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Electoral Rhetoric and Political Polarization: The Begin–Peres Debates

*Dan Caspi**

The article is based on a political-stylistic analysis of the first televised debates in Israel, which took place in 1977 and 1981 between Menachem Begin and Shimon Peres. It examines how the Israeli parliamentary democracy adapted and changed the debate format which originated in American presidential elections. The rhetorical strategies of the two candidates are then identified and compared to determine whether they are idiosyncratic or anchored in contrasts between their rival ideologies, focusing especially on the 'spheres of polarization' by which their verbal behaviours were shaped.

The increasing presence of the mass media in the political system diverts attention from politicians' deeds to their words. Once again, the vital connection between the two becomes especially prominent just before the elections, when politicians need the media for public exposure and the opportunity to persuade voters — with words more than actions — and win their electoral support. Voters are asked to evaluate the candidates not according to their deeds and achievements, but primarily according to their verbal behaviour (Corcoran, 1979). The mass media, with their extensive coverage, often blur the narrow boundary between words and deeds — consciously or otherwise.

In this respect, the televised debate represents a dramatic climax in candidates' pre-election verbal behaviour. The debate is naturally considered a 'media event' (Katz et al., 1981). Although it is intended *prima facie* to gratify the urgent communicative needs of electors and elected alike, its format is governed by the constraints of the medium, which also leaves its mark on the structure, content and form of the debate itself. Nevertheless, the televised debate remains the most reliable documentation of verbal electoral behaviour. This may well be the reason it has become a source — and perhaps the main source — of research on this behaviour (Bishop et al., 1978). This factor, although neither exclusive nor primary in nature, suffices to explain

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why the contenders and their advisers invest so much thought before and during the debate in planning the most appropriate strategy for winning votes. Format constraints, as considered below, influence verbal behaviour significantly. Perhaps for this very reason, we may safely assume that such pressures will accentuate both the unique qualities and the differences in the contenders' verbal behaviour.

The present study¹ joins a rather short list of attempts (Bitzer and Reuter, 1980) to consider the televised debate as authentic raw material for research on political verbal behaviour. Its key objective is to consider the possible relation between verbal and political ideology. As words generally help translate ideas (Paine, 1981), we aim to comprehend the debaters' rhetorical nuances in light of the respective political ideologies they represent.

Various features of the debate format's adoption in the Israeli parliamentary democracy, as well as the political context of the first televised Israeli debates, provide the background to this study. These features may serve as a kind of case study in microcosm of media format diffusion to a new political system.

The Televised Debate in Israel

One year after television broadcasting commenced in Israel, the medium became involved in the 1969 electoral campaign. (Gurevitch, 1972). The first televised debate took place five years later, in 1977, between Menachem Begin and Shimon Peres, who met before the cameras once again four years later. By that year, conditions had apparently become ripe for conducting a spectacular and *wasteful* election campaign with all professional indicators of 'the new style.' (Caspi and Eyal, 1983). The major parties hired public relations firms and an army of advisers and professionals who otherwise specialized in economic marketing and shaping public opinion.² But the 'American style' ascribed to election propaganda was not sufficient to pave the way for adoption of the televised debate format.

At first glance, the Alignment ought to have rejected the idea of a debate. Eight terms of office had crowned it — with a considerable measure of justification — as the virtually eternal ruling party. A debate would thus have run contrary to its basic interests (Polsby, 1979). Debates had never been held previously in Israel and therefore did not constitute an obligatory precedent. This fact could have helped the Alignment hold to its conventional strategy, wherein the incumbent expresses neither desire nor interest in debating with some 'anonymous' opponent. A debate might have accorded public

legitimacy and equal status to the Likud candidate, whom the Alignment presented as the 'eternal opposition.' However, there were several conditions and factors in effect which ran contrary to pure political logic. Elections to the Ninth Knesset were held earlier than anticipated because of a series of crises affecting the Alignment leadership, culminating in Rabin's resigning and relinquishing the party leadership to his avowed rival Shimon Peres. Peres had a successful political career and was well-known to the public. Despite his inexperience as head of the list, Peres enjoyed all the advantages of an incumbent candidate and apparently had no need for a debate. However, Peres's situation reminded many Alignment elections advisers of that of Ford vs Carter about one year earlier. Like Ford, Peres was heading the country, but his personal status within the party was neither solid nor convincing.

