The Definition and Typological Model of a Dogwhistle

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Abstract: A formal, speaker-based definition for the linguistic trope known as a 'dogwhistle' is provided. This definition is supported by an 11-part typological model for distinguishing dogwhistles from similar linguistic tropes (i.e., puns, innuendo, inside jokes) and other speech acts. The model is applied to many data examples from a variety of sources. The model allows for data input, filtering against the criteria, and classification of the speech act as a dogwhistle or not. Additionally, the model can highlight how well the data example adheres to certain criteria. This informs interpretations about whether the speech act is a successfully constructed dogwhistle as well as provide possible reasons for failed dogwhistles. This analysis deepens our understanding of political and social discourse and the ways

it can be manipulated for personal gains, resulting in new insight that helps dismantle strategic racism (Haney-López, 2014) and other threats to democracy.

The definition and typological model of a dogwhistle

This work examines the speech act occurring in social discourse (most often in political speech) called a 'dogwhistle'. Informally, a dogwhistle is a type of coded speech found in lexical, phrasal, or thematic form in which a speaker delivers a message that contains two plausible interpretations to a mixed audience, with at least some members of that audience unaware of the existence of a second interpretation. The term 'dogwhistle' is a metaphor modelled after the function of a literal dog whistle, which emits a noise at a pitch that only dogs can hear.

An unpublished version of this paper has been in circulation since 2008, updated and shared publicly in 2014 (Witten, 2008, 2014). Since then, my definition of a dogwhistle has been referenced several times and expanded upon and clarified in many important ways. In this paper, I will incorporate the valuable contributions of others into an updated definition and 11-part typological model of a dogwhistle. This is followed by a brief exploration of ways to hear a dogwhistle, plus important distinctions between successful vs. failed dogwhistles. Next, several linguistic features of dogwhistles are outlined in this paper, addressing how these speech acts relate to audience design (Bell, 1984), relevance (Grice, 1975), narrative coherence (Duranti, 2006), next turn proof (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998), among other key aspects. This also demonstrates the crucial differences between dogwhistles and similar tropes such as inside jokes, innuendos (Bell, 1997), and puns.

Following the distinction of dogwhistles from other, similar tropes, I present data analysis, where I apply the typological model to various examples of dogwhistle data. Lastly, the discussion covers some other perspectives and current challenges with analyzing dogwhistles and applying the typological model.

In the data analysis, many examples from various domains support the definition and model, showcasing the evolution of the trope over the years as speakers find ways to communicate among an ever-changing social and technological landscape.

The most common arena for hearing dogwhistles is still political; the tactic is commonly known as 'dogwhistle politics' and refers the act of sending these types of messages for political gains.

In the past decade, dogwhistle politics has been described as "at the heart of strategic racism" (Haney-López, 2014). In *Dogwhistle Politics: How coded racial appeals have reinvented racism and wrecked the middle class*, Haney-López (2014, Chapter 2) defines 'strategic racism' as follows:

Strategic racism refers to purposeful efforts to use racial animus as leverage to gain material wealth, political power, or heightened social standing.

The definition and model support these previous assertions that the dogwhistle tactic has been used for strategic racism for decades (Haney-López, 2014).

Analysis of the various functions and effects of dogwhistles are crucial to advancing current conceptions of how we use tropes to communicate ideas to others and index solidarity, distance, and power.

A brief history of dogwhistles

While I'm primarily focusing on the more recent, metaphorical use of 'dogwhistle' here—most crucially as it relates to dogwhistle politics and strategic racism—even the physical object called a 'dog whistle' has racist roots (Shapiro, 2020).

Also called 'Galton's whistle', the silent dog whistle was invented by Francis Galton, who was most known for coining the term 'eugenics' and developing many theories about variations among human populations (Shapiro, 2020; Wikipedia, 2022). Galton designed the dog whistle to test hypotheses about differences among races, with the aim to assert that differences were biologically and inheritance-based, not social.

Around 1940, Galton's whistle replaced the traditional dog whistle used for hunting. This had an impact on the types of dogs used for hunting, as well as the contexts in which dog whistles were employed.

With this new silent whistle technology, suburban dogs were used more frequently, especially by police forces. This coincided with the start of the civil rights movement and by the 1960s, the American public had fully embraced using dogs in law enforcement.

These changes led to over-policing of Black neighborhoods and reinforced ideas about race, criminality, intelligence, and morals—the very same racist theories that Galton and others held.

To summarize, from Shapiro, 2020:

> *It was in this context that the silent dog whistle, an invention that unified racist scientific equipment with racist cultures of dog hunting, became a technology that facilitated violent opposition to civil rights.*

It was also during this time that the metaphorical use of dogwhistling began, even though it wasn't labelled as such at the time. The emerging discourse was prompted by shifting social norms about what was considered acceptable to say in public. People increasingly did not want to be seen or be perceived as racist (Mendelberg, 2001; Haney-López, 2014; Saul, 2018a). As a result, a more covert, coded form of racism replaced overt displays, and this became a new norm of discourse.

The dogwhistle tactic enabled some people to be manipulated without them realizing it, while others were picking up on the secret message loud and clear. Yet others still were completely unaware of nor influenced by any hidden messages in the communications.

American politicians — and most frequently, Republicans — have a long history of using dogwhistles in their messaging (Haney-López, 2014; Blades, 2016), starting with Barry Goldwater and his use of 'states rights', to Richard Nixon's 'Southern Strategy', continuing with Ronald Reagan's 'welfare queens', gaining complexity and covertness in George H. W. Bush's Willie Horton advertisement (Mendelberg, 2001), creating confusion with George W. Bush's 'just a comma' (Witten, 2008, 2014), and pushing new limits of acceptability with Donald Trump (Haney-López, 2016; Marshall, 2016; Lopez, 2020). The latter examples with Trump have left many to wonder if he has *"abandoned code and shifted to flagrant racist appeals"* (Haney-López, 2016; Marshall, 2016). The 11-part model outlined in this paper provides a likely answer.

Mentions of 'dogwhistle' in print

The term 'dogwhistle' made its first print appearance in this metaphorical sense in 1988 by Washington Post pollster

Richard Morin as the 'dogwhistle effect', as quoted in Saul (2018a, p. 361):

'Dogwhistle' is a relatively new term in politics, arising out of US political journalism in the 1980s. The first recorded use of the term seems to have been by Richard Morin of the Washington Post, discussing a curious phenomenon that had been noticed in opinion polling.

> *Subtle changes in question-wording sometimes produce remarkably different results… researchers call this the 'Dogwhistle Effect': Respondents hear something in the question that researchers do not. (1988)*

(Morin 1988, quoted in Safire 2008: 190)

The concept of a dogwhistle was further explored in print again in 1997 (The Dominion, 1997). A few early research papers referred to the term and Josh Fear's 'Under the Radar' was one of the very first to deal with the phenomenon directly (Fear, 2007).

Since then, Google sources, Wikipedia, and various political blogs discussing dogwhistles help to provide a basic understanding of what the tactic entails. In recent decades, the term has also appeared in newspaper headlines, on UrbanDictionary.com and Wikipedia.

Merriam-Webster (2022) currently lists a dogwhistle as relating to politics and defined as *"an expression or statement that has a secondary meaning intended to be understood only by a particular group of people"* (Merriam-Webster, 2022). This is a sufficient definition for dictionary entry, aimed at informing the public about the word and its generally understood sense. For linguistic clarity and distinguishing a dogwhistle from other forms of coded speech, a more substantial definition is needed.

Dogwhistles today

This paper addresses the definition and construction of a dogwhistle as it's used in discourse today. In the next sections, I will define what a dogwhistle is using linguistic terminology. I outline the necessary requirements that allow it to be understood as such and introduce a typological model that describes and differentiates dogwhistles from other, similar rhetorical devices such as inside jokes, innuendos, and puns. This demonstrates how these various tropes are distinguishable with respect to audience, intent, relevance, method of concealment, and other established discourse criteria.

Although most research to date on dogwhistling has focused on the political arena, I argue that this discursive tactic can and does exist in other speech genres and social domains as well.

The typological model presented here is first applied to examples of dogwhistle data found in TV programming primarily targeted for children. Using data from this genre accomplishes two goals. First, these examples show how dogwhistles are neither limited to political realms nor are they solely confined to adult-directed discourse. Secondly, messaging aimed at mixed-age audiences clearly demonstrates dogwhistles in practice, since the difference in common ground knowledge and power between children and the adults who manage their viewing content provides a highly contrastive environment in which to view the criteria that make a dogwhistle successful.

Moving on to an example from advertising, applying the model in this context shows how dogwhistling to a niche audience can garner support (and sales) in a way that direct messaging initially couldn't. Subaru's use of dogwhistles in their car advertisements targeted at lesbians paved the way for a more progressive, community-supported corporate

identity full of superfans who embraced the covertly inclusive messaging (Mayyasi, 2016).

