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'Yes, We Can': The Social Life of a Political Slogan

Adam Hodges, *Carnegie Mellon University*

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1 Introduction

A central feature of American electoral politics is the campaign slogan. Short, catchy slogans do important political work by reminding the public about the candidate's campaign message. Even in situations where detailed rehearsals of an overarching campaign narrative are not possible, slogans index that narrative and reinforce its message in the minds of voters. Much like an advertising jingle, a campaign slogan is only as effective as its reach. If it diffuses widely and enters into widespread social circulation, the message with which it is associated can also spread. If not, the slogan may be at best an in-group rallying cry among a small number of local supporters. With this in mind, it is important to understand how a political slogan gains traction in public discourse. Namely, what factors impact the circulation of a political slogan? And what is the semiotic process by which a slogan does political work? This chapter suggests some answers to these questions by focusing on the case of the 'yes, we can' slogan associated with the 2008 American presidential campaign of Barack Obama.

The study is situated within the domain of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). Although Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) broadly recognizes a political dimension to language use – whether it be, for example, gender inequality (e.g. Lazar, 2005), racism (e.g. van Dijk, 1987, 1991), media representations (e.g. Fairclough, 1995) or the ideological underpinnings of discourse (e.g. Hart, 2011) – PDA places a specific focus on the language of politicians or activities associated with governance (e.g. Fairclough, 2000; Cap, 2002; Cap, this

volume; Chilton, 2004, Charteris-Black, 2005, Wodak, 2009; inter alia). As evidenced by the wide array of topics and approaches found in the current volume, CDS scholars (including those involved in PDA) draw from a range of disciplinary perspectives and approaches. Indeed, the forging of interdisciplinary perspectives is vital to the study of language as 'a form of "social practice" ' (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258). Moreover, greater understandings of both language and society – and language and politics – benefit from the integration of linguistic analysis with social theory. This chapter therefore starts with the Bakhtinian inspired notion of intertextuality – a concept widely applied within CDS in general (Fairclough 1992, inter alia) and PDA in particular (e.g. Dunmire, 2009, 2011; Hodges, 2008, 2011; Oddo, forthcoming) – and attempts to merge this interest in intertextuality with insights from sociological research on the diffusion of innovations (Rogers 2003). In doing so, I draw from Enfield's (2008) use of these ideas in work on linguistic change and illustrate how these ideas are relevant to the domain of politics. The aim is to outline the conditions that allow a political slogan to effectively propagate through society in the service of political aims. I begin by providing an overview of the social life of the 'yes, we can' slogan during the 2008 election season. I then illuminate the mechanisms that allow for its diffusion in public discourse, and discuss the process by which the slogan accomplishes political work.

2 The social life of a political slogan

On the evening of 8 January 2009, Senator Barack Obama delivered a speech to supporters in New Hampshire after that day's primary election. Although that day he finished behind his main rival for the Democratic nomination, Senator Hillary Clinton, Obama gave an impassioned speech out of which a new slogan arose that would accompany the campaign to its end in November. The speech taps into a spirit of American optimism and emphasizes a determination to keep working for political change. After naming several points of desired change, Obama culminates the speech with a note of optimism and a call for perseverance amidst difficult odds, as seen in excerpt 1.

(1) *Obama's speech in New Hampshire on 26 January 2008*[1]
We know the battle ahead will be long. But always remember that no matter what obstacles stand in our way, nothing can stand in the way of the power of millions of voices calling for change.

   We have been told we cannot do this by a chorus of cynics. And they will only grow louder and more dissonant in the weeks and months to come.

   We've been asked to pause for a reality check. We've been warned against offering the people of this nation false hope. But in the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope. (*Applause*)

   For when we have faced down impossible odds, when we've been told we're not ready, or that we shouldn't try, or that we can't, generations of Americans have

responded with a simple creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can. (*Applause*)

Yes, we can. (*Crowd chants*, 'Yes we can')

Yes, we can.

It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes, we can. (*Cheers*)

It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights: Yes, we can. (*Cheers*)

It was sung by immigrants as they struck out from distant shores and pioneers who pushed westward against an unforgiving wilderness: Yes, we can. (*Crowd responds in unison*, 'Yes we can')

It was the call of workers who organized, women who reached for the ballot, a president who chose the moon as our new frontier, and a king who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the promised land: Yes, we can, to justice and equality. (*Applause; crowd chants*, 'Yes we can')

Yes, we can, to opportunity and prosperity.

Yes, we can heal this nation.

Yes, we can repair this world.

Yes, we can.

