“Please continue to be an anime lover”: How political identities are constructed or damaged through the deployment of characterization metaphor and humor in Hong Kong political discourse

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Objectives

* To investigate how metaphor and humor, and the combination of both, are used as tools to construct the political identities of public figures.

* To explore how these created identities are reconstructed by one’s rival(s).
The socio-political background of Hong Kong

* A relatively recent process of democratization

* A series of controversial issues in recent years:
  e.g. 2010 political reform package
  unauthorized building works of government officials
  unpopular national education curriculum

* The rise of many new political parties + independent Legislative Council (LegCo) candidates
Political parties in Hong Kong

- Pro-government
- Pro-democracy

- Labour (left)
- Capitalism (right)

- FTU
- DAB
- BPA
- Liberal Party
- NPP
- Prof. Commons
- Democratic Party
- Civic Party
- Neo-democrats
- Pro-democracy

Labour Party
LSD
People Power
Numerous studies have been done on metaphor and humor in political discourse

- Metaphor (e.g. Chilton and Lakoff 1995; Kuo 2003; Obeng 1997; Wilson 1990)
- Humor (e.g. Bippus 2007; Morreall 2005; Tsakona 2009)
Metaphor and humor in political discourse (cont.)

* Both are pervasive rhetorical strategies.

* Both can attack or denigrate opponents in a less face-threatening way (Kuo 2003; Morreall 2005; Taskona 2009).
**Characterization metaphor:** A person or a political party is described as another fictional character or assigned another social role.

‘So today I present an acting award to Tse Wai Chun, (as) he pretends to be independent and democratic. Also (he) pretends to be healthy ... His acting (is) excellent.’
Investigated the use of humor in Greek parliamentary discourse

- Two protagonists involved: Greek prime minister & leader of the opposition

Function of humor:
- To construct a positive identity for oneself
- To attack one’s opponent(s) without violating house rules

Whether the use of humor succeeds or not is related to the mode in that discourse (“humorous mode” vs. “serious mode”, cf. Mulkay 1988). In the parliamentary discourse, a serious mode often prevails. The use of humor may backfire.

→ Instead of creating a positive humorous image of himself, the prime minister may be viewed as frivolous.
This study

* To analyze the use of characterization metaphors and humor in the construction of political identities.

* To demonstrate how these constructions of political identities are closely linked to the common ground between the people who created the identity and the public.
Data

- Database: 5 televised debates hosted by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) in the run-up to the 2012 LegCo elections

- Period: 18th August – 1st September, 2012

- 50-60 minutes each
  Total minutes of data: 290 minutes

- Metaphors analyzed based on the Conceptual Blending Theory (Turner & Fauconnier 1995; Fauconnier & Turner 2002)

- Humor analyzed based on incongruity and absurdity models (e.g. Attardo 1994, 2001; Morreall 1987)
Table 1. Frequency of characterization metaphor and humor tokens in televised election debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. of Tokens</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characterization metaphor</td>
<td>8 (57.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>3 (21.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of characterization metaphor and humor</td>
<td>3 (21.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Anime lover metaphor
Background

Wong Yeung Tat 黃洋達 (YT)

* A democratic candidate
  * A member of People Power, which is often labeled as a radical party in the local media
Wong Kwok Kin 黃國健 (KK)

- A pro-government candidate
- The chairman of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU)
- The member of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB)
- Disguised himself as a ninja inside the Japanese manga Naruto 火影忍者 during his election propaganda
- Being accused of watching the movie Hail the Judge during a LegCo meeting
Televised debate held by RTHK

* 2012 Legislative Council Election debate forum for the Kowloon East District

* Date: 19th August, 2012

* Gift giving session inside the debate: Candidates can present gifts, either to the public or to particular rivals. Most of the candidates would make use of this chance to attack the opponents.
The first metaphor: Hail the Judge

01 WYT: 我 呢，就 會 送 呢 個，《九品芝麻官》 嘅 VCD 呢 界 黃國健。
ngo5 le1, zau6 wui3 sung3 li1 go3, Gau2Bun2Zi1Maa4Gun1 ge3 VCD le1 bei2 Wong4Gwok3Gin6.
1SG PRT about.to FUT give this CL Hail.the.Judge ATTR VCD PRT dat Wong.Kwok.Kin

‘I will present this VCD of Hail the Judge to Wong Kwok Kin.’

