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MANY FACETS OF CHARISMA

Review of the book: Petlyuchenko, N. The Linguistics of Charisma. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2024. Sprachwissenschaft, vol. 67. 216 p.
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As an expert in the field of charisma studies, Nataliya Petlyuchenko synthesizes in the volume her research in this sphere drawing on the initial monograph (Petlyuchenko, 2009) and her 27 papers listed in the references. The author organizes the text into four sections. The first one offers an overview of the foundations of charisma theory. The second section dwells on charisma in contemporary European and American discourses. The third section deals with charisma as a media weapon in Ukrainian political discourse. The fourth one focuses on linguistic research methods for studying charisma and predicting successful political leaders.

The first section of the monograph comes to grips with many aspects of charisma finding that it can be perceived as a concept, a phenomenon, a state, a quality, a personal attribute. As a concept, charisma is viewed by the author from the most general perspective in relation to Weber's interpretation and scrutiny in the humanities. As a phenomenon, charisma is considered with respect to its various manifestations which seem to depend on its place in a communicative situation. As an addressor's state, charisma is linked to inspiration that manifests itself through speech and gestures of politicians, their ability to express enthusiasm for significant ideas, to inspire others to share enthusiasm. As a quality, i.e. from the addressee's viewpoint, charisma gets two interpretations in the monograph. First, it is claimed not to be intrinsic but rather a projection, attributed to an individual against the background of societal or cultural norms such as enthusiasm, inspiration, influence, devotion. Second, charisma as a quality is often considered to be a gift from above, a divine endowment or a divine grace contrasted with a theatrical performance. As a personal attribute, charisma is expected to enhance the impact of a person's message.

The first section of the book also distinguishes charisma from the similar phenomenon of charm and the opposite quality of toxicity. The monograph treats charm as attractiveness with respect to gender which makes it different from charisma. Conversely, toxicity is regarded as a reversal of charisma, or its negative form but not as anti-charisma which, in my view, needs further elucidation. Like charisma, toxicity is also treated as a concept, a term, a quality, and a phenomenon. Interestingly, it is found that owing to the expectations of the audience the same individual can be perceived as charismatic in some contexts and as toxic in others. This section of the monograph also dwells on the primary circumstances bringing forth a person's charisma, i.e. major political upheavals. The section wraps up with a charismatic communication model resting on the qualities attributed to a leader by a populace.

The next two sections discuss features of separate charismatic figures, which, in my view, can be best assessed treating charisma as a category. According to the vantage theory, a category hinges on three main constituents: focus, a characteristic sample of a category;

dominant vantage, with a strong attention to similarity embracing more stimuli; recessive vantage, with a strong attention to difference embracing fewer stimuli (MacLaury, 2002, pp. 509–510). Considered from the viewpoint of vantage theory, each subsection of the next two sections of the monograph represents three types of politicians: those related to the category focus, to dominant or recessive vantage.

From my point of view, section 2, tackling charisma in contemporary European and American discourses, falls into four subsections dealing with the political figures of Germany, France, Great Britain and the USA.

In the German subsection, the dominant vantage of the charisma category is represented by two politicians, characterized by an increase in categorial features. First, it is Willy Brandt treated as an inspirational charismatic, i.e. a new type of leader who distinguishes himself from the polished politicians who have built well-established careers. Second, it is Franz Joseph Strauss ascribed by his admirers with a demi-god feature. The focus of the category seems to be represented by Joachim Gauck with his perceived features of a potential beacon for a new type of politicians and a bearer of moral charisma, known for his virtue and distinctive political language. The recessive vantage of the category appears to be pertained to two politicians with receding charismatic stimuli. They are Angela Merkel with her everyday charisma, which is not attributable to any extraordinary gifts or flamboyant qualities, and Helmut Schmidt, known for his anti-charismatic statements. These two leaders seem to be on the outskirts of the category which is rendered by the author's keywords 'not attributable to any extraordinary gifts' and 'anti-charismatic statements'.

In the French subsection, the keywords 'cold' and 'lacking' locate Charles de Gaulle and Francois Mitterrand within the recessive vantage of the category because the former is treated as a cold charismatic and the latter falls short of electric charisma. Meanwhile, the category's dominant vantage appears to be represented by Emmanuel Macron, famous for his irresistible charm and similarity to John Kennedy.

In the British subsection, the three charismatic politicians – Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, Boris Johnson – appear to embody the dominant vantage though for different reasons. Churchill's charisma is triggered by World War Two, while Thatcher and Johnson are charismatic due to their personal features. According to the author of the monograph, Thatcher adeptly blends masculine qualities such as determination and decisiveness with feminine flexibility while Johnson aspired to become the 'king of the world' with all his political actions geared towards amassing power though so far it is not clear if his activities are beneficial for Britain.

In the American subsection, the three leaders – John Kennedy, Barack Obama and Donald Trump – also belong to the category's dominant vantage due to their individual features. Kennedy's charisma is ascribed to his personal allure. Moreover, Obama together with Kennedy are considered to possess an inexplicable something that underlies their charisma. Meanwhile Trump's charisma is believed to be achieved by a more negative interpretation of this quality used as a tool for manipulation, which, according to the author, has led to the trumpanisation of political discourse. I wonder what this type of discourse has in store for the future of the world and of the US.