And so, tomorrow, as we take the campaign south and west, as we learn that the struggles of the textile workers in Spartanburg are not so different than the plight of the dishwasher in Las Vegas, that the hopes of the little girl who goes to the crumbling school in Dillon are the same as the dreams of the boy who learns on the streets of L.A., we will remember that there is something happening in America, that we are not as divided as our politics suggest, that we are one people, we are one nation. (*Applause*)

And, together, we will begin the next great chapter in the American story, with three words that will ring from coast to coast, from sea to shining sea: Yes, we can. (*Applause; crowd chants in unison with Obama* 'We can')

As seen in excerpt 1, the crowd of supporters responds to his initial utterance of 'yes, we can' with applause and begins chanting the three words. As the speech continues, Obama sets up the phrase as a refrain that punctuates a series of examples used to exemplify the words' connection to past American struggles: 'It was a creed written into the founding documents', 'It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists', 'It was sung by immigrants', 'It was the call of workers'. Each example ends with the words, 'Yes, we can'. The rhetorical parallelism imbues the delivery with a rhythmic quality that echoes the call and response of a preacher and congregation. He then fronts the refrain to sum up the call for change represented by his candidacy in several short lines: 'Yes, we can, to opportunity and prosperity', 'Yes, we can heal this nation', 'Yes, we can repair this world'. The speech ends with a final return to those three words, as the crowd joins in the final 'we can' and erupts into applause.

Of course, the slogan itself is not unique to Obama or his campaign. True to the Bakhtinian perspective on language, the slogan has an intertextual history that reaches back into American history. In his speech, Obama even plays upon this history where he places the spirit of the words into the nation's 'founding documents', as well as the mouths of 'slaves and abolitionists', 'immigrants', and 'workers'. The final allusion to workers shifts from a typical sentiment represented by the words in the first examples to the use of the very phrase itself in struggles for workers' rights. Most notably heard in Spanish beginning in the 1970s as 'si, se puede', the phrase became a rallying cry of the labour movement led by Cesar Chavez, co-founder along with Dolores Huerta of the United Farm Workers. Thus, not only does the English version of the slogan have direct connections to Chavez and the farm workers, but so does the spirit of progressive struggle characterized in Obama's call for political change.

Just as any text has an intertextual history, it also connects to 'subsequent links in the chain of speech communion' (Bakhtin, 1986: 94). Once introduced in the New Hampshire speech on January 8, the phrase 'Yes, we can' became a rallying cry for Obama supporters in much the way it had for the United Farm Workers in a previous generation. Although Obama does not reiterate the full rendition of the January 8 speech at subsequent campaign rallies, the slogan nevertheless features as a powerful rhetorical element at those rallies. On January 26, Obama won the South Carolina primary. On February 5, he won the majority of states voting on 'Super Tuesday,' and on February 12 he swept the 'Potomac primaries'. In each of his speeches on the evening of these nominating contests, the 'yes, we can' phrase appears and serves as a reminder of the campaign's themes of hope and change, as illustrated in excerpt 2.

(2) *Obama's speech in South Carolina on 26 January 2008*[2]
When I hear the cynical talk that blacks and whites and Latinos can't join together and work together, I'm reminded of the Latino brothers and sisters I organized with and stood with and fought with side by side for jobs and justice on the streets of Chicago. So don't tell us change can't happen. (Ch*eers, applause*)

When I hear that we'll never overcome the racial divide in our politics, I think about that Republican woman who used to work for Strom Thurmond, who's now devoted to educating inner-city children, and who went out into the streets of South Carolina and knocked on doors for this campaign. Don't tell me we can't change. (*Cheers, applause*)

Yes, we can. Yes, we can change.
(*Chants of*, 'Yes, we can! Yes, we can!')
Yes, we can.
(*Continued chants of*, 'Yes, we can!')
Yes, we can heal this nation. Yes, we can seize our future. And as we leave this great state with a new wind at our backs, and we take this journey across this great country, a country we love, with the message we've carried from the plains of Iowa to the hills of New Hampshire, from the Nevada desert to the South Carolina coast,

the same message we had when we were up and when we were down, that out of many we are one, that while we breathe we will hope, and where we are met with cynicism and doubt and fear and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of the American people in three simple words: Yes, we can.

Thank you, South Carolina. I love you. (*Cheers, applause*)

The early adoption of the phrase by political supporters at Obama's speeches in New Hampshire and elsewhere represents an important step in the diffusion of this political slogan. With the reiteration of the slogan in those speeches by Obama plus the reverberations of the slogan among chanting supporters, the sound bite spread into the 'circular circulation' (Bourdieu, 1996: 22) of the news cycle. It played on television and radio broadcasts and featured in newspaper articles recounting Obama's campaign rallies. The slogan's association with Obama was further cemented by the release of a music video on 2 February 2008 that turned the slogan into a four-and-a-half minute song entitled 'Yes, We Can'.