Next, I examine dogwhistles in an online discourse context. As both form and function of a dogwhistle have changed in several ways in the past decade, so have evolving social and technological practices—and the emergent behavior that results from them. Using examples of 'algospeak', I demonstrate how dogwhistling tactics are used to bypass algorithms as well as humans who might take offense at the true content of the message.

Lastly, examining how dogwhistles function in political discourse shows some of the possible social effects that failed or successful dogwhistles can have on an audience or a speaker's narrative, along with the potential harmful outcomes of using this tactic divisively.

Through this research, I provide concrete evidence that the discursive tactics that one chooses while addressing an audience are not arbitrary. They contain an underlying composition that reflect the speaker's social goals. How a speaker constructs the dogwhistle serves to strengthen or weaken the coherence of that speaker's narrative, and this examination is crucial if we are to expand our understanding of the mechanisms at work in our everyday communication.

The updated linguistic definition of a dogwhistle

In the years since I first proposed my original definition of a dogwhistle (Witten, 2008, 2014), several variations and subtypes of dogwhistles have emerged in academic research (Saul, 2018a, 2018b; Almagro & Torices, 2018; Henderson & McCready, 2018). The updated definition in this paper attempts to consider all these variants, with the aim of creating a simple definition that is inclusive of them while still accounting for their nuance and complexity.

This dogwhistle definition and typology is derived primarily from the intentions and actions of a speaker and the design of their message, and not from a hearer and the effects on them upon their receipt of a message. The latter will be covered in brief detail where relevant, such as hearer impact when dogwhistles fail to achieve their designed effects.

Based on existing sources, and analyzing the nature of a dogwhistle with respect to audience design (Bell, 1984) and speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1965), I propose the linguistic definition of a dogwhistle as the following:

> *A dogwhistle is a speech act designed—with conscious or subconscious intent—to allow at least two plausible interpretations of a message, with one interpretation being a coded message targeted for a select audience and concealed in such a way that, at minimum, a broader or out-group audience is unaware of the existence of the coded interpretation.*

In the next section, the definition of a dogwhistle will be broken down into component parts and defined in greater detail. This deconstruction allows dogwhistles to be compared to other tropes and discursive tactics, which may only differ from each other in a few small but crucial ways.

Typological model of a dogwhistle

Based on exploration of uses of the term 'dogwhistle' in political news reports, speeches, Google and Wikipedia sources and UrbanDictionary.com, plus more recent published papers (Saul, 2018a, 2018b; Almagro & Torices, 2018; Henderson & McCready, 2018), eleven criteria are

established as necessary components of a successfully constructed dogwhistle.

The word 'successful' here is crucial, as there are many speech acts that may fail to comprehensively meet all the dogwhistle criteria. Messages may be perceived as dogwhistles by others, when in fact — according to the typology presented here — they would be technically classed as dogwhistle-like or other types of speech tropes entirely. The model provides a basis to enable us to distinguish successfully constructed dogwhistles from failed ones, successfully received dogwhistles from those that fail to be heard properly by their audience, canonical dogwhistles from their non-canonical variants, and dogwhistles from other tropes that may sound like dogwhistles but aren't.

The challenge for this paper is therefore to present a model that accurately describes a speaker-based account of the dogwhistle tactic that both captures the reality of usage without being prescriptive, but not being so descriptive that it lacks definition or proper scope (so as not to be distinguishable from other tropes). The approach I've applied to this model aims to carve a path that captures the current understanding of dogwhistles as they're used today, using the critical tools within the sociolinguist's skillset.

Throughout this paper, the terms 'speaker(s)', 'hearer(s)', and 'receiver(s)' will be used. 'Speaker(s)' refers to the author-deliverer of a message. This can be done in any form or modality.

Authorship is not always the sole responsibility of a single speaker, such is the case with advertising or political speeches, which are typically created by teams of writers or content designers. Therefore, the speaker is the brand or person that delivers the message, as they "speak for" those that created it, as if they were the author.

'Hearer(s)' refers to the recipients of a message and may imply at least some form of conscious awareness of the act

of hearing. That is, they may consciously realize they've heard something (and often do, making communication possible). Again, this can occur in any modality or channel, even though the traditional meaning of 'hearing' implies sound.

With dogwhistling, it becomes necessary to make a distinction here using an additional term, 'receiver(s)'. This refers to those who receive a message, but they may or may not be consciously aware that they are doing so. As such, hearers are a subset of receivers. This distinction allows us to describe messaging designed with high degrees of concealment (e.g., priming implicit associations) and with impact that varies in how consciously the message may be realized among members of the audiences.

The 11 criteria of a dogwhistle

The criteria below outline a canonical dogwhistle — one that has speaker intent, with purpose, and is successfully concealed during and immediately following its delivery. Other variants will also be discussed in later sections.

Table 1. Summary of the 11 criteria of a dogwhistle

1.	**Intentionality:** A dogwhistle is a speech act that is intentional, and often premeditated. The speaker's intent to dogwhistle can range from conscious to subconscious. As intent cannot be proven, a speaker always has plausible deniability of dogwhistling.
2.	**Purpose for Dogwhistling:** A dogwhistle is motivated by a compelling reason; there must be a point to constructing and sending a dogwhistle message.

3.	**Interpretation:** A dogwhistle must have at least two salient, plausible interpretations, differing in some manner involving either meaning or function.
4.	**Linguistic Packaging:** A dogwhistle can be a single lexical item, an utterance, or even a series of utterances (e.g., forming a theme or narrative). • The token encompassing the dogwhistle will be referred to as the speech act. • At least two interpretations must be readily available from ONE speech act.
5.	**Audience Design:** There exists a general audience for the dogwhistle message and it has at least one subset audience; defined here as the 'target audience'. This audience is distinct from rest of the general audience with respect to common ground.
6.	**Target Audience:** The target audience members are the intended recipients of the dogwhistle message. Members of the general audience that are not also members of the target audience are defined as 'general receivers'. Members of the target audience are 'target receivers'.
7.	**Method of Concealment:** The audiences must differ with respect to common ground (e.g., through shared knowledge, identity, or affiliation) and the speaker must design the speech act so that this difference is capitalized upon in that speech act; this can be done overtly or covertly.
8.	**Degree of Concealment:** The dogwhistle message must be sufficiently coded to not reveal itself to general receivers of the message. In some cases, this degree of concealment extends to target receivers too—it may be preferable that the speaker designs and conceals the dogwhistle message to reduce the possibility of the target audience being consciously aware that they are receiving a dogwhistle message.

9.	**Motivation for Concealment:** There must be compelling reason to keep the dogwhistle message hidden from general receivers.
10.	**Coherence & Relevance:** Speakers must make sure that both interpretations of the speech act are cooperative and meet the needs and expectations of all likely receivers, (Grice, 1975). Messaging consistent with what we know about the speaker is insurance that a dogwhistle will not be discovered, e.g., speakers over-attuning to their target receivers run the risk of sounding incoherent to general receivers.
11.	**Next Turn Proofs:** Messages must be designed, packaged, and delivered in a way that is likely to elicit the same response from the receivers of different audiences, regardless of interpretation(s). That is, the next turn proofs must be unmarked.

These eleven criteria will be explored in further detail below.

Criterion 1: Intent

The general understanding of a dogwhistle is that it is a speech act that carries intent, and in many cases, is premeditated. I propose that this intent criterion exists on a spectrum and can range from conscious intent to subconscious intent.

At one end, a speaker can deliberately craft coded messaging with full awareness of doing so in pursuit of a specific communicative goal (i.e., conscious intent). On the other end of the spectrum, a speaker could have no conscious knowledge of designing messaging that is coded, manipulative, or evokes attitudes in their audience, but they still may have subconscious knowledge that they are doing

so. That is, their thoughts and actions are motivated by a hidden desire, implicit bias, negative stereotypes, or other motivational structure (i.e., subconscious intent).

In a speaker-based account of dogwhistling, it is important to stipulate that a dogwhistler is a speaker who intends to convey a coded message and is not simply a repeater or otherwise accidental deliverer of one. This is also keeping with the public understanding of the term.

It is conceivable that a dogwhistle could be constructed by accident, e.g., a phrase contains a secondary interpretation much like an accidental play on words. This creates scenarios where a hearer could justifiably accuse any speaker of dogwhistling the moment the presence of an alternate interpretation was found. This happens often in politics, prompting those speakers (and sometimes their supporters) to plausibly deny that they had any intent to send coded messaging. This is also the case when speakers may unintentionally repeat dogwhistle messages and are unaware that they are doing so. Saul (2018a) and others (Lo Guercio & Caso, 2022) subcategorize these as 'unintentional dogwhistles'; see **Discussion** for more on this.