02 咲 希望 你 呢， 以後 就 唔 好 開會 咿 陣 呢，
gam2 hei1mong6 le15 le1, jishau6 zau6 m4hou2 ho1wui5 go2 zan6 le2
so hope 2SG PRT from.now.on then do.not hold.meeting that time PRT

03 再 上網 侵權 睇 電影 喲。
zo13 soeng5 mong5 cam1kyun4 tai2 din6 jing2 laa3
again go.on.the.Internet infringe watch movie SFP

‘I hope that from now on you won’t go on the Internet to watch movies illegally during the meeting again.’
The first metaphor: Hail the Judge

* Wong Yeung Tat presented the VCD of *Hail the Judge* to Wong Kwok Kin
  * Intending to remind the public of Wong Kwok Kin’s improper behavior earlier in the LegCo meeting
  * Insinuating that KK is like a lowest-grade ("9th grade") government official in the Qing Dynasty
* Implied meaning of the 9th grade government official
  * Idle and insignificant
The first metaphor: Hail the Judge

Main character
The character’s status in the political system
(Implied) traits of the character

Wong Kwok Kin
A non-outstanding LegCo member

Input Space
1

Wong Kwok Kin
– A 9th grade government official
A non-outstanding LegCo member – the lowest ranking official

Generic Space

Input Space
2

A “9th grade” government official
The lowest-ranking official
Idle and insignificant

Blended Space

Implied meaning: Idle and insignificant
01 WYT:我呢，就會送呢個，《九品芝麻官》嘅VCD呢畀黃國健。

‘I will present this VCD of Hail the Judge to Wong Kwok Kin.’

02 咁希望你呢，以後就唔好開會嗰陣呢，

‘I hope that from now on you won’t go on the Internet to watch movies illegally during the meeting again.’

03 再上網侵權睇電影喇。

‘Set-up’

‘Punch-line’
Humor – Incongruity (1) (cont.)

* **Expectation from audience:** [set-up]
  * YT would accuse KK of watching a movie during the LegCo meeting since this behavior was inappropriate for a LegCo councilor.

* **Actual result:** [punch-line]
  * YT did not focus on the misconduct of KK as a LegCo councilor. Instead, he reprimanded KK for watching an online movie illegally.

→ **Implication:** The fact that YT did not focus on KK’s inappropriate behavior as a LegCo councilor suggests that he does not view KK as a legitimate LegCo councilor.
  * Created image or identity: KK is **insignificant** in LegCo
‘And he said something which many of us did not understand.’

‘So actually many of us needed to search for information on the Internet.’

‘You watched Hail the Judge to search for information?’
An absurdity arises because of the contrast between the genre to which “watching Hail the Judge” and “searching for information during a LegCo meeting” belong.

- *Hail the Judge* is a Hong Kong comedy film, which is to be watched for fun only [leisure, informal setting]
- KK refuted that he needed to go onto the Internet to search for information because of Wong Yuk Man’s filibustering [workplace, formal setting]

YT then associated the two events together. The incompatibility of the genres to which the two events belong will give rise to the absurdity, and thus the humor.

⇒ Implication:
- A **foolish** image was constructed: KK is an **incompetent, impudent and ridiculous** person.
The second metaphor: anime lover

06 你啊鍾意cosplay，扮忍者，又放鏢。
nei5 aa3 zung1 ji3 cos1pei1， baan6 jan2 ze2， jau6 fong3 biu1
2SG PRT love cosplay disguise.as ninja and throw dart

‘You love cosplay, disguising yourself as a ninja and throwing darts.’