The song was produced by the musician will.i.am, lead singer of the Black Eyed Peas, and the video was directed by Jesse Dylan, the son of Bob Dylan. The song's lyrics consist of verbatim quotations from Obama's New Hampshire speech (see again excerpt 1). Words from the speech are set to music as various celebrities alternately sing and speak the words, interwoven with Obama's oratory. The musical refrain of the song is the same as the rhetorical refrain of the speech, only turned into a moving musical score: 'Yes, we can. Yes, we can.' As Mackay (2013) discusses in her multimodal analysis of the song, the background harmony works to bring out the musicality of Obama's oration. The video itself is shot in black and white, moving from one celebrity to another as they sing or speak, juxtaposing the celebrity images with clips of Obama delivering his speech. In all, nearly 40 musicians, actors and athletes took part in the shooting of the video, including celebrities such as John Legend, Herbie Hancock, Scarlett Johansson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Nick Cannon, and Common, among others (Kaufman, 2008). Within a few days of its release on the Internet, the video received more than a million views on YouTube; and by the end of 2008 it 'was viewed on YouTube and other video-sharing Web sites more than 20 million times' (Elliott, 2008). Images 14.1 and 14.2 depict screenshots from the video.[3]

The popularity of the 'yes, we can' slogan as it quickly diffused through American society is illustrated by the results of a Google Trends search. Google Trends is a tool provided by the search engine company Google. The search tool provides insight into the popularity of search items. Plugging the search term 'yes we can' into the search engine shows a spike in interest in the term in February 2009, as illustrated in the screenshot in Figure 14.3. The phrase dips throughout the summer and regains popularity around the time of the presidential election in November. A small resurgence also can be seen around the time of Obama's inauguration as president in January 2009. As noted by Hill (2005) and Hodges (2011), technology such as this can be used

FIGURE 14.1 *A screenshot of the video on YouTube as musician will.i.am sings, 'Yes, We Can'.*

FIGURE 14.2 *Celebrities such as Scarlett Johansson feature in the video in juxtaposition with clips of Obama speaking.*

Interest over time ⑦   ☐ **News headlines** ☐ Forecast ⑦
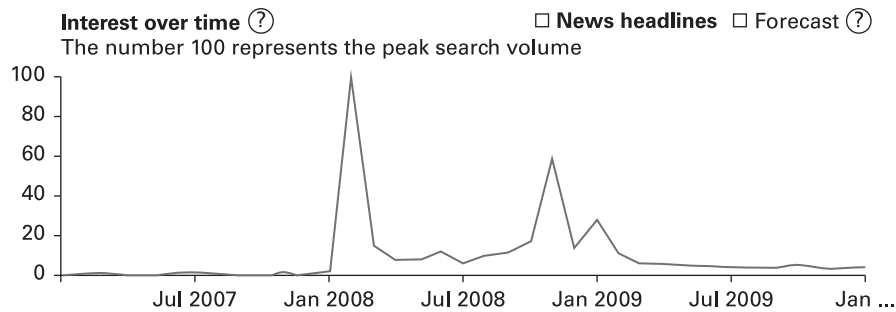The number 100 represents the peak search volume

FIGURE 14.3 *A screenshot from the GoogleTrends timeline shows peak interest in the slogan in February 2008 with subsequent spikes in November 2008 and January 2009.*

to provide a snapshot of the social life of key phrases, mapping where those phrases enter into social circulation and evolve in their usage over time. Figure 14.3 provides a visualization of the slogan's life cycle during the 2008 presidential elections.

3 The diffusion of a political slogan

Illuminating the process by which the 'yes, we can' slogan entered into widespread circulation in American society affords discourse analysts an opportunity for better understanding the way popular sound bites propagate through public discourse in the service of political goals. Fundamental to the circulation of political slogans are the intertextual connections that link the usage of a slogan in a single context to usages across multiple, overlapping contexts where the slogan lives 'its socially charged life' (Bakhtin 1981: 293). Many political discourse analysts have adopted an intertextual approach (Dunmire, 2009, 2011; Hodges, 2008, 2011; Oddo, forthcoming; inter alia). Complementary to these approaches is Enfield's (2008) work on understanding the circulation of linguistic variants. In his discussion, Enfield (2008) illustrates the usefulness of sociological research on the diffusion of innovations (Rogers 2003) and anthropological research on the evolution of cultures (Boyd and Richerson, 2005). Although Enfield (2008) applies these ideas to model linguistic change at the level of the (socio)linguistic variable, the ideas can also enrich intertextual approaches to the study of language at the level of discourse – in this case, political slogans.

