates in countries with a parliamentary system (such as Germany). However, as became evident in the discussion, we must remain cognizant of diversity in the political systems of different countries.

This line of research can be extended and augmented in many ways. First, debates are being held for other offices (such as mayor) both in the U.S. and other countries. This method could be expanded to help understand debates for other political offices. Second, this approach can be applied to other forms of discourse, such as political television spots, webpages, blogs, stump speeches, or direct mail advertising (see Benoit, 2007, for discussion of Functional Theory research on other message forms, mainly on American campaigns). Research in this traditional has contrasted campaign messages from incumbents versus challengers and Democrats versus Republicans (Benoit, 2007); research could also investigate the influence of other variables such as gender, age, or ethnicity on candidate messages. Fourth, case studies of specific political campaigns for offices at various levels and in different countries could help illuminate the influence of contextual factors. Furthermore, Functional Theory does not attempt to address every potentially important question about political debates. Other interesting questions include the use of supporting materials in campaign messages, such as evidence or metaphors. Mixed-method research (see, e.g., Benoit & Holbert, in press; Creswell, 2003, or Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) could com-

bine Functional Analysis of campaign messages with audience effects research (e.g., focus groups, survey) of the same messages. Many opportunities exist for extending our understanding of political campaign messages around the world.

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Appendix: Political Debate Participants

	<u>Incumbency</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
France 1988		
Francois Mitterrand	Incumbent	Winner
Jacque Chirac	Challenger	Loser
France 1995		
Lionel Jospin	Incumbent*	Loser
Jacque Chirac	Challenger	Winner
South Korea 1997		
Hoi-Chang Lee	Incumbent*	Loser
Dae-Jung Kim	Challenger	Winner
In-Jae Lee	Challenger	Loser
South Korea 2002		
Moo-Hyun Noh	Incumbent*	Winner
Hoi-Chang Lee	Challenger	Loser
Young-Ghil Kwon	Challenger	Loser
U.S. 1960		
Richard M. Nixon	Incumbent*	Loser
John F. Kennedy	Challenger	Winner
U.S. 1976		
Gerald Ford	Incumbent	Loser
Jimmy Carter	Challenger	Winner
U.S. 1980		
Jimmy Carter	Incumbent	Loser
Ronald Reagan	Challenger	Winner
U.S. 1984		
Ronald Reagan	Incumbent	Winner
Walter Mondale	Challenger	Loser
U.S. 1988		
George W. Bush	Incumbent*	Winner
Michael Dukakis	Challenger	Loser
U.S. 1992		
George W. Bush	Incumbent	Loser
Bill Clinton	Challenger	Winner
H. Ross Perot	Challenger	Loser

U.S. 1996		
Bill Clinton	Incumbent	Winner
Bob Dole	Challenger	Loser
U.S. 2000		
Al Gore	Incumbent*	Loser
George W. Bush	Challenger	Winner
U.S. 2004		
George W. Bush	Incumbent	Winner
John Kerry	Challenger	Loser

*incumbent party candidate

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