Since one of the fundamental components of a dogwhistle is plausible deniability (Fear, 2007; Torices, 2021; Lo Guercio & Caso, 2022) and the intent to send a coded message cannot be proven, the very nature of the dogwhistling tactic allows the speaker to deny the existence of a secondary meaning contained in a message sent to their audience(s). This is done on the grounds that what was interpreted by some was not what was intended by the speaker. Therefore, one cannot empirically prove the existence of a dogwhistle, as any instance of one can be subsequently denied.

Plausible deniability about intent can be a benefit not only for the speaker, but also for the target audience. For example, in allegations of dogwhistle racism, not only can the

dogwhistler refute racist intent, but that plausible deniability is conferred onto the audience too (Saul, 2018a). These target receivers can agree with the sentiments of the message while denying that it is problematic or racist; even if that denial is only within themselves (Haney-López, 2016).

Using the clearly defined framework of analysis for what a dogwhistle consists of, we can highlight locations in a text that feature likely dogwhistles and focus on an analysis of those examples. All dogwhistles referred to in this paper are for the purpose of showing how they work and function. Moving forward, we will assume intent, conscious or subconscious, with the caveat that it can be plausibly denied—and in some cases truthfully so, e.g., the 'unintentional dogwhistles' that Saul (2018) and others posit.

Criterion: 2 Purpose

Where there's intent to communicate something, there's an underlying motivation or reason for that message (and for the method in which it's delivered).

It follows that where there is intent to send a dogwhistle message, there must be a compelling reason or purpose that a dogwhistle message serves.

The dogwhistle message aims to achieve something of value for the speaker. It is not a platitude or other kind of meaningless sentiment; the dogwhistle does identity work.

It is almost always a higher-level goal that is being pursued — the dogwhistle is simply a means to achieve it.

Henderson & McCready (2018) assert that dogwhistles are about selecting personas and putting them forth. I propose that the personas are already present within the speaker and dogwhistles are about stance-taking. These two perspectives are complimentary—both put forth that identity construction and presentation are at work here.

A speaker may knowingly craft a dogwhistle message in pursuit of a specific communicative goal, such as rallying support or agreement. In many cases, the purpose of a dogwhistle is to signal in-group identity or affinity with an audience. The dogwhistle says, 'I am one of your kind, I am like you, we share the same ideological orientation' (Albertson, 2015; Saul, 2018a; Henderson & McCready, 2018). This signalling can be as overt as a linguistic wink and nod, or as covert as activating implicit biases, with the target audience none the wiser (Saul, 2018b).

In sum, we assume that when people speak, they use words that not only contain the meanings of the ideas they want to express, but that the values contained in those choices are in alignment with the speaker's personal values. Using a swear word versus a euphemism is an example of lexical choice that reveals information about the speaker's ideology. The same is true when one spouts slurs or racial epithets, and it applies just as well when a speaker does this covertly using dogwhistles. Furthermore, the choice of using a divisive tactic such as a dogwhistle itself says something about the speaker, their values, and their regard for the audience they address.

Criterion 3: Interpretation

A dogwhistle must be a speech act that has two distinct, plausible interpretations. It is crucially important that these two interpretations of the message substantially differ in some manner involving either meaning or function.

It is not sufficient to claim that a dogwhistle is a phrase where the two interpretations are slight variants of each other. For example, saying the phrase 'I am going to the store' where one interpretation is the grocery store, and the other is a pet store, is not a dogwhistle. However, if 'going

to the store' was a phrase that carried a special significance between the speaker and the target hearer(s), then it would sufficiently meet the interpretation criterion, and could potentially be a dogwhistle, other criteria pending; it is necessary to meet these other criteria, as 'going to the store' could simply be a euphemism or inside joke.

The degree to which these interpretations must necessarily differ is arguable. There is no metric yet for measuring differences in meaning or function. The interpretations are also highly contextual.

Additionally, interpretations must be hierarchical. The secondary interpretation is a subset of the more general one, in the sense that it is marked by requiring an extra "cost of admission". This extra cost is realized as common ground; see **Criterion 5: Audience Design.**

Criterion 4: Linguistic Packaging

A dogwhistle in linguistic form is one speech act containing two interpretations. If the two interpretations were allowed to be gleaned from separate messages (e.g., two different utterances), we would expect that those messages would contain semantic differences, lest they be completely redundant. As we saw above, redundancy is not allowed regarding meaning or function of interpretations either. It is crucial that both interpretations are packaged in the same message.

Paralinguistic or non-linguistic dogwhistles are possible, such as visual metaphors, gestures, actions, etc.; these will not be looked at here but have been explored by Drainville & Saul (forthcoming). The same criteria could be applied and the linguistic manifestations would be replaced by other communicative modalities.

It is worth noting here that there are more complex dogwhistles which are linguistic in form, but not confined to a single message. For example, while it is possible and straightforward to see that a single lexical item containing two potential meanings can be considered a dogwhistle, it is also possible that a series of messages can form a theme, where that theme has an alternate interpretation, and therefore can be a dogwhistle (Witten 2008, 2014).

Linguistic messaging always occurs in a context. This context can contribute to the understanding of the message as a dogwhistle. If the broader context or juxtaposition of message with images, sounds, prefacing, or other forms of context cues co-occurs, this could strengthen the dogwhistle message and reduce plausible deniability. The opposite is also true; the lack of supporting context or paralinguistic cues could weaken the assertion that the speaker is dogwhistling and therefore increase their plausible deniability.

In sum, we must not only focus on the linguistic aspects when analyzing dogwhistle data, as these messages always occur in a context and often have other reinforcing signals (Drainville & Saul, forthcoming).

Criterion 5: Audience Design

The speaker must be addressing two different audiences with the same surface (non-secret) form of the message. Minimally, the audience design of the dogwhistle speech act consists of five parts:

1. The 'speaker' is the deliverer of the dogwhistle; the speaker can be any number or modality.

2. The 'general message' is the uncoded, surface interpretation of the speech act.

3. The 'dogwhistle message' is the coded, covert message found in the speech act.

4. The 'general audience' includes all possible receivers.

5. The general audience has at least one subset audience that is defined as the 'target audience'.

Additionally, both audiences must be sharing the same metaphorical or literal space at the same time. This is required because it allows both audiences equal access to the message; the only differentiating factor is the common ground knowledge of the members of the audiences (Witten, 2008, 2014; Henderson & McCready, 2018).

Common ground is understood as *"the key to recognizing the speaker's meaning [...] the information they believe they share. Technically it consists of their mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual suppositions,"* (Clark and Schober, 1992, p. 17). Speakers in interaction capitalize on common ground knowledge, and design their speech to conform to the Principle of Utterance Design, which is stated as the following:

> *Speakers try to design each utterance so that their addressees can figure out what they mean by considering the utterance against the current common ground.*
> (Clark and Schober, 1992, p. 17)

Furthermore, if audience members are known to belong to certain affiliations, such as a political or church group, it is possible that each of these groups constitute a Community of Practice (CoP). A CoP is defined as:

> *...groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.*
> (Wenger, 1998)

In their regular activity together (or with a role model or through an intermediary), a common ground of ideas, beliefs, jargon, tools, and other forms of reifying group membership are created and shared. This knowledge is understood by group members and is part of what differentiates them from non-members.

It is also possible for audiences to differ with respect to pre-existing attitudes and biases. In some instances, it is those who share the attitudes and biases who form common ground together and this is capitalized upon and manipulated in the dogwhistle. As such, I expand the traditional definition of 'common ground' to encompass shared identity, including shared pre-existing attitudes or biases. As quoted in Albertson (2015):

> *…the unique appeal of multivocal language is that it allows politicians to speak directly to like-minded others, communicating to them common ground and shared values, while those who do not share this perspective remain oblivious.*
> (Albertson, 2015, p. 6)

To summarize, the audience design criteria for a dogwhistle minimally requires two audiences, with at least one audience being distinct from the other(s) with respect to common ground. A speaker constructing a dogwhistle must follow the Principle of Utterance Design and account for two these different sets of common ground knowledge and successfully capitalize on this disparity.
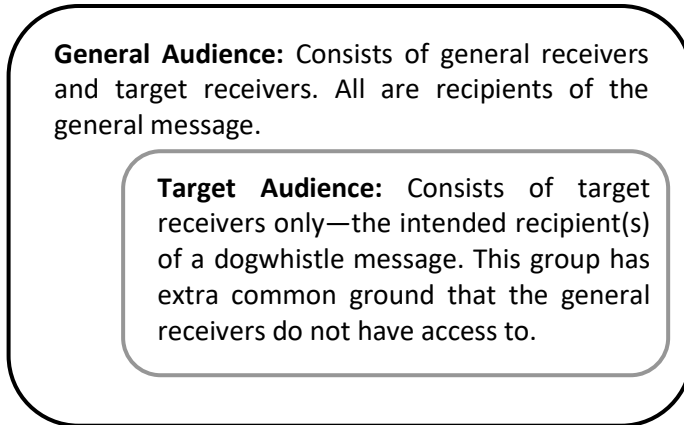
Criterion 6: Target Audience

Minimally, dogwhistle must contain two messages directed at two audiences. The first message will be referred to as the 'general message' and is the uncoded, general interpretation of the speech act. The second message, henceforth referred to as the 'dogwhistle message', is the coded, covert message. The possible interpretations are meant to each be realized by specific audiences, and their consistent alignment with their intended audience is crucial.