Both Alignment and Likud propagandists claim credit for having been first to introduce the televised debate in Israel. However, it would be erroneous to assume that curiosity alone was responsible for the debate initiative. Had this been the case, it would surely have been surrounded by several weighty political considerations:

1. Begin, the Opposition candidate for 29 years, was labelled a 'loser.' His facing the Alignment candidate would bolster legitimization of his candidacy and render the Likud's slogan — 'The Alternative for Leadership' — more tangible.

2. Likud propagandists seeking to refine Begin's ideological image were especially concerned about his stigma of 'hawk.' They believed that the debate with Peres would prove that 'the beast is not so formidable.' On the contrary, Begin's television exposure before a record audience would be a golden opportunity to disprove rumours of seriously failing health following his hospitalization. Moreover, Begin, as an Opposition candidate, would be accorded a rare opportunity for public exposure.

3. Begin was well-known for his rhetorical talents. Likud propagandists believed that television, which emphasizes form over content, would best serve Begin — the master of words (Aronoff, 1982).

The tables were turned in the Tenth Knesset election campaign of 1981. The Likud had formed the government in 1977, with Menachem Begin assuming the post of Prime Minister. This time, Shimon Peres, as Head of the Opposition, sought to replace Begin. Hence the Likud ought to have rejected the suggestion of a debate, which apparently would have been more beneficial to the Opposition candidate than to its own. Nevertheless, the situation of the respective parties, as in

1977, could not be clearly defined. In 1981, as in previous campaigns, public opinion polls played a role in determining election strategy (Caspi, Diskin and Guttman, 1984). Six months before the elections, the Likud was at an unprecedented low, with the gap narrowing considerably just before the elections. However, the surveys did not point to a decisive victory for either of the two parties. Neither party could afford to miss an opportunity in this close race.

Ostensibly, the Alignment's advantage in the surveys, which could only be adversely affected by Begin's rhetorical power, ought to have motivated Peres to avoid the debate. Furthermore, Peres did not need the exposure. His decision to debate Begin thus apparently stemmed at least partly from the following considerations:

1. The Alignment's advantage was steadily decreasing in public opinion polls.

2. Begin's rhetorical pathos could only serve as his nemesis among voters repelled by manifestations of physical violence in the election campaign.

3. Peres felt that he had learned from experience. Alignment propagandists believed that Peres would successfully reflect a 'solid,' rational and balanced leader, contrasting sharply with an emotional Begin; they apparently assumed that Peres's qualities had 'electoral value.'

These considerations and other relevant factors led the Alignment to consent to a second televised debate.

Shaping the Format

The Israeli debate format differs from that of its American counterpart. It was first formulated in 1977 on the basis of characteristics unique to Israel's parliamentary democracy and constraints on use of the broadcast media for election propaganda.

Israel's broadcast media are anchored in an independent public trust, the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA), modelled on the BBC (Caspi and Eyal, 1983) and enjoying a virtually absolute monopoly on broadcasting. The sole, one-channel television station, with four hours of programming nightly, is supposed to gratify all political and cultural needs of the population and the political establishment. The Election Law (Propaganda Methods — 1973) regulates the parties' approach to the broadcast media and allocates time for election propaganda. It ensures party access to the media for broadcasts during the month preceding the elections. The parties bear only the costs of production (Caspi, 1982). The time allotted to parties is

divided proportionally in accordance with their representation in the outgoing Knesset. In addition, each party receives a uniform time quota, including those new lists which are not represented in the previous Knesset.³

The debate is thus a function of candidates' intentions and allotted broadcast time alike. The time 'belongs' to the parties, which are free to determine how to use it. In this respect, the Israeli debate is spared all the ethical and legal issues which surround its American version. In the two campaigns, the Likud and Alignment each received a total of 3.5 to 4 hours of broadcast time. Both camps agreed to a 40-minute debate, which meant that each party would relinquish about 10% of the time it would otherwise use for conventional political messages. Another ramification of the Israeli format is that the debate essentially comprises only one round, unlike those of the USA and other Western democracies (Mickelson, 1972). The IBA does not intervene in production; the debate, like all other propaganda broadcasts, is produced at private facilities and paid for by the respective parties. However, all political broadcasts, including the debate, require the approval of the Elections Committee,⁴ which reviews and approves each propaganda broadcast before its transmission. Each debate was thus preceded by extended and detailed negotiations between the two campaign headquarters, in which representatives eventually reached accord on the entire range of operative issues.