As a type of cultural variant, a political slogan is subject to a complex set of mechanisms responsible for its diffusion through society. Enfield (2008) discusses several types of *transmission biases* that act as 'conduits or filters for the success or failure of a cultural variant' (Enfield, 2008: 298). One type of bias – the *content bias* – is defined by the properties of variants themselves. Is there anything intrinsic about a particular political slogan that leads to its appeal and hence adoption? Certainly,

politicians attempt to package words in a manner that makes future recontextualizations highly likely. Political slogans are designed to be witty, catchy, and most importantly, highly quotable. Intratextual repetition in discourse contributes to these ends, whether through alliteration (e.g. Julius Cesar's 'veni, vidi, vici' or Spiro Agnew's 'nattering nabobs of negativism'), parallelism (e.g. Tony Blair's 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime') and/or the rule of three (e.g. John Kerry's 'wrong war, wrong place, wrong time'), among other rhetorical and poetic devices that make slogans easy to remember and fun to repeat. Ultimately, a pithy sound bite provides a campaign with 'a greater chance of having their perspective played over and over again in subsequent media coverage' (Hodges, 2011: 87). In addition, the catchiness of a slogan plays upon social actors' 'compulsion to repeat' (Butler, 1990: 145), which allows the message to spread through public discourse. Thus, 'strategies of entextualization' (Wilce, 2005), which attempt to shape the way words are later recontextualized and understood, often draw upon the poetic dimension of language (Jakobson 1960) that make slogans easily repeatable. The 'yes, we can' slogan adheres to these principles to give it a certain amount of intrinsic appeal. Namely, the rhetorical devices of parallelism and the rule of three, along with the simplicity of the phrase consisting of three single-syllable words, provides for a rhythmic delivery.

Another type of bias – the *context bias* – is defined by the relations between the variants and the contexts in which they are used. 'Any kind of meaningful structure, be it a word, an artefact, a type of social relation or whatever, will presuppose some kind of contextual frame into which it properly fits, and without which it will not function appropriately' (Enfield, 2008: 299). Where a car presupposes a system of roads or a telephone presupposes a system of telephone lines, a political slogan presupposes a political system with election campaigns designed to persuade voters through rhetorical appeals. More specifically, though, the context bias applies to another type of system fit between the micro-level use of language (i.e. the political slogan) and the macro-level campaign discourse of which it is a part. If there is little connection between a slogan and the larger message of the campaign, the slogan amounts to little more than fanciful words. If, however, the slogan resonates with the larger campaign narrativethat is being forwarded, the slogan can function to its fullest extent as a small (but potent) part of a larger whole. The 'yes, we can' slogan provides such a bridge to the overarching narrative of the Obama campaign, which emphasizes an inspirational message of political change brought about by grassroots action. The three-word slogan strongly resonates with that larger narrative and finds a good fit within its discursive system.

Perhaps the most salient biases impacting the diffusion of slogans deal with the ways people factor into the equation, whether through properties of social actors themselves, the relations among social actors or the relations between social actors and the cultural variants. As discussed by diffusion of innovation researchers, people vary in their readiness to adopt and reproduce an innovative behaviour. So there is a *threshold bias* relating to these personality differences, which incline people toward

roles ranging from innovators to early adopters and on through later adopters and finally 'laggards', or the last to adopt a new behaviour (Rogers, 2003). Certainly, the earliest adopters of a novel political slogan include the candidate's supporters present at the speeches where the slogan is introduced. The spread of the slogan beyond the immediate environment then relies upon a social network. Here, a *sociometric bias* comes into play where the degrees of connectedness among individuals impact the further spread of the slogan. In the case of a major political campaign, the media form a substantial social network in their own right. As already noted, the intertextual connections between campaign speeches and media reportage provide for a certain amount of social circulation as sound bites enter into the news cycle. Yet beyond the news cycle, for a political slogan to truly catch on in public discourse requires a critical mass of adopters who embrace and continue to repeat the coinage. This requires propagation through an intertextual speech chain.