What will be defined as the 'general audience' includes all possible receivers for a speaker's message. The general audience contains a subset audience, defined as the 'target audience'. The dogwhistle message is intended for the target audience. It is assumed by the speaker that these audience members have the necessary common ground to decode the message, by their common identity, shared values, membership to the group or CoP that grants them access to this knowledge (see **Criterion 5: Audience Design**).

Members of the general audience that are not also members of the target audience will be defined as 'general receivers'; referred to elsewhere as the 'non-targeted audience' (Torices, 2021). Members of the target audience will be referred to as 'target receivers'.

An instance of a dogwhistle must include a speaker, at least one general receiver and at least one target receiver. It is possible to have target receivers outnumber general receivers, and vice versa. Figure 1. Message Alignment with Audience is a visual representation of this audience naming convention.

Figure 1. Message Alignment with Audience

> **General Audience:** Consists of general receivers and target receivers. All are recipients of the general message.
>
> > **Target Audience:** Consists of target receivers only—the intended recipient(s) of a dogwhistle message. This group has extra common ground that the general receivers do not have access to.

Criterion 7: Method of Concealment

As stated in the audience design component, the audiences must differ with respect to common ground knowledge. For a dogwhistle to work, it is crucial that the target receivers have access to more or different common ground knowledge than the general receivers, so that they may decode the hidden message and the general receivers may not.

This common ground can be called upon through shared knowledge and repertoire (explicit association) or through identity and affiliation (implicit association).

The speaker designs the speech act so that the difference in common ground is called upon in the speech act; they may vary in how much conscious awareness they have of doing this. Thus, this difference in common ground provides a pathway for the message to be delivered to target receivers but at the same time concealed from general receivers.

Criterion 8: Degree of Concealment

This criterion addresses how easily accessible the meaning of the dogwhistle is from the audience. Minimally, the speaker must design their dogwhistle message in such a way that it is hidden from general receivers. Additionally, the dogwhistle message can be designed to be concealed from target receivers so that they receive the message but may not be consciously aware that this has occurred.

Several researchers make distinctions about how concealed the dogwhistle message is from target receivers. That is, they explore instances where the target audience isn't necessarily aware that they are being dogwhistled at. This is referred to by some as 'covert dogwhistling' (Saul, 2018a, 2018b; Almagro & Torices, 2018; Henderson & McCready, 2018; Torices, 2021; Lo Guercio & Caso, 2022).

Covert dogwhistling refers to the idea that the dogwhistle is constructed in such a way and concealed so that pre-existing attitudes are evoked with the intended target hearers being unaware of the dogwhistle message (Mendelberg, 2001, Saul, 2018b, Almagro & Torices, 2018); that is, priming, implicit bias, and other tactics are at play, and done so intentionally, and therefore as a form of manipulation. As Almagro & Torices state:

> *Covert dogwhistles, on the other hand, are not really about sending a "coded message." Instead, they raise attitudes to salience, so people will act on them without realizing they are being moved on them.*
> (Almagro & Torices, 2018, p. 93)

Which is to say, the decoding of the message isn't always conscious, nor is the message always explicit for target receivers.

Compare this with *overt* dogwhistling, where the dogwhistle is designed, packaged, and delivered so that target receivers will consciously hear, decode, and realize the message intended for them (2018b). With overt dogwhistling, the message can be more easily consciously entertained by the target audience (Lo Guercio & Caso, 2022). This is the 'wink' aspect of dogwhistling; both speaker and special audience are in on the secret message, and they know it.

The distinction between overt and covert dogwhistling is useful, but I maintain that they should be viewed through the speaker lens — that is, keeping in mind that a speaker designs their intent, linguistic packaging, and both method and degree of concealment when they construct any message; they may do this spontaneously and/or unconsciously and to varying degrees. In other words, a dogwhistle is defined here in terms of its construction, not its impact on hearers.

It is my view that the degree of concealment is more accurately described as existing on a spectrum, rather than as binary categories of 'overt' or 'covert'. This is asserted for two reasons:

1. A speaker cannot categorically determine whether their message will be overt (consciously realized) or covert (unconsciously realized) to receivers; they can only design their utterances with degrees of concealment that aim to do so.

2. As such, speakers may intend to dogwhistle in ways that are partially concealed, somewhat covert, haphazardly overt, consciously covert to only some, or any other manner of concealment that doesn't fit neatly into a binary category of 'overt' or 'covert'.

It should also be noted that audience members will vary as to how consciously they receive a message, regardless of its design. As we'll see with Example 6. "Global special interests", some target receivers will recognize that this is a coded language referring to Jews, while others may not make the connection but will nonetheless "get" the message—that is, racial resentments and stereotypes are activated upon hearing "globalists".

Putting all of this together, it is this criterion — the degree of concealment — along with how it's done (the method of concealment), that allows the dogwhistle to function as more 'overt' (less concealed) or more 'covert' (more concealed).

To summarize the degree of concealment criterion, the dogwhistle must be concealed enough to be less likely to reveal itself to general receivers. This concealment can be raised to optionally cover target receivers as well.

Criterion 9: Motivation for Concealment

There must be a compelling reason to keep the dogwhistle message from general receivers. In most cases, the motivation for secrecy has to do with the speaker's best interest. For instance, if a speaker wants to appeal to a mixed audience, they may use a dogwhistle to align with one audience, but not outwardly show their preferential treatment to the other audience. Or the speaker may have a message that is not appropriate in some manner for the general audience.

When the degree of concealment extends to target receivers, there is likely an additional motivation for concealment. The speaker may not want the target audience to know that audience manipulation is occurring. In the case of dogwhistle racism, the speaker may intend to shield the

target receivers from being consciously aware that they're receiving messages of a racial nature, while still activating cognitive attitudes such as racial stereotypes and prejudices, or noncognitive attitudes, such as emotions of resentment, anger, disgust, etc (Torices, 2021). The purpose of a dogwhistle in these instances is to evoke these pre-existing attitudes, not to create them (Saul, 2018a; Torices, 2021).

Criterion 10: Coherence & Relevance

It is necessary that all probable interpretations make sense and be in line with the overall messaging intent and identity of the speaker. If this is not adhered to, then either general receivers, target receivers, or both, will search for relevance in the message. An instance of failure to meet this criterion is shown in Example 5. "Just a **Comma**".

If receivers are searching for relevance, they will likely discover the dogwhistle. Proper linguistic packaging that is consistent with what we know about the speaker provides greater assurance that the dogwhistle will not be discovered. Speakers that over-attune to their target audience run the risk of sounding incoherent to their general audience, and especially to general receivers. It is important that speakers make sure that each interpretation of the message is cooperative and meets the needs and expectations of its intended hearer(s), (Grice, 1975).

Criterion 11: Next-turn Proofs

In Conversation Analysis (CA), a basic tool of assessing a speaker's understanding of what was said previously is called a next-turn proof procedure. Speakers express information in their response to a previous utterance to

signal to the previous speaker what they understood that person's conversational turn to be about, regardless of whether or not it was what the original speaker intended (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). This allows all speakers to ensure that they are understanding each other properly, and to make repairs if not. The response is designated as the *next-turn proof*, because it is in the next-turn that proof of what was understood of the previous utterance is given.

With a dogwhistle, both general and dogwhistle messages must be designed and packaged (within the same speech act, see ***Criterion 4: Linguistic Packaging***) to elicit the same general response from the hearers, regardless of which interpretation(s) each hearer makes. Lack of awareness on the speaker's part in accounting for likely possible reactions from each audience may result in general receivers becoming aware that they have missed something that they were not supposed to be privy to. That is to say, the next-turn proofs must be aligned, so that no member of the audience is made aware that they have understood something in a different sense than another member of that audience. To do so could reveal the presence of the dogwhistle.

For example, if a general message is serious in tone, but the dogwhistle message is humorous, then a response of laughter by target receivers could signal to general receivers that some members in the audience understood the previous turn to be humorous. Consequently, these general receivers might search for relevance in the laughter response and discover the dogwhistle.

An interesting side effect of successfully aligned next-turn proof responses is that a dogwhistler does not often receive confirmation that the dogwhistle message was received as intended by the appropriate hearers, if at all.

That is, if the speaker is assessing their success by response alone, they may not have a way to disambiguate which hearers (if any) received the dogwhistle message. What

the speaker may be able to assess by audience response is if the dogwhistle was successfully concealed; a successfully concealed dogwhistle message should elicit the expected response across the entire audience. Over-concealment, however, may mean that this aligned response is due to nobody hearing the dogwhistle (e.g., metaphorically, the pitch was too high) and therefore all audience members are reacting to the general message.