The initiators of the first debate in 1977 admitted to keen interest in the two American debates between Nixon and Kennedy and Ford and Carter. Following the American model, they initially sought to place the two candidates before a battery of three veteran journalists.⁵ However, for various reasons, only one of the three journalists acceptable to both parties agreed to participate. This prevented a 'press conference' format with all its attendant drawbacks and advantages (Bitzer and Reuter, 1980). For the second debate, only one mutually acceptable journalist was sought in the first place.⁶ The two participating parties are granted maximum control and supervision of the format and time distribution.

Only a few issues remain outside the bounds of advance negotiations between the parties, including the matter of moderator's questions. The presence of an acceptable moderator will ensure balanced questions. Nevertheless, the moderator need not submit these questions for party scrutiny and may therefore phrase them according to professional insights. The only constraint imposed on

the moderator is the number of questions, which is decided by the debate's organizers (four in the first debate and six in the second). By 1981, the organizers appeared to have learned their lesson and decided to allow each candidate 2.5 minutes per response. This ruled out rebuttal and prevented possible dialogue between the candidates.

Exploiting the Format

Pre-election political antagonism between the two parties led to the drafting of detailed and comprehensive agreements regarding format. For example, just before the first debate, when even the Likud was none too certain of Begin's state of health, a paragraph was introduced declaring that if either of the candidates should faint — or, alternatively, in the event of a power blackout — the debate would be retaped (Ansky, 1978). This again reflected all the constraints and limitations of the American model (Bitzer and Reuter, 1980) in its Israeli copy.

Distribution of debate time between questions posed to the respective candidates, and between the candidates and the moderator, imposed a rigid structure lacking spontaneity and surprise. This was precisely what the organizers desired. Moreover, control of the Israeli debate by party headquarters destroyed the few remaining elements of spontaneity present in the American debates. In principle, only about 10% of the time was allocated to the moderator in each of the two debates — four minutes in the first and five in the second — with the remaining time divided evenly between the two candidates. In the second debate, the parties agreed to a simple formula of seven turns, each five minutes in duration, divided evenly between the two candidates. Each candidate was given the opportunity to respond to the question alone, without relating to his rival's remarks. This situation, as demonstrated below, adversely affected the quality of the debate. The structure of the first debate was more complex: the organizers agreed to four rounds of questions, including rebuttal rights for three of them, as well as a summation by each candidate. This structure led to some minor confusion at the outset of the debate when Begin (erroneously) believed that he had the right of rebuttal. Nevertheless, the format clearly contributed to the spontaneity and quality of political argumentation.

As the Alignment estimated, Menachem Begin found it difficult to adapt himself to the rigid format of the debate. In the first debate, the two candidates did not use up the full 18 minutes accorded them — Begin left 40 seconds and Peres 29. At first glance, this difference does

not appear significant. However, an investigation of candidates' deviations in both directions reveals that in 1977, Begin behaved in a more extreme fashion than Peres both in overuse and underuse of time. The total deviation by Begin in both directions amounted to two minutes and that of Peres, closer to one minute. Begin's 'silences' in 1977 were louder than those of Peres. On four out of the eight occasions in which Begin had the floor, he failed to use an average of 20 seconds. On the other hand, on the four remaining occasions, he overshot the allotted limit by ten seconds each time. Peres manifested fewer deviations, straying from imposed limits by no more than an average of 6.5 seconds. Even when he preferred to remain silent (on six occasions), he failed to use an average of less than seven seconds. Recognizing Begin's tendency of verbal overenthusiasm, Alignment officials insisted that the 1981 debate agreement include a section enabling the moderator to cut off a speaker's microphone after a five-second excess. The moderator intervened and exercised the authority granted by this stipulation, cutting Begin off four times and Peres twice.