Agha (2003) defines a speech chain as 'a historical series of speech events linked together by the permutation of individuals across speech-act roles' (247). In the case of the slogan examined here, the candidate utters the slogan in campaign speeches where supporters hear the words. Those hearers then take on the role of speakers as they reiterate the slogan at the campaign rallies where it is in turn heard and recorded by journalists covering the events. Continuing on in the speech chain, journalists recontextualize the slogan within their reportage. In turn, additional supporters hear/read the slogan and provide additional momentum for its propagation when they join in the speech chain. This simplified model of the intertextual connections involved in the propagation of a political slogan underscores the role individuals play in providing the slogan with a social life of its own through repetition in public discourse. The more frequently a slogan is repeated, the more likely others will hear it, adopt it, and further its propagation to additional individuals. In this way, a *frequency bias* forms another important mechanism by which a slogan diffuses through the body politic. Yet, most notably, the capacity for a slogan to propagate (and to be repeated frequently) is dependent upon the properties of individuals involved in the speech chain.

Particular individuals hold more sway than others as they model the slogan. The 'publicly perceived properties' of individuals therefore lead to a *model bias* where 'an individual who acts as a carrier of the innovation will affect others' willingness or desire to reproduce it' (298). In her exploration of language and political economy, Irvine (1989) puts forth the notion of a *chain of authentication*. In effect, this is a type of speech chain where the value of a material commodity is authenticated. For example, to effectively evaluate the worth of a gold ring, an expert that possesses the requisite training and credentials – say, a trained jeweller – is needed. This expert vouches for the value of the ring (certifying it is real gold, that it contains a certain purity, etc.) and passes this endorsement on to others (e.g. a buyer) who then in turn pass that information on (e.g. to friends who admire the ring) through a speech chain where the value is reaffirmed. Notably, in this type of speech chain, the expert – who is publicly perceived as possessing certain credentials – plays a substantial role in imbuing the

commodity with value and providing the impetus for that value as its ratification continues within the speech chain. Likewise, the publicly perceived properties of early adopters of a political slogan can influence its spread among later adopters. The production of the will.i.am music video provides an important case in point. Armed with a substantial amount of prestige and charisma, as well as social connections, the nearly 40 celebrities involved in the video added a substantial amount of weight to the diffusion of the 'yes, we can' slogan in American society. Further, the ability to put the video on the Internet and attract viewers added substantial frequency to the play the slogan received in public discourse. Moreover, celebrity endorsements are often effective not only because such figures possess social prestige and forms of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) that help them authenticate a message or imbue it with social value, but also because people admire them or socially identify with them. 'This in turn is related to a *conformity bias* by which, all things being equal, people will tend to adopt the same practices as those with whom they socially identify' (Enfield, 2008: 298).

The rapid diffusion of the 'yes, we can' slogan through American society in early 2008 resulted from its capacity to surmount these various types of transmission biases. It worked poetically. It represented a good fit within the overall discursive system of the campaign narrative about hope and grassroots change. It benefited from the social prestige, charisma, and authority of early adopters that frequently and creatively repeated the slogan. As such, it not only entered into the news cycle, but it penetrated into pop culture where those modelling the new slogan (a who's who list of famous musicians, actors, and athletes in the music video) compelled many to repeat, 'Yes, we can!' One surmises that the far reach of the slogan beyond the confines of the political arena may have even inspired normally non-political individuals to support the cause – the true mark of a successful political slogan.

4 The political work of a slogan

Political slogans are created to serve political aims. Chief among those aims is to disseminate and reinforce a campaign message to as wide an audience as possible. Space limits what can be placed on a bumper sticker or campaign poster, and time limits what can be said in a television advertisement or a sound bite on the evening news. However, a pithy slogan can overcome those limitations by standing in for the larger message. Where the full rehearsal of a detailed campaign narrative is not possible, a memorable and highly quotable slogan can act as an economical reminder of that narrative.

Central to a slogan's ability to do this political work is the semiotic process of indexicality whereby an association is established between a slogan (qua signifier) and the larger campaign message (qua signified). In campaign speeches, the larger message of the Obama campaign is elaborated in a narrative about the impossible odds faced by generations of Americans, from the founding fathers to slaves and

abolitionists to immigrants and workers (see again excerpt 1). The narrative recounts (often through allusions) the struggles for civil rights, for racial justice, and for economic justice that Americans have faced but overcome (see again excerpt 2). Amidst cynicism and doubt and fear, however, Americans involved in those struggles possessed a spirit of optimism and hope that allowed them to prevail. That spirit, the narrative emphasizes, is the same spirit that will allow the current generation to prevail in bringing positive change to the nation through Obama's election. Where even a short synopsis of the narrative, as provided here, becomes too cumbersome, a three-word slogan can convey the message in a succinct and memorable manner.