Summary of dogwhistle criteria

The eleven criteria outlined here are guidelines for establishing the canonical dogwhistle; deviations are possible and, in some cases, allowable. The specific content or expressions of most of these criteria are extremely variable. For example, differences in the amount or nature of the intent, purpose, linguistic packaging, types of interpretations, coherence, motivation, audience(s), common ground, target(s), or next turn proofs are possible and allowable, so long as they sufficiently perform the functions as outlined in each criterion. This allows us to use the logical framework of what a dogwhistle is, and apply it to other genres, age groups, backgrounds, and cultures, and to do so for any purpose.

How to hear a dogwhistle

Successfully constructed dogwhistles go unheard by everyone but those with ears attuned to it. This prompts the question: how do we hear a dogwhistle? Analysis shows that there are at least three ways that hearers can be the recipient of a dogwhistle. The first and most straightforward way is to 'be a dog'. That is, to be the intended targeted recipient of the secret message. This of course is not always possible, as

it requires membership or similar affiliation to the group that the speaker is addressing covertly.

'Being a dog' entails knowledge of the group's shared repertoire— the procedures, jargon, symbols, concepts, etc. specific to that group (Wenger, 1998). This provides the necessary key to decoding the message. In the case of overt dogwhistles, where the speaker intends their target receivers to become aware of the dogwhistle message, it is this extra common ground that dogwhistlers expect that group members will recognize. They are also aware that these group members know that they are receiving a special message, and these speakers entrust their targeted receivers to keep the special message hidden from the general audience. This builds solidarity between the speaker and the group members, with the general audience unaware of group reinforcement occurring behind the scenes.

One risk that speakers delivering dogwhistles take is in knowing that sometimes people cannot control their responses to language. Target receivers may have no intention of revealing to others that they are the recipients of a secret message but may be helpless to prevent that from happening. For example, if a politician sends a dogwhistle message that is inherently funny to the secret group, but banal to the general audience, a response of laughter by a significant portion of the population will be alarming to the rest who literally 'didn't get the joke'. Those not laughing may instead search for an explanation for the laughter (see **Criterion 10: Coherence & Relevance**) and may find that they were purposely left out. It may somewhat acceptable if the content is a lighthearted joke, but it is undermining to the aim of greater transparency in a democracy when the dogwhistle is used to send messages of a more serious nature, as is demonstrated in Example 5. "Just a **Comma**".

The second way to be made aware of a dogwhistle is to be explicitly told by a third party. This is usually somebody

who has the common ground necessary to understand the secret message but does not have strong group allegiance or motivation to preserve the secrecy. Torices (2021, pp. 6-7) refers to these receivers as part of the 'mindful audience', "*those who are aware of the coded message even though they are not the intended recipients. […] the audience that detects the manipulation and can publicly denounce it.*"

It is the job of the media to expose these forms of preferential treatment. Media representatives usually work together with insiders (note: in some cases these insiders may be colloquially called 'whistle-blowers'—a different instantiation of a whistle metaphor) to learn about the special in-group knowledge that allows dogwhistles to be heard. Because people have varying levels of group membership, knowledge, and allegiances—and there is much interest in analyzing political speech—it is often inevitable that a coded language will eventually be revealed. This is one of the potentially damaging outcomes that public figures must account for when they go on record with messaging that is preferential and covert.

The third and clearest way that a dogwhistle can be heard is by failure of the speaker to construct or execute the coded message successfully. This can sometimes even be intentional, such as when a speaker does not have high regard for the general audience and therefore does not put effort into concealing dogwhistle messaging from general receivers.

Where unexpected responses can reveal the presence of a secret message, an infelicitous message to a general audience prompts a search for relevance of the message, often resulting in the discovery of the dogwhistle. This can be an example of a failure of the speaker to sufficiently tailor the message for the general audience, while over-attuning for the secret audience.

Unsuccessfully constructed dogwhistles are most relevant to an analysis of the phenomenon because they allow us to see something otherwise seamlessly elusive. In their inability to remain undercover, the covert machinations are revealed, showing us not only the manner of breakdown, but allowing us to make an educated guess at intent as well as to add to our overall assessment of the speaker.

For researchers and other interested parties, the main benefits of these 'failed' dogwhistles are that they can be identified more easily, and their structure can be analyzed so that communication breakdown is revealed, thus laying bare the components of the tactic. It is because of these failures that myself and others have been able to decode dogwhistles and therefore progress our definitions, models, and general understanding of the linguistic phenomenon with others.

The right pitch: defining success

A dogwhistle that is successfully constructed, delivered, and received is partly in the purview of the hearer and cannot be adequately covered by a speaker-based account of dogwhistling. However, as success or failure in this sense is critically important to a speaker and their goals, it will be discussed briefly here.

Albertson (2015) defines a successful dogwhistle as the outgroup being not only oblivious to the meaning but also that they are unaware that a reference has even been made. This speaks to both the common ground disparity that aids concealment, as well as successful audience design, and other criteria.

Saul (2018b) asserts that for more overt dogwhistles, success is defined in terms of hearer impact; failure occurs if the intended effect is recognized as intended and the deception is revealed.

In both these perspectives, 'no news is good news'. I agree with this and put forth that a dogwhistle has been successfully delivered and received by the general audience, with no signals or 'news' from general receivers about the existence of the dogwhistled message. Also note that it is not part of the definition of success for target receivers to know they're being whistled at, see Criterion 8: Degree **of Concealment** for more on this.

The typological model allows us to input data, filter it against the criteria, and classify the speech act as a dogwhistle or not. Additionally, the model can highlight how well the data example adheres to certain criteria. This informs interpretations about whether the speech act is a successfully constructed dogwhistle as well as provides possible reasons for failed dogwhistles — instances where the dogwhistle is revealed or doesn't make its intended impact on hearer-receivers.

All criteria must be met to a minimal degree to classify the speech act as a successfully constructed dogwhistle. However, four criteria are potential failure points for the successful *receipt* of a dogwhistle; these are outlined in Table 2. Again, this isn't directly pertinent to a speaker-based account of dogwhistling, but it is relevant for showing how the typological model can lend insight toward what makes a specific instance of dogwhistling an overall success or failure (not just successfully constructed); some criteria in the model are also useful for a receiver-based account dogwhistling.

Table 2. Dogwhistle failure points

Criteria	Dogwhistle failure points
7. Method of Concealment	If the common ground is not capitalized upon sufficiently or meaningfully in the construction of the message, the dogwhistle may fail to be received as intended.
8. Degree of Concealment	If the dogwhistle message is not sufficiently coded, it may be revealed to unintended audiences.
10. Coherence & Relevance	If a speaker doesn't attune to coherence and/or relevance properly when designing their message, the dogwhistle may be revealed to unintended audiences.
11. Next Turn Proofs	If a speaker doesn't account for likely next turn proofs from their audiences when designing their message, the dogwhistle is at greater risk for being revealed to unintended audiences.

It is not necessary for the classification of a particular speech act as a dogwhistle that it be eternally concealed. It is the intent to send a hidden message to an audience in this specific manner that makes it a bona fide dogwhistle at the time of delivery. After that point, it can be classified as a successful dogwhistle, or a failed one, depending on other criteria, such as being concealed enough to remain covert.

In sum, the overall success of a dogwhistle relies on message design and delivery that meet all criteria and receipt by hearers that suggests nothing went awry upon receipt of the message.

Differentiating dogwhistles from other tropes

With a fully defined set of criteria for dogwhistles, they can be effectively compared to other tropes, such as innuendos, puns, and inside jokes.

Here we introduce a framework for applying data. A successful dogwhistle answers 'YES' to all of the criteria below, whereas other tropes would fail on one or more counts.

1. Intentionality: is there at least some intent by the speaker to perform the dogwhistle?

2. Purpose: is there a purpose for dogwhistling?

3. Interpretation: are there at least 2 or more interpretations?

4. Linguistic Packaging: are interpretations contained in the same linguistic packaging?

5. Audience Design: are there at least two audiences differing with respect to common ground?

6. Target Audience: is the target audience a subset of a general audience?

7. Method of Concealment: does the method of concealment rely on common ground disparity between audiences?

8. Degree of Concealment: is there a discernible degree of concealment?

9. Motivation for Concealment: is there motivation for this concealment?

10. Coherence & Relevance: are all likely possible interpretations coherent and relevant?

11. Next Turn Proofs: are the next turn proofs aligned (to sufficiently conceal the dogwhistle message)?

Innuendos, puns, and inside jokes are examined using the dogwhistle criteria and each are shown to differ with respect to at least one criterion. These differences crucially result in different classifications of the speech act.

