
Dog-whistles and the at-issue/non-at-issue distinction

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George Bush's 2003 State of the Union address contains the following line.

- (1) Yet there's power—wonder-working power—in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.

To most people this sounds like, at worst, a civil-religious banality, but to a certain segment of the population the phrase *wonder-working power* is intimately connected to their conception and worship of Jesus. When someone says (1), they hear (2).

- (2) Yet there's power—Christian power—in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.

Albertson (2015) shows experimentally that examples like (1) do in fact improve a speaker's appeal to religious voters, while slipping right by unreligious voters, unlike uncoded religious appeals like (2), which are punished by non-religious voters.

Stanley (2015) argues that dog-whistle language like (1) involves a conventional non-at-issue component. After arguing against a not-at-issue account, we develop our own positive proposal along the lines of McCready 2012, which considers how speakers converge on whether certain expressives have positive or negative evaluative content. In addition, we will consider properties of dog-whistle language that are of interest to pragmatic theory, in particular, the fact that dog-whistle language is only semi-lexicalized and not wholly cooperative.

References: • Albertson, B. L. (2015). Dog-whistle politics: Multivocal communication and religious appeals. *Political Behavior*, 37(1), 3-26. • McCready, E. (2012). Emotive equilibria. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 35(3), 243-283s. • Stanley, J. (2015): *How Propaganda Works*. Princeton University Press.

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