The Contenders' Basic Strategies

The contenders' lot is no easier than that of the moderator. Within the allotted time, each must respond to the moderator's questions, strongly indicate differences between himself and his rival — or between their respective parties — and react to his opponent's previous words. The format of the first debate allotted time for rebuttal, but the second compelled contenders to manoeuvre within a short time period to fulfill their primary objectives. This difference is inherent not only in the formats themselves, but also in the external political atmosphere of the respective campaigns. While the first debate was relaxed and pleasant, the second was laden with tension, reciprocal *ad hominem* attacks and numerous 'verbal strikes.' In 1977, the two contenders addressed each other by their first names, thus contributing significantly to the atmosphere of amity; in 1981, however, they made sure to use only family names and official titles.

Each participant's political status undoubtedly had a significant effect on his behaviour towards his rival during the debate. In 1977, after eight failed attempts at electoral victory, Menachem Begin faced a relatively 'fresh' rival in the studio ('I've headed the party for only four weeks . . .'). To a great extent, the 1977 debate was conducted by two 'outside' observers.' Hence Begin found it difficult to consider Peres as a convenient target for criticism and attack. Four years later,

the style, strategy and targets of Begin's slings and arrows changed completely. After a stormy campaign, fraught with personal attacks, it was difficult for Begin not to focus most criticism on Peres himself. Moreover, in 1977, Begin came to the studio following hospitalization and recovery from a serious illness. It is reasonable to assume that both his political status as Opposition and his health compelled him to adopt a moderate line. He reached the second debate after a term as Prime Minister, radiating confidence and self-satisfaction. No longer requiring legitimization by his opponent, as explained below, he attempted to deny such legitimization for Peres and what he represents. Moreover, uncertainty about election results and continued Likud rule tended to inflame the candidates' natural political drives. 'A restrained Begin' suited the Likud's overall election strategy in 1977, which sought to disprove the long-term suspicions spread by its opponents and to develop an attractive public image for the Opposition leader. The prevailing political situation during the second debate allowed the Likud representative to expose himself as 'Begin at his best', i.e. best at argumentation with political rivals.

Peres, in turn, was confident of victory before the first debate, believing that he would continue the Alignment's tradition of electoral success. During that debate, Peres, like his predecessors, made sure to note Begin's political mistakes with a demonstrative measure of forgiveness and paternal understanding ('I say this out of great friendship . . .'), and to play up the achievements of the Alignment in shaping Israeli society (see below). In the second debate, Peres attacked both the Likud and Begin himself, this time following the propaganda line suggested by Alignment election staff advisers and in continuation of a personal rivalry exacerbated by the election campaign.⁷ Despite these superficial differences, however, there appears to be some stylistic continuity between the two debates, enabling us to sketch the respective rhetorical strategies of each candidate.

Begin's Spheres of Polarization

There are several indications that the electoral campaign in Israel is increasingly polarized. First, political antagonism between the two major political camps (the Labor and Likud movements), originating in the pre-State era, still prevails today — perhaps to an even fiercer extent than ever before. Second, certain current circumstances, such as the ethnic fissure in Israeli society (Diskin, 1984), intensify the

traditional polarization between these political camps. Third, the campaign by nature tends to promote and sharpen political contradictions between rival parties and candidates. Finally, the debate format itself provides potential for display of antagonism. Hence it is expected that the debaters' rhetoric will reflect the general mood of the entire campaign.

About three weeks before the Tenth Knesset elections, for example, Begin spoke at a rally in Tel Aviv's Malchei Israel Square. In an analysis of this speech (which produced numerous echoes and was even mentioned in the debate itself), Graetz (1983) notes the theme of dichotomy, of 'them vs us', which appears both in Begin's speech and in Revisionist⁸ writings and essays. Obviously, such dichotomy and polarization will be emphasized more strongly in the debate. A systematic examination of Begin's performance in the two debates reveals the following four spheres of polarization and dichotomy, each with two sides: 'We' — the good, just and moral, vs 'They' — the evil, errant and immoral. This underscored Begin's dichotomous conception and intensified polarity between the two sides: (a) International, (b) National — The Israel-Arab conflict, (c) Party-Political, (d) Personal.

All four spheres are firmly anchored in Begin's Revisionist-ideological conception.