The first type of speech act to examine is innuendo. Innuendos are like dogwhistles in that they have more than one interpretation and there is a motivation for covertness, but innuendos differ from dogwhistles with respect to **Criterion 5: Audience Design.**

With an innuendo, it is crucial that the same hearer can receive both available interpretations, whereas with a dogwhistle it is imperative that some hearers receive only one interpretation and select others have access to the dogwhistle message containing the second interpretation.

Puns and other forms of wordplay are also like dogwhistles in that there are two possible interpretations, based on common ground differences. In addition to the same issues as innuendos, what puns also crucially lack is a motivation for concealment (see Criterion 9: Motivation **for Concealment**).

That is, a pun is a self-contained entity that is meant to be understood by all possible hearers.

A good example of punning is found in a headline from The Washington Post, reporting on an event where many tightrope walkers convened to cross the Han river. The headline read, "Skywalkers in Korea Cross Han Solo," (Lim,

2007). Many people would recognize the use of the word 'skywalker' and the juxtaposition of 'Han' with 'solo' as references to the famous movie series, Star Wars. While clever, this is no more than a play on words, because the reference to the movie sends no special message to its hearers, and there is no need to keep that message hidden from other hearers who aren't familiar with the movies (i.e., there is no motivation for concealment).

The last trope to compare to dogwhistles is an inside joke. Inside jokes have necessary intent, are directed at a target audience, and are based on common ground, but their existence is not concealed from general receivers. Additionally, there is only one interpretation of the message, available to those who have the necessary key to decode it. Receivers lacking this common ground are aware of their exclusion from the in-group because the message has no relevance to them. This is one of the ways that an inside joke establishes power and social hierarchy. With dogwhistles, there is an attempt to conceal the existence of the dogwhistle message, and therefore the social indexing of hierarchy is not done publicly.

Below outlines the differences between dogwhistles, innuendos, puns, and inside jokes with respect to the 11 criteria.

Table 3. Comparison of Dogwhistles to Other Tropes

Criteria	Dogwhistle	Innuendo	Pun	Inside Joke
1. Intent:	**Necessary**	Optional	Optional	Necessary
2. Purpose:	**Necessary**	Necessary	Necessary	Necessary
3. Interpretations:	**Yes; 2 or more**	Yes; 2 or more	Yes; 2 or more	No; 1 or more
4. Same Linguistic Packaging:	**Yes**	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Audience Design:	**At least 2**	1 or more	1 or more	1 or more
6. Target Audience:	**Yes; subset**	Yes; same	N/A	Yes; subset
7. Method of Concealment:	**Common Ground**	Varies	Common Ground	Common Ground
8. Degree of Concealment:	**Necessary**	Optional	None	None
9. Motivation for Concealment:	**Necessary**	Necessary	None	Optional
10. Coherence & Relevance:	**Necessary**	Necessary	Optional	Optional
11. Next Turn Proofs:	**Aligned**	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: Criteria that differ from dogwhistles are shaded grey.

Applying the framework to dogwhistle data

Examples from TV programming aimed at children

In this section, the typological model is applied to dogwhistle data. The two examples are from children's TV & film, demonstrating how the dogwhistle tactic need not be confined to the political speech genre.

In the examples below, the dogwhistles serve to build solidarity between the programming writers and the adult viewers, who are both invested in creating safe, appropriate content for younger audiences. The writers and adults index this common goal by rewarding the parents with adult-oriented messaging intended for their ears only, without making children privy to its potential inappropriateness.

A dogwhistle in Pee-wee's Playhouse

Pee-wee's Playhouse was a TV show that ran from 1986-1990 on CBS. It featured a loud and animated host and a cast of characters, many of whom were robots or machines. In Example 1, a repairman played by guest star Jimmy Smits is sent in to fix Conky, one of the regular robot characters. Yvonne, a regular guest, has just met Johnny the repairman for the first time. (Conky's Breakdown: Season 5, Episode 1)

Example 1. "Is that a wrench in your pocket?"

> 1 Johnny: I just have a few switches to tighten up here, uhhh...my wrench?
> [looking around]
> 2 Yvonne: **Is that a wrench in your pocket?**
> [points to Johnny's bulging pants]
> 3 Johnny: Huh! That's a wrench!
> [pulls out giant wrench]

4   Thank you very much!
(bold emphasis mine)

Interpretation

The Dogwhistle Message: "Is that a wrench in your pocket?"
What the General Audience (children and adults) Heard: Johnny forgot that the missing item was in his pants.
What the Target Audience (adults) Heard: A sexual innuendo; allusion to a movie quote.
Result: Both adults and children have a laugh, but children don't have access to, and are protected from, the second interpretation not intended for their ears (the sexual innuendo).

Table 4. Dogwhistle Model Applied to Pee-wee's Playhouse Data

Criteria	Dogwhistle	Evaluation
1. Intent:	Necessary	We can assume that the show writers have intent.
2. Purpose:	Necessary	To entertain adult viewers while also protecting younger viewers from content that is inappropriate for their age
3. Multiple Interpretations:	Yes; 2	Yes. General interpretation is humorous oversight. Target interpretation is sexual innuendo.
4. Same Linguistic Packaging:	Yes	Yes. Both meanings are a result of lines 1-3.
5. Audience Design Req's Met:	Yes	Yes. Children and adult viewers comprise separate audiences.

6. Target Audience:	Yes; subset	Adult viewers are a subset of the general audience.
7. Method of Concealment:	Common Ground	The dogwhistle is based on extra common ground available to the adult audience only.
8. Degree of Concealment:	Necessary	The dogwhistle is sufficiently concealed.
9. Motivation for Concealment:	Necessary	Due to the sexual nature of the target interpretation (an innuendo), the motivation to conceal it is high.
10. Coherence & Relevance:	Necessary	General and target interpretations are both relevant to their respective audience(s).
11. Next Turn Proofs:	Aligned	Both next turn proofs are aligned (laughter is the expected response).
Result:	**Criteria Met**	**This is a successfully designed dogwhistle.**

In this example, kids watching the show would likely interpret the exchange between Yvonne and the repairman as a funny instance of forgetfulness. The repairman cannot find his wrench, but it is obvious to Yvonne since she can see that his pants are bulging in a wrench-like shape.

Adults would recognize this exchange as a sexual innuendo for at least two reasons. They might understand it as such because Yvonne is responding to Johnny's inquiry about a "wrench" by pointing to Johnny's pants, which are in the shape of an erect penis. Extra common ground knowledge would also lead many adults to understand Line 2 as a reference to a Mae West film, She Done Him Wrong (1933), where she delivered the line, "Is that a pistol in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?" It was intended as a sexual innuendo at that time as well.

It is interesting to note that while there is obvious common ground knowledge that is not available to children, and for good reason, there is also an extra layer of common ground in the form of the Mae West line that further divides the adult audience. All adults have access and understanding of both the child-directed and adult messages, but only a select portion of adults, likely older or classic movie buffs, that will have access to the additional nuance that is contained in the movie trivia knowledge.

A specific purpose is served when show writers include dogwhistles to adults into their scripts. Parents have a lot of choices in deciding what programming their children should watch. This programming is oriented towards and an age-appropriate audience, and because these kids enjoy watching their favorite show or movie countless times, the parents must also be subjected to these repeat viewings. Parents may be more likely to tolerate or engage with programming that offers them some specialized entertainment value. Writers that understand this are incentivized to provide this enjoyment, but they know that it must be done in a covert manner, since the very thing that might entertain adults would not be age-appropriate for children. A decision to covertly engage adults in the children-oriented programming is solidarity-building, because the move to do so is recognized by adults as being a special message designed for them. It is an even exchange, since the favor extended in laughs is returned in repeated support of their efforts to do so.

It is also interesting to see the embeddedness of tropes in this example. The use of a particular trope — a sexual innuendo — is concealed in a manner that allows it to also function as a dogwhistle. It can also serve to demonstrate the complexity of human communication, since the use of the innuendo's true function is to make the adult viewers laugh in recognition of its referent quality.

A dogwhistle in Finding Nemo

A second example of a dogwhistle in children's programming is shown below, from the children's animated Pixar film Finding Nemo (2003). In this film, the big fish Gill tells the others in the tank to *"Think dirty thoughts!"* so that everyone will be as gross as possible, make the tank dirty, and ensure that it will need cleaning soon (then they can all make their escape).

Because 'think dirty thoughts' has different meanings for kids and adults, the result is that everyone laughs together, but for different reasons.

Example 2. "Think dirty thoughts."

> 5 Gill: All right, gang. We have less than 48 hours before Darla gets here. This tank'll
> 6   get plenty dirty in that time but we have to help it along any way we can. Jacques!
> 7   Jacques: Oui!
> 8   Gill: No cleaning.
> 9   Jacques: I shall resist.
> 10 Gill: Everybody else, be as gross as possible.
> **Think dirty thoughts.** We're gonna
> 11 make this tank so filthy, the dentist will have to clean it.
> (bold emphasis mine)

Interpretation

The Dogwhistle Message: "Think dirty thoughts"
What the General Audience (children & adults) heard:
A command to be uncleanly.