07 跟住喺立法會呢，又成日舉手，
gan1 zyu6 hai2 Laap6 Faat3 Wi5 le1， jau6 seng4 jat6 geoi2 sau2
then at LegislativeCouncil PRT and always raise.up.hand

08 問規程問題幾時有得食飯。
man6 kwai1 cing4 man6 tai4 gei2 si4 jau5 dak1 sik6 faan6
ask order question when have can eat.rice

‘Then at the Legislative Council meetings, you always raise up your hands and ask when we can have a meal.’

09 我覺得都好難為你。
ngo5 gok3 dak1 dou1 hou2 naan4 wai2 nei5
1SG think also very press 2SG

‘I also think that’s asking too much of you.’

→13 你去繼續做動漫愛好者啦好冇？
nei5 heoi3 gai3 zuk6 zou6 dung6 maan6 oi3 hou3 ze2 laa1 hou2 mou2
2SG go continue do anime.lover SFP good.NEG

‘So I hope that you will also support me to kick the pro-government party out, such that you people from the conservative party can be liberated. Please continue to be an anime lover, okay?’
The second metaphor: anime lover

Wong Kwok Kin
Tries to cast himself as a protector of the people - Disguises as a ninja and throws darts
For political gain - Election propaganda

For leisure - anime show/exhibition

Main character
Display of heroic behavior
Occasion for displaying heroic behavior
Purpose for such behavior

Wong Kwok Kin - an anime lover
Tries to cast himself as a protector of the people - Disguises as a ninja and throws darts
Election propaganda – anime show
For political gain - for leisure
So I hope that you will also support me to kick the pro-government party out, such that you people from the conservative party can be liberated. Please continue to be an anime lover, okay?

Then at the Legislative Council meetings, you always raise up your hands and ask when we can have a meal.

‘Then at the Legislative Council meetings, you always raise up your hands and ask when we can have a meal.’
Humor – Incongruity (2) (cont.)

* **Expectation from audience:** [set-up]
  * YT would denounce KK as an idler who does not serve the citizens genuinely.
  * YT would also make use of this chance to attack KK and his associated parties (FTU and DAB) and advocate that these parties deserve to be kicked out because they are useless and do not benefit the public.

* **Actual result:** [punch-line]
  * Instead of attacking KK and his associated parties directly, YT offered a mock-friendly move – YT said he was hoping to set KK and the other conservative parties free. Also, he encouraged KK to pursue his dream as an anime lover at the end using a rhetorical question.

→ **Implication:** KK does not belong to the political arena but to the entertainment anime arena. He should leave LegCo for his own good.
  * An **unprofessional** image was constructed.
How is a political identity re-created?

* Initial identity constructed by KK for himself / Assumed identity of KK
  * KK disguised himself as an anime character in *Naruto* as a gimmick to appeal to the electorate, especially to the younger voters.
    * Created identity: approachable, open-minded and keeping pace with the times
  * Assumed qualities of a LegCo councilor: competent, professional and pragmatic
How is a political identity re-created?
(cont.)

* Wong Kwok Kin’s recreated identity by Wong Yeung Tat
  * Hail the Judge
    * competent, professional and wise →
      Idle, goofs around, foolish and insignificant
  * Anime lover
    * Approachable, open-minded and keeping pace with the times → childish and unprofessional
Consistent with previous findings (Kuo 2003; Tsakona 2009), we can see that

* The mode (“Humorous mode” or “serious mode”, cf. Mulkay 1988) that prevails play a part in determining whether an identity can be (re-)created successfully.

  * Election propaganda

  * Metaphor can help to attribute a certain image to a character.
Characterization metaphors and humor can act as a tool to construct the image and political identities of a public figure.

- This is done by inviting the audience to search for conceptual links between the label and the target.
- Other factors such as humorous vs. serious mode also plays a part in determining whether these identity creations are successful or not.
Acknowledgements

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References