*The United States (the Free World) vs Russia
(Totalitarian Regimes)*

Begin introduced this motif several times during both debates. At the outset of the first debate, he links a Palestinian State to the Soviet:

Furthermore, I believe that we have the opportunity, especially in the United States, to explain that the danger is not only to us, but also to the Free World, since such a Palestinian State would become a key Soviet base in the Middle East; hence we and the United States effectively have joint interests.' (Debate 1, Response 1)

Moreover, Begin frequently expressed his overt appreciation of democracy and of the Free World and his rejection of all totalitarian regimes, bordering on open rivalry with the Soviet Union.

*Israel (the Land of Israel, the Jewish People) vs its
Neighbours (the Arab World)*

Begin frequently sharpens, emphasizes and intensifies the extended conflict between Israel and the Arab world, both by stating the respective interests of each side (see Debate 1, for example) and by

describing the conflict itself and its consequences ('... to penetrate the terrorists' bases and strike them there, to instil terror and fear...'), Debate 2). Compared with the Arabs, Israel is obviously considered just, self-defending and moral, granting generous rights within the framework of autonomy (see Debate 2), to the very Arabs who seek to deny the historic rights of the Jewish People.

The Likud (the Right) vs the Alignment (the Left)

It is only natural that during the first debate, Begin, an experienced Opposition politician, would attribute all the ills of the economy and society to the ruling Alignment, linking political missteps to ideological differences between the two parties. There is also an essential difference in his presentations of party polarity in the two debates. In the first debate, Begin made an effort to stress the common denominator between what he represents and views held by the majority of the Alignment in both the political and economic spheres. His opening remarks included a quotation from an article by Peres, proving that the hawkish views he upheld were within the confines of political consensus between the two parties. Yet Begin could not absolve the Alignment absolutely, finding his necessary party rivals in its left wing — the Mapam faction and Abba Eban. His portrayal of party polarity in the second debate is more diffuse, spontaneous and detailed, extending over a longer period of time. In 1981, he recalled historic accounts between the two movements from both the distant past ('What was the "saison"? You've been attempting to assassinate my character for 40 years...') and more recent history ('We took, 3,800 out of 6,000 families from the *maabarot* (immigrant transit camps) over 30 years under the socialist regime of the Alignment, which for some reason does not mention the word "socialism" today.')

Begin vs Peres

Personal differences between Begin and Peres were played down in the first debate but presented in all their severity in the second. Initially, Begin exerted considerable efforts to avoid attacking Peres, whose personal criticism and attacks evoked no response during the third debate. Begin may thus be said to have exercised 'a policy of restraint.' Even when Begin disagreed with Peres and was injured by the latter's words, he chose to shift differences from the personal to the party sphere. For example, reacting to Peres's portrayal of territorial compromise as a breakthrough in Israel-Arab conflict,

Begin objected strongly without relating directly to his debate opponent:

It has been claimed that if we offer territorial compromise, that is, partial withdrawal from Judea and Samaria, we will be placing the Arabs in a trap . . . the whole idea has no foundation whatsoever. (Debate 1)

In the second debate, in contrast, many of the inter-party disputes were transferred to personal lines. Begin spared no opportunity to attack Peres, peppering his words with sarcasm and derision ('What are you saying in his name? . . . Do you recognize me as Prime Minister? . . . I'll recognize you as Head of the Opposition four years from now as well . . .').

Combining the Spheres

Begin's dichotomous, polarized vision within each sphere was exacerbated by his combining the positive (or negative) elements of several such spheres. The Likud is identified with the Land of Israel and the two together are identified with democracy, the United States and the Free World, while the Alignment is identified with the enemies, the Arabs, the Soviet Union and totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, there is obvious identity between the Arabs and the non-free world (identity between Begin and the Likud and Peres and the Alignment, respectively, is self-evident). The following are tangible examples of Begin's use of this technique:

1. Israel—United States:

'We have common interests with the United States of America; we are essentially the ones who prevent a communist takeover in the Middle East, but I want to tell you that very few Americans are aware of it. I told a group of influential people in the United States that for six years, as we stood on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, we saved thousands of American soldiers in Vietnam from injury and slaughter because we forced Soviet ships bearing weapons to the Vietcong in Tonkin to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, so that each shipment was delayed by 16 days.' (Debate 1)

2. Israeli Left—Arabs—Soviet Union:

There is a certain leftist snobbery, perhaps under the influence of Mapam, which blocks this explanation . . . preventing the establishment of a Palestinian State. Practically speaking, any withdrawal from Judea and Samaria would mean the establishment of a Palestinian State. Establishing a Palestinian State places the State of Israel in mortal danger. Furthermore, the danger posed by its serving as a Soviet base creates joint interests with the Free World. (ibid.)