In effect, the three words, 'yes we can', become indexically anchored to the Obama campaign's larger message about hope and change. This continuity between the two is achieved through the juxtaposition of the slogan and narrative within the contexts of the candidate's speeches. With that association established, as the slogan travels forward into subsequent contexts it points backward toward the prior contexts in which that narrative was told, thereby reinforcing the indexical ties between slogan and narrative. Intertextuality and indexicality work in tandem to reinforce the ties, a point well recognized in the Bakhtinian perspective on language. As Bauman (2005) notes, 'Bakhtin's abiding concern was with dimensions and dynamics of speech indexicality – ways that the now-said reaches back to and somehow incorporates or resonates with the already-said and reaches ahead to, anticipates, and somehow incorporates the to-be-said' (145). In Silverstein's (2003, inter alia) terms, as 'any socially conventional indexical' sign (e.g. a political a slogan in this case) leaves a prior context and enters into a new context, it is 'dialectically balanced between' what he calls *indexical presupposition* and *indexical entailment* (195). That is, a sign carries with it 'what is already established between interacting sign-users' (i.e. presupposed indexicality); but the sign also takes on new layers of meaning in the new contexts (i.e. creative or entailed indexicality). For a political slogan to continually renew its association with the larger campaign narrative, it therefore needs to be recontextualized in a manner that maintains fidelity to that narrative.

The process of recontextualization – that is, inserting prior text into new contexts – inevitably reshapes the meanings associated with the text. Yet the amount of transformation can vary along a continuum with varying degrees of fidelity to how the text appeared in previous contexts. Recontextualization can introduce imperceptible differences, subtle shifts in meaning or radical transformations (as with parody). In the terms of Briggs and Bauman (1992), the *intertextual gap* between the re-presentation of a text and its previously established model can be minimized or maximized. In examining the diffusion of innovations, researchers talk of 'reinventions'. As Rogers (2003) emphasizes, 'An innovation is not necessarily invariant during the process of its diffusion. And adopting an innovation is not necessarily a passive role of just implementing a standard template of the new idea. Many adopters want to participate actively in customizing an innovation to fit their unique situation' (Rogers, 2003: 17). This summarizes well the process of recontextualization. As language users appropriate

previously uttered words, their own aims and purposes for doing so variously intersect and collide with the previous meanings attributed to those words.

Also of interest from a Bakhtinian (1986) perspective is the role genre plays in framing forms of political communication (Cap, 2012; Cap and Okulska, 2013). The 'recurrent forms' or 'recurrent actions' (Johnstone, 2008: 181) that lead one to assign types of discourse to particular genres are only 'relatively stable' (Bakhtin, 1986: 64). As Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes, they reflect 'all the changes taking place in social life' (65). Through migration (Lemke, 1985), mixing, and hybridization, genres 'are thus open to innovation, manipulation, and change' (Briggs and Bauman, 1992: 143; see also, Hanks, 1987: 671, 677). As Cap and Okulska (2013) suggest in their discussion of political genres – and as further illustrated by Mackay (2013) in her examination of the way the 'yes, we can' slogan migrates from the genre of political speech to the genre of political ad set to music – substantial transformation of an intertextual series (here, the phrase 'yes, we can') occurs simply through the shifting generic frameworks in which the migrating text is embedded and received as it is recontextualized in new settings.

As Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes, we continually 'assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate' (89) what has come before us, thus opening up the possibly for various degrees of transformations of circulating texts. As Obama supporters take up the slogan in chants at campaign appearances, they recontextualize the slogan 'seriously, claiming and appropriating it without relativizing it' (Kristeva, 1980: 73). The association with the campaign narrative is reinforced; and, most importantly, it provides impetus to the forward movement of the speech chain as journalists draw from the sound bite in further recontextualizations that recount the use of the slogan by supporters. One such example is found in excerpt 3, the beginning of an article that appeared in the Los Angeles Times the day after the New Hampshire primary.

(3) Article in the Los Angeles Times the day after the 2008 New Hampshire primary[4]
OBAMA HAS NEW RALLYING CRY
His supporters are disappointed by second-place finish, but they're fired up by latest slogan: 'Yes, we can.'

<div align="right">January 9, 2008 | Maria L. La Ganga | Times Staff Writer</div>

NASHUA, N.H. – Sen. Barack Obama got a new campaign slogan Tuesday night when he lost the New Hampshire primary here in an upset that surprised his staunch supporters but left them no less ready for a fight.

'Yes, we can!'

He unveiled it after a long and painful night at Nashua High School South, where 1,500 supporters watched the election results roll slowly in, a night that sobered the men and women who believed that Iowa's victory could take an easy sprint east.