What the Target Audience (adults) heard: A command to think in a sexual manner.
Result: Both audiences are delivered a simultaneous, age-appropriate joke.

Table 5. Dogwhistle Model Applied to Finding Nemo Data

Criteria	Dogwhistle	Evaluation
1. Intent:	Necessary	We assume that the film writers have intent.
2. Purpose:	Necessary	To entertain adult viewers while also protecting younger viewers from content that is inappropriate for their age.
3. Multiple Interpretations:	Yes; 2	Yes. General interpretation is humorous oversight. Target interpretation is a joke of sexual nature.
4. Same Linguistic Packaging:	Yes	Yes. Both meanings are a result of line 9
5. Audience Design Req's Met:	Yes	Yes. Children and adult viewers comprise separate audiences with different common ground knowledge.
6. Target Audience:	Yes; subset	Adult viewers are a subset of the general audience.
7. Method of Concealment:	Common Ground	The dogwhistle is based on extra common ground available to the adult audience only.
8. Degree of Concealment:	Necessary	Sufficiently concealed with the aim for target receivers to be aware of the message.
9. Motivation for Concealment:	Necessary	Due to the sexual nature of the target interpretation (an innuendo), the motivation to conceal it is high.
10. Coherence & Relevance:	Necessary	General and target interpretations are both relevant to their respective

		audience(s).
11. Next Turn Proofs:	Aligned	Both next turn proofs are aligned (laughter is the expected response).
Result:	**All criteria met**	**This is a successfully designed dogwhistle.**

In this relatively straightforward example, the double meaning is found in Line 10, 'Think dirty thoughts'. Kids, who are generally messy, would recognize this as a funny command to think in a messy manner—something that may come naturally to them, but is rarely praised or asked for. Adults would see this as a command to think in a sexually explicit manner, something that may come naturally, but is not generally encouraged in public settings.

This dogwhistle hinges on the meaning of 'dirty'. Adults have additional common ground than kids do; they understand both meanings of the speech act, but also recognize the special meaning that is intended for them exclusively.

Criterion 10: Coherence ***& Relevance*** is particularly salient in this example. Both interpretations are sensible and aligned with the speaker's identity – a rebellious and authoritative leader with a sense of humor. This is also evidenced by matching next turn proofs by all receivers.

These perfectly executed dogwhistles allow us to fully understand the necessary internal components and how this form of veiled speech works internally. In these two examples from entertainment programming, the difference in common ground between the two audiences is large. This makes it is easy to construct and perform a successful dogwhistle. Additionally, the underlying intent for using the tactic was positive and unifying.

Example from advertising – Subaru, "Get Out. And Stay Out"

In the examples so far, dogwhistles are used for non-manipulative and unifying or altruistic purposes. The next example is similarly motivated yet aimed solely at adult audiences and is delivered through advertising.

During the 1990s, carmaker Subaru took a novel approach toward their problem of declining sales. While all the other car companies were fighting each other over sales from white, suburban 18–35-year-olds, Subaru decided to double down on those who were already their fans (Mayyasi, 2016). One of the five niche fan groups they discovered through their market research were lesbians.

In their first attempt to market to lesbians, Subaru tried direct, overt approach — at the risk of alienating their general audiences and other niches (Albertson, 2015). It wasn't received well by any groups. Subaru eventually discovered that covert messaging worked much better. They began including hidden references in their ads that spoke to lesbian audiences. Many of these ads featured taglines containing two possible interpretations—the general audience were unaware of the true meaning of the message, while lesbian and gay audiences immediately picked up the in-print representations. A canonical example of this is seen in their ad for a Subaru Outback, featuring the headline, "Get Out. And Stay Out."

Example 3. "Get Out. And Stay Out."

In the full-page ad featured in Figure 1, the top half shows a green Subaru Outback driving around a curve on a mountain pass. The bottom half features the smaller, centered headline in capital letters that reads, 'GET OUT.'

Underneath in slightly larger letters reads, 'AND STAY OUT.' Paragraphs of advertising copy and logos follow.
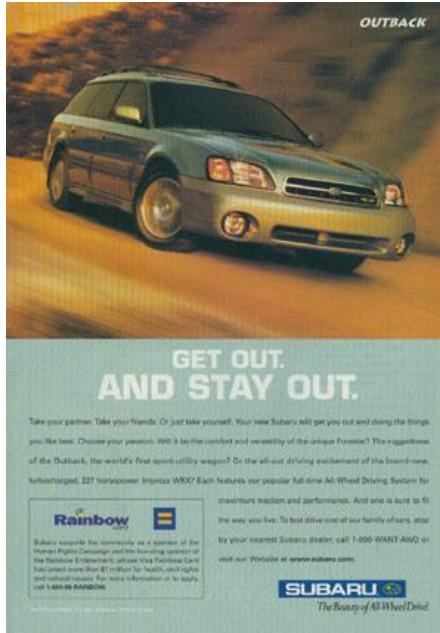

Figure 1. Image of Subaru Outback ad (GLAAD, 2001)

Interpretation

The Dogwhistle Message: "Get Out. And Stay Out"
What the General Audience (straight and gay audiences) heard: Go outdoors and stay there as long as you like.
What the Target Audience (gay audiences, and specifically, lesbians) heard: Get out (of the closet) and stay out (be proud).

Result: Straight and gay audiences both hear a marketing message that speaks to them.

Table 5. Example 3: Dogwhistle Model Applied to Subaru Advertisement Data

Criteria	Dogwhistle	Evaluation
1. Intent:	Necessary	As advertising is very deliberate and backed by market research, we can assume a high degree of intent.
2. Purpose:	Necessary	To connect with lesbian and gay audiences while not alienating straight audiences who may hold negative biases or prejudices toward LGBTQ+ identities.
3. Multiple Interpretations:	Yes; 2	Yes. General interpretation is an invitation to go outdoors. Target interpretation is akin to 'we see you, we get you.'
4. Same Linguistic Packaging:	Yes	Yes, both meanings are recoverable from the single tagline.
5. Audience Design Req's Met:	Yes	Yes. Straight and LGBTQ+ people comprise separate audiences with differing common ground knowledge.
6. Target Audience:	Yes; subset	LGBTQ+ people are a subset of the general audience.
7. Method of Concealment:	Common Ground through identity	The dogwhistle is based on higher salience of 'out' referring to identity (rather than outdoors) for the LGBTQ+ audience only.
8. Degree of Concealment:	Necessary	Sufficiently concealed with the aim for target receivers to be aware of the message.

9. Motivation for Concealment:	Necessary	As Subaru is aiming to appeal to multiple audiences with messaging that resonates deeply (and specifically) to each, without alienating the others, the motivation to conceal potentially controversial messaging is high.
10. Coherence & Relevance:	Necessary	General and target interpretations are both relevant and coherent to their respective audience(s).
11. Next Turn Proofs:	Aligned	Both next turn proofs are aligned (identification with the message is the expected response).
Result:	**Criteria Met**	**This is a successfully designed dogwhistle**

This Subaru ad, and others like it, was a hit. As a dogwhistle, the covert messaging in these ads was also incredibly successful—the target audience related to the copy and found enjoyment in decoding the messages. In follow-up research, Subaru found that straight people were completely oblivious to the references or double meanings (Massayi, 2016).

Over the years, the success of the ads, the development of the niche, and shifting public attitudes allowed Subaru to be more overt with its messaging, ditching the dogwhistle for very public messages of support beyond the ads and into direct sponsorships and partnerships. As reported in Massayi, 2016:

> *While Volkswagen played coy about whether an ad perceived as gay-friendly really portrayed a gay couple, Subaru sponsored events like gay pride parades,*

> *partnered with the Rainbow Card, a credit card that instead of cash back offered donations to gay and lesbian causes, and hired Martina Navratilova, a lesbian and former tennis pro, to appear in Subaru ads.*

This demonstrates the trust and community that Subaru built over time. Their early attempts at overt, direct marketing to lesbians were rejected, as they were perceived as untrustworthy and inauthentic. When Subaru showed that they both valued their supporters and knew how to relate to them discreetly and meaningfully, they were able to earn that trust and become powerful allies who could amplify and, in their own way, normalize coming out narratives among the wider public.

Example from social media – Algospeak for digital dogs

In this section I argue that a new emergent form of speech, 'algospeak', is a type of dogwhistle. We will briefly look at several examples of algospeak, with varying levels of concealment, to show how it operates as a dogwhistle. In these examples, the general audience contains non-human general receivers: social media algorithms.

On social media platforms, many content creators use lexical substitutions for words they know that the platform's algorithms will be looking for. By swapping out the algorithm's disfavored words with benign choices, these creators can avoid demonetization and other punitive measures that could occur if their words got flagged by the algorithm.