3. Alignment—Totalitarian Regimes:

The Alignment is proud that we have had five Prime Ministers from one party. Totalitarian countries have this as well. Democracy is expressed . . . when the

Opposition replaces the Government. A party other than the ruling one replaces the Government and forms a new one. (Debate 1)

4. Likud—Free World:

Governments were changed without threats and without terror: in America, Sweden, India and elsewhere . . . Perhaps we will do the same here. (ibid.)

5. Alignment—Arab States:

. . . on the contrary, they praised him as moderate, peace-loving . . . The Government to which you belong, Shimon, — and I must say this with great sorrow — aided considerably in fostering an image of Sadat as peace-loving and moderate. (Debate 1)

Begin's dichotomous conception facilitated transition from one sphere to the other and aided in their combination, culminating in the development of a comprehensive polarized ideological vision. Begin thus formulated his integrative interpretation of events and personalities, wherein individual contentions within each sphere are derived from and linked with his overall conception. This conception appears convenient and easily absorbed, as it frees the individual from challenge and interpretation of a corpus of facts, most of which are confusing and self-contradictory. Its advantage is inherent in its composition of ready-made images: good vs bad, righteousness vs evil, 'them vs us'.

Peres's Spheres of Polarization

Peres's claims, unlike those of Begin, extend over two spheres of polarity only — party and personal — which he combined in the first debate. Peres criticized Begin by name and stressed differences between Begin and various Alignment personalities and between the Likud's positions and those of his own party. Begin's past political mistakes and demands for the future were presented in stark contrast to Alignment policies, actions and achievements:

I have not changed my mind. I have no reason to change my mind, as the Alignment platform includes the following components: no return to the '67 borders, that is, a width of 14 km. (Debate 1)

It seems to me that once again, Menachem is beset by rather superfluous fears, warning that fire will break out soon. [Ours is] a policy of attitudes and deeds — and not just words. I believe we are now acting with considerable wisdom. (Debate 1)

Peres's need to identify himself and his political positions with the Alignment may have been stronger in 1977, as he was then new in his post as party head. In the second debate, Peres combined spheres of polarity when referring to the opposing camp:

I have no doubt that the Likud is leaving us scorched earth; the national treasury will be empty, Israel will be isolated. It may be all that Mr. Begin can do to hold his ground until July 1. (Debate 2)

Peres's attitudes towards the two other spheres — international relations and the Israel-Arab conflict — were more complex than Begin's dichotomous conception. Peres essentially adopted an analytical approach, attempting to perceive all aspects of the various issues. For example, he claimed that USA-Israel relations are based on co-operation rather than identical interests.

Now, I would like to state my conception of the parameters of our relations with America. We do not have to accept its suggestions in matters regarding Israel. We are not obligated to do so: defensible borders; a Palestinian State, the future of Jerusalem, etc. However, I believe that the condition for working together with the United States is that America be convinced that we are indeed, as we truly desire, working for an arrangement between us and the Arab states, that we are open to negotiation, that negotiations on all matters are possible without prior conditions and that our tone and actions alike will be positive in this respect. (Debate 1)

Peres reflects an analytical approach to evaluation of relations with the Arab states, mingled with diagnoses and 'parameters':

We do not say 'not one inch — let them say it; you cannot approach the Arab world and say 'Let's begin to negotiate for peace, so long as you realize that sooner or later we will institute Israeli sovereignty over the entire area between the [Mediterranean] Sea and the Jordan [River].' (Debate 1)

Peres's complex analyses are therefore liable to be less comprehensible. His positions on the Arab-Israel conflict are more diffuse and perhaps also more difficult for the mass audience to perceive and comprehend.

Begin's views of both party and personal polarity consistently parallel his dichotomous conception of the situation transcending the debate and the electoral race, while Peres effectively limits polarization to the studio alone. This necessary distinction between debate-orientated and external political realities demands certain discriminatory abilities which are not required for reception of Begin's claims; hence the latter may be more easily absorbed by large sectors of the population.