'It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists, as they blazed the trail toward freedom,' Obama said. 'Yes, we can! By immigrants who traveled to a new land, workers who organized, women who reached for the vote,' Obama continued, building to a rousing finish tinged with church cadences. 'Yes, we can!'

And come this morning, when he takes his campaign south and west, Obama vowed, 'we will begin the next great chapter in the American story with three words that will ring from coast to coast, from sea to shining sea.

'Yes, we can!'

They took up the chant here at what was expected to be a celebration but ended up an edgy night. [. . .]

In the article, the journalist recontextualizes the slogan with a high degree of faithfulness to its previous use within the context of Obama's speech. Supporting quotations from the speech help spell out pieces of the larger narrativethat the slogan indexes. In addition, four repetitions of the slogan are included within those quotations. The use of reported speech to bring prior text into a new setting can be carried out with 'varying degrees of reinterpretation' (Bakhtin, 1986: 91), underscoring the 'dynamic interrelationship' (Voloshinov, 1973: 119) between the reported and reporting contexts. Yet in reportage such as the type illustrated in excerpt 3, the prior text is actively reconstructed within the confines of the newspaper article in a manner that minimizes the intertextual gap and further reinforces the association between the slogan and the campaign narrative. This helps advance the political work being done by the slogan, and pass the slogan on to others 'in the chain of speech communion' (Bakhtin, 1986: 94).

The music video produced by will.i.am represents a more creative recontextualization than that found in standard media reportage. In the case of the music video, the transformations of the text become more obvious as the slogan is placed into a musical key and the political genre is thereby altered (Cap and Okulska, 2013). Yet the indexical association between the slogan and narrative of hope and change remains. In fact, the generic shift into a musical score even amplifies the emotional appeal of the rhetoric as it turns the music of oratory into the music of song – complete with aesthetically appealing images (see Mackay's 2013 multimodal analysis for a more detailed discussion in this vein; cf. also Van Leeuwen, this volume). Remaining faithful to the overarching message, the music video creatively recontextualizes the slogan in a manner that provides further impetus for its diffusion through public discourse. In the wake of the video's release, media reportage featured stories about the 'Yes, We Can' song; and, most importantly, the slogan/narrative of the Obama campaign – further reinforcing the link.

However, as earlier noted, recontextualization can also be done in a manner that attempts to reshape prior text in line with competing aims. This is clearly illustrated in the case of political slogans where opposing candidates attempt to co-opt one another's message and control the discourse surrounding the campaign. Therefore, once a slogan has gained substantial traction within the political arena, others may attempt to play upon it towards their own political aims. This can be seen as supporters of Senator Hillary Clinton, Obama's main rival in the Democratic nominating process, provided their own creative reinvention of the 'yes, we can' slogan, as described in an article in the *New York Times* the day after Clinton won the primaries in Ohio and Texas.

(4) Article in the New York Times after the 2008 primaries in Ohio and Texas[5]
Clinton Says Her Campaign Has 'Turned a Corner'
By Adam Nagourney
Published: March 5, 2008
Mrs. Clinton took the stage in Columbus before a sea of waving white-and-blue 'Hillary' signs and immediately portrayed her victory in Ohio as an indication of her electability in a general election. And she reprised a line of criticism against Mr. Obama that appeared to have gained her some traction in this contest.

   'Americans don't need more promises,' she said. 'They've heard plenty of speeches. They deserve solutions, and they deserve them now.'

   As she spoke, the crowd responded with chants of 'Yes, she will!' – apparently an orchestrated response to Mr. Obama's trademark 'Yes, we can!'

   Turning one of Mr. Obama's themes against him, she said, 'Together, we will turn promises into action, words into solutions and hope into reality.'

In contradistinction to the emotional appeal of the inspirational 'yes, we can' message of the Obama campaign, Clinton attempts to shift Obama's focus on 'hope' to her own focus on 'reality'. As Clinton plays upon the theme of hope and change, reshaping those elements of the Obama campaign to fit her own political aims, her supporters in the audience provide their own subtle shift to the 'yes, we can' slogan, chanting, 'Yes, she will!' The reformulation of the slogan among chanting supporters draws upon the widespread popularity of the 'yes, we can' phrase while at the same time reinventing the phrase in line with support for Clinton's campaign. This variation on a theme approach can be an effective strategy in that it starts with a well-established phrase that carries previously established social value. That social value benefits the re-inventors of the phrase as they customize it to their own situation, attempting to shift the debate.