As we see, the vantage theory indicates that the most charismatic politicians are in Britain and the USA since they belong to the dominant vantage of the category and often serve as role models for distinguishing other charismatic personalities. The most symmetrical representation of the category is pertinent to the German leaders related to all three constituents. The least charismatic statesmen seem to be in France with two presidents related to the recessive vantage.

Section 3 bringing to light a range of Ukrainian charismatic politicians is one of the most stimulating. No wonder, all of the Ukrainian charismatic figures display this quality due to the turbulent changes in the country (Petlyuchenko, 2024). With respect to the causes which bring to light their charisma, the Ukrainian politicians fall into two groups: those who display it before the all-out Russia-Ukraine war and after its inception.

The subsection on the pre-war statesmen opens with Yulia Tymoshenko treated in the book as a phoenix, displaying her dominant-vantage charisma three times: at the dawn of Ukrainian independence when she was regarded as Joan of Arc, during the 2004 Orange Revolution, in the times of the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity. Moreover, she is treated as an exemplar figure with whom two other pre-war presidents are compared: Viktor Yushchenko and Petro Poroshenko. In terms of vantage theory, Yushchenko can be related to the focus of the charisma category since a potential voter can fill him in with any content, though the author's perception of Yushchenko as a charismatic messiah strikes me as somewhat strong. Rather it is what he thinks of himself but not the effect he produces on the voters, at least on me. As for Poroshenko, the author's treatment of his charisma as official and dissipating with time gives me grounds to relate it to the recessive vantage of the category. As the author rightly states, with the beginning of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war the three pre-war statesmen disappear, giving way to new charismatic personalities brought forth by the new circumstances.

The charismatic figures of the war period discussed in Section 3 of the monograph are President Volodymir Zelensky, Vitaly Kim, and Oleksiy Arestovych. They neatly correspond to the category's three constituents. One has every right to relate President Zelensky's heroic charisma to the dominant vantage of the category for several reasons. First, the Ukrainian President is considered a modern-day Churchill who is also treated as an epitome of this particular vantage. Second, Zelensky is contemplated to be a heroic charismatic commander, inspiring others to fight and follow him. Third, the President is sometimes hailed as Ukrainian Superman with an eastern heart that the West has lost. Kim's charisma, attributed to such perceivable features as self-confidence and humour, can be related to the category focus. Meanwhile, Arestovych, termed in the book as a calming prophet with a reassuring charisma, seems to be related to the recessive vantage quickly shifting to the opposite – toxic – category. This switch was predicted by the monograph author almost a year ago.

A separate subsection of Part 3 focuses on Ukrainian women's charisma during the Russia-Ukraine war. The monograph states that in the third year of the war there is a trend toward feminization of charisma, which demonstrates the indomitable nature of the Ukrainian people with a special emphasis on women.

As Section 3 suggests, unlike their Western counterparts the Ukrainian pre-war and war charismatic figures spread more evenly across the category being related to all three constituents. However, unlike other countries, in case of Ukraine we observe an exceptional sample of a politician's transformation into a toxic individual.

Section 4 strikes as the most valuable since it sketches the linguistic research methods applied to studying charisma so as to predict future figures possessing this quality. This section begins with an important discussion of charisma indicators divided into verbal, paraverbal, and non-verbal. The author finds that verbally charismatic speakers deliver forward-looking, people-friendly, change-driven and inspirational messages; paraverbal features are marked by the amplification of prosodic and kinetic elements; the non-verbal features include energy, a striking and colourful appearance, a high degree of independence, excellent oratory skills and absolute unwavering confidence in their own actions.

This section also offers a number of methods pinpointing charisma: associative experiment; perceptual identification; computational analysis; indexing historical

personalities' charisma according to forty indices; determining future political charismatics. The results of applying those methods are demonstrated in numerous appendices: they contain samples of questionnaires for association and identification experiments; sample summary tables of associative experiments; samples of identification experiments; charisma coefficients of historical German and Ukrainian charismatic leaders. The application of those methods also allows the author to offer in Section 4 a new discursive model for identifying future charismatic leaders. It is structured into three levels comprising charisma of office, public charisma, and grassroots charisma.

The conclusion of the monograph gives two final definitions of charisma (p. 127) complementing each other. The first one treats charisma as the mental construct encompassing an individual's ability to attract attention and exert influence in diverse domains. The second one perceives charisma as a capacity of individuals to lead, persuade, think and speak at a level beyond the norm. After reading the monograph, it becomes clear that charisma is an individual's ability to attract attention and exert influence which results in leading the followers.

The Linguistics of Charisma is a valuable resource for researchers in communication studies, particularly those interested in persuasive language, public speaking, and the influence of media on charismatic performance. It is also relevant for sociologists examining power dynamics, leadership, and social influence. It makes a significant contribution to the expanding interdisciplinary domain of charisma studies, which encompasses disciplines such as linguistics, politics, sociology, media, and psychology.

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