Discussion

The communications constraints inherent in the debate format, as demonstrated by the Israeli case, are liable not only to stifle the

rhetorical talents of the contenders but also to blur the differences between them. On the other hand, it is precisely because of the rigid time constraints imposed by the format and the medium that the contender is forced to develop rhetorical uniqueness. In this respect, a study of verbal behaviour through debate content analysis poses considerable challenges for the researcher.

The immediate objective of this study was to identify the unique rhetorical strategies of each of the two participants. The main findings indicate that Begin formulated a strategy of rhetorical polarization in four spheres: international, Arab–Israel conflict, party and personal. In contrast, Peres limited himself to the two latter spheres. Begin's ability to combine the four spheres accorded a special quality to his words and aided him in instilling within viewers a 'totalistic' and more easily acceptable global outlook. Although Begin displayed signs of lack of adjustment to the rigid structure of the debate format, his rhetorical strategy, based on dichotomous vision and intensive use of conceptual forms, may well be considered highly persuasive insofar as the electorate is concerned.

Despite the format's limitations, we may also apply the contenders' rhetorical strategies to their verbal behaviour outside the television studio. Furthermore, we may assume that these strategies are not solely the result of differences in individual personalities or the views of advisers, but rather also a consequence of essential ideological differences between the two political camps. Thus, the strategic, rhetorical and verbal-behavioural changes among representatives of the two political camps in Israel will persist as mandatory minor differences in personality. Notwithstanding this observation, the present study cannot and does not attempt to evaluate the extent to which the rhetorical strategy of each candidate contributed to the electoral successes of his party.

The present study may encourage further research, aiming at defining the relations between ideas and words, between ideology and rhetoric. Moreover, further efforts are needed to clarify the reciprocal relationship between verbal behaviour and actual political conduct. The present study may constitute a modest contribution towards comprehending the puzzling connection between covert ideas and their overt presentation. 'La musique fait le ton.' Ideas, apparently, accomplish no less!

Notes

1. This article is based on a joint project conducted with my dear colleague, Professor Raphael Nir, on Political Rhetoric in Israel. I would like to thank him for the intellectual experience in working together and for his fruitful co-operation during the project.

2. The Likud election headquarters staff was headed by Ezer Weizman, who immediately succeeded in neutralizing political demands to run a traditional propaganda campaign emphasizing the Likud's ideological components and differences between the party and the Alignment. The staff engaged the services of the Dahaf Advertising Agency, which had been employed previously by the Alignment. The friendly relations and mutual understanding on basic election propaganda strategy which prevailed between Weizman and the agency's director, Eliezer Jourabin, were reflected in far-reaching changes in campaigning methods. Giant advertisements in the press, extending over one or two full pages constituted a unique feature of the Likud's election propaganda. They were meagre in content but rich in 'easily digested' slogans and visual effects — designed to appeal to popular demands for a strong leadership — as well as other strength-related symbols. 'The Likud — power No. 1' was the key slogan selected by Weizman and Likud propagandists as an effective response to these demands.

3. While this arrangement ostensibly appears generous to the parties, it drew intensive political criticism. Among other things, critics indicated that the law fosters perpetuation of the existing political map and discriminates against new lists not represented in the outgoing Knesset.

4. The Elections Committee, headed by a High Court Justice, may not intervene in the manner in which parties decide to use their time, nor in their pre-debate agreement negotiations.

5. The resignation of the other two journalists, Hannah Zemer of *Davar* and Shalom Rosenfeld of *Maariv*, apparently dictated the one-moderator debate format.

6. The Broadcasting Authority's Director General forbade TV correspondent Ehud Yaari from moderating the debate, thereby seeking to preserve the broadcasting media's neutral image. This decision underscores an additional constraint on the Israeli debate, which must be left to journalists insufficiently experienced with the electronic media.

7. According to journalists' reports, Eliezer Jourabin believed that the Alignment's best strategy would be to attack Begin. Hence Alignment newspaper propaganda concentrated on Begin's personality, which ignored the extent of the Likud leader's popularity (Caspi, 1982).

8. 'Revisionism' is the popular term for the pre-State, right-wing nationalist movement, headed by Zeev Jabotinsky, spiritual mentor of Menachem Begin.

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