   As evidenced from these examples, political slogans carry with them the residue of prior contexts. Even the 'yes, we can' slogan that became Obama's so-called trademark carried with it the residue from the earlier contexts in which the Spanish version of the phrase ('si, se puede') was used by Cesar Chavez to rally labour around the United Farm Workers' push for workers' rights. The Obama campaign built upon those sediments of prior meaning and re-invented the slogan into an effective index of its own campaign narrative. By indexing that narrative in contexts where it cannot be told in detail (e.g. campaign posters, bumper stickers, news reportage), the slogan reaffirms the overarching political message.

5 Conclusion

It has become a truism in the field of marketing that even the most innovative products or services do not sell themselves. At the least, information about those products or services must reach potential customers. And to achieve the greatest impact among

the target audience, the information must be packaged in a manner that allows it to reach a large number of people in a persuasive manner. Political campaigns are no different (at least as practised in contemporary American politics) in that a campaign's success is predicated upon the ability to persuasively spread its message far and wide. Political slogans (like advertising slogans) aid that objective. This chapter has illuminated some of the factors that allow for the effective diffusion of a political slogan through the body politic.

Crucially, a political slogan, such as the 'yes, we can' mantra of the 2008 Obama campaign, gains its power through the intertextual connections that give it a social life beyond a bounded speech event. Even the most artful slogan cannot spontaneously do political work without first entering into some kind of speech chain that allows it to diffuse across multiple contexts. Poetic prerequisites do constitute one filter among a complex set of transmission biases that impact a slogan's success, but ultimately the propagation of the slogan relies upon the discursive actions of people involved in sustaining or impeding its momentum in public discourse. This raises the issue of the role power plays in the relations among people in the diffusion of a political slogan.

As emphasized in Bourdieu's (1991, inter alia) conception of power as capital, there are forms of capital that extend beyond the traditional focus on economic capital. Cultural capital (in the form of educational credentials), social capital (in the form of social networks), and symbolic capital (in the form of non-material forms of honour and prestige) are all power resources that contribute to the differential reach and influence exerted by some individuals over others. In Irvine's (1989) notion of a chain of authentication, an expert (in possession of substantial cultural capital) plays a central role in the valuation of a commodity. Likewise, in a speech chain that forwards a political slogan, the forms of capital possessed by the 'permutation of individuals across speech-act roles' (Agha, 2003: 247) can impact the social value placed upon the slogan. Within a speech chain, certain voices (such as the celebrities in will.i.am's video) may have more impact than others based upon the forms of capital they possess.

Nevertheless, the success or failure of a political slogan relies upon more than just authoritative pronouncements made by individuals with sufficient capital to wield the Homerian skeptron, to use Bourdieu's (1991: 109) imagery. It requires a network of individuals to propagate the slogan through a web of interactions. In this way, the discursive power involved in the spread of a political slogan is, in line with the perspective put forth by Foucault (1980), diffused across the social body (across each campaign supporter, across each journalist that reports on the slogan's use, across each citizen that reiterates the phrase in daily conversations). It 'circulates' in 'a net-like organization' (Foucault, 1980: 98) so that individuals are not merely beholden to power, but also exercise power as they interact with one another. Power is therefore productive and not merely repressive. In Foucault's words, 'individuals are the vehicles of power' (Foucault, 1980: 98). They are 'the elements of its articulation' (Foucault, 1980: 98). And the articulation of power – that is, the exercise of power – is entwined

with language use as individuals come together in everyday interactions to invent and re-invent discursive innovations such as political slogans. Although the conceptions of power put forth by Bourdieu and Foucault are sometimes seen as competing rather than complementary, I suggest that the two need to be considered in tandem to fully account for the effective circulation of political slogans in public discourse.

In sum, the success of a political slogan in spreading a campaign's message lies in the strength of the intertextual web into which it enters. Thus, insight into the power of a political slogan requires examining the web of connections that comprises its social life. This chapter has attempted to do just that while showing that an intertextual approach to discourse analysis can also benefit from complementary perspectives on how innovations diffuse through society.

Notes

1 This is my own transcription based on the transcript provided by the *New York Times* and modified with additional detail while watching the video of the speech online. The full transcript from the *New York Times* is available at http://www.nytimes. com/2008/01/08/us/politics/08text-obama.html?_r=0&pagewanted=all. The video of the speech on YouTube is available at http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=Fe751kMBwms

2 The full transcript of this speech from the New York Times is available at http://www. nytimes.com/2008/01/26/us/politics/26text-obama.html?_r=3&pagewanted=all&

3 The video on YouTube is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcx-mYY

4 The full *Los Angeles Times* article is available at http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jan/09/ nation/na-obama9

5 The full *New York Times* article is available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/05/us/ politics/05cnd-primary.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

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