As stated in Doctorow (2022):

> *The moral panic around social media — as well as the growth of toxic communities — has made the platforms risk-adverse, and they've explicitly chosen to silence positive and important speech in order to avoid the possibility of a scandal. Suicide prevention content has to use "becoming unalive" as a euphemism to avoid being disappeared by Tiktok's algorithm.*

On platforms like TikTok, creators may opt for the Orwellian 'unalive' to avoid using the word 'dead', which is flagged by the algorithms on many platforms. The concern for these platforms is that by allowing these words, they could be potentially idealizing suicide (Doctorow, 2022). The result is that content creators, such as suicide prevention organizations, must work around these constraints in creative ways, coming up with emergent language that their audiences will understand without the algorithms detecting the true meaning of the message.

Similarly, many YouTubers since 2020 have needed to find ways to reference the pandemic without these algorithms being alerted to the fact that they were doing so. The YouTube algorithms demonetize and demote content referring to Covid, so as not to promote Covid deniers and their misinformation campaigns. As such, content creators in these spaces have reverted to 'panini' or 'Panda Express' to refer to the pandemic.

The markedness of these terms as they appear in content relates directly to the degree of concealment criterion for dogwhistling. In some cases, the lexical substitutions are very marked (not concealed) for target receivers.

For example, using 'unalive' is marked, as it isn't a known word and those searching for relevance (e.g., why not say 'dead'?) may become aware that coded speech is occurring. Algorithms, however, would not object to 'unalive' unless specifically programmed to.

The lexical substitutions can vary wildly in their markedness, using a variety of tactics to achieve these effects. Some lesser-marked algospeak words may employ misspellings ('whyt ppl' or ⃝ [white circle emoji] for 'white people'), nicknaming ('nip-nops' for 'nipples'), or word substitutions that wouldn't raise an eyebrow on relevance ('looking to hire an accountant' instead of 'looking to hire a sex worker'). In this latter example, many general receivers might misread or be unaware of the broader context cues and find themselves innocently or naively recommending their unwitting bookkeepers, tax specialists and the like.

This is explored in more detail in Example 4. In this case, there are two distinct groups within the general audience that are NOT the intended recipients of the dogwhistle message: humans who would be offended by the request and algorithms that are searching for such requests. Therefore, the speaker has different types of motivation to conceal — to hide their true intentions from people who are not supportive of their goals and to avoid algorithms that could punish them for explicitly stating their goals. At the same time, these speakers want to capture the attention of those in the audience who identify with their request and can help them meet their goals.

For the purposes of our analysis, we assume that the speaker intends to seek sex work. That is, they are purposefully sending a dogwhistle message and not unintentionally dogwhistling for a sex worker (and in fact want the services of an accountant). We will also explore the implications of the ambiguity that is created with this dogwhistle.

Example 4. "I'm looking to hire an accountant"

The Dogwhistle Message: "I'm looking to hire an accountant" is posted on social media.
What the General Audience (anyone on the platform, the algorithm) hears: Someone in need of a finance specialist.
What the Target Audience (sex industry workers) hears: Someone desiring the services of a sex worker.
Result: All audiences hear a specific type of request.

Table 6. Dogwhistle Model Applied to Algospeak Data

Criteria	Dogwhistle	Evaluation
1. Intent:	Necessary	Yes, we are assuming that the speaker is seeking a sex worker.
2. Purpose:	Necessary	To discreetly connect with a sex worker.
3. Multiple Interpretations:	Yes; 2	Yes. The general interpretation is a finance specialist. The target interpretation is a sex worker.
4. Same Linguistic Packaging:	Yes	Yes, both meanings are gleaned from 'accountant'.
5. Audience Design Req's Met:	Yes	Yes, people in the sex work industry are separate from the general audience and the algorithm and they have common ground knowledge about the alternative meaning of 'accountant' that these other audiences do not.
6. Target Audience:	Yes; subset	Yes, people in the sex work industry are a subset of the general audience.

7. Method of Concealment:	Common Ground	The dogwhistle is based on shared repertoire within industry about how to talk about services.
8. Degree of Concealment:	Necessary	Highly concealed (and unmarked), with the aim for target receivers to be aware of the message.
9. Motivation for Concealment:	Necessary	Very high. Human general receivers may find the message offensive owing to the stigmatized nature of sex work. Algorithms could recognize the message and take punitive action.
10. Coherence & Relevance:	Necessary	Both general receivers and target receivers find the request unassuming and inoffensive.
11. Next Turn Proofs:	Aligned	Yes. If applicable, further inquiries may be made.
Result:	**All criteria met**	**This is a successfully designed dogwhistle.**

What's interesting to note about this example is that there may be ambiguity among the speaker and the audiences whether this is a dogwhistle or simply a request for professional advice of a financial nature. Owing to the nature of the request and the platform in which it is posted, there may be a lack of supporting context to disambiguate what the speaker really means.

That said, there may be other ways to disambiguate this for the target receivers, as well as to deter general receivers from responding to the request literally. For example, if the speaker's profile signals a sex-positive identity, that can be a common ground cue for target receivers. Similarly, providing detail in the request that could make it difficult for general receivers to support the request — without sounding

incoherent — could be one way for a speaker to deter unwanted finance enquiries.

Another aspect for this example is that further vetting may be required by both speaker and receiver to disambiguate these unintentional dogwhistlers and unintentional hearers. In the instance that it is revealed that either the dogwhistler or the receiver are unintentional, plausible deniability comes into play, allowing either party to gracefully back out of the transaction. This can be done without the dogwhistle (or misinterpretation of one) being revealed.

In the case of algospeak, dogwhistling allows speakers to meet their goals while escaping the watchful eyes of algorithms. The purpose a speaker has for constructing a dogwhistle message in this context can vary. For example, if the speaker wants to help someone seek medical care, they may dogwhistle their intent to lend support in ways that bypass the algorithms trained to flag terms such as 'abortion' or 'Planned Parenthood'. On the other hand, nefarious actors, such as the white supremacy group the 'Boogaloo Bois', may find new ways to reference themselves and their actions, such as calling themselves 'Big Luau' and wearing Hawaiian shirts to covertly identify each other in gatherings (Drainville & Saul, forthcoming).

These examples speak both to the many purposes of dogwhistling as well as the contexts in which they occur. The dogwhistle is a means to an end; just one way to achieve a communicative goal. These goals can range from altruistic to nefarious to simply necessary for communicating more freely in the digital space. The messages are reinforced by their contexts — the style and dressing that co-occurs with the message, whether that's by online profile, dress shirt, or accompanying emoji.

Examples from politics

Politicians use a wide range of discursive strategies in their communications with various individuals and audiences. Some of the tactics employed contain complex messages, not always intended for all audience members, or meant to be understood by all potential receivers.

There are several political figures that have been well known for using dogwhistle tactics in their messaging—most notably, Donald Trump, the 45th President of the USA and George Bush, the 43rd President of the USA (Witten, 2008, 2014; Haney-López, 2014; Saul, 2018a).

Owing to the public nature of politics, a politician does not create their narrative alone, but is mutually involved with others in a constant, subtextual dialogue and negotiation about what their identity is and what that means for the future of the people they represent. The alignment in expression of stances on small ideas to larger stated objectives is an integral part of how a politician builds coherence (Duranti, 2006). Consistency in thought and action builds trust and support among the populace. Conversely, deception and mixed-messaging destroy that trust. This can result in loss of support, but also in the degradation of the platforms on which these speakers stand and in the political systems that support them.

Therefore, it is important for politicians to listen to the needs and wants of their constituents, and act accordingly. Because the values of the public are varied, a politician must find a way to navigate this potential minefield, knowing that a statement that appeals to one group of people representing a particular ideology might offend another group that values an opposing framework. Here we look at two examples of how Bush and Trump have addressed this challenge through their use of dogwhistles.

George W. Bush, "Just a comma"

George W. Bush, the 43rd President of America, has been known for successfully dogwhistling religious messages to his supporters (see 'wonder-working power' in Albertson, 2015). However, the example below is an instance of an unsuccessful dogwhistle. The data reflect the failure to attend to both audiences simultaneously and sufficiently. The target receivers can hear the dogwhistle, but the general receivers also hear something, prompting them to search for a relevant explanation for a seemingly insensitive sentiment.

In Example 5. "Just a **Comma**", interviewer Wolf Blitzer interviews then US President George W. Bush on CNN's Late Edition television show. They are discussing the recent deaths of many soldiers during the ongoing Iraq war. This episode originally aired on September 24, 2006.

Example 5. "Just a Comma"

12 Blitzer: We see these horrible bodies showing up...
13 Bush: Of course you do.
14 Blitzer: ...tortured, mutilation. The Shia and the Sunni, the Iranians apparently having
15 a negative role. Of course, Al-Qaida in Iraq's still operating.
16 Bush: Yes, you see...You see it on TV, and that's the power of an enemy that is willing
17 to kill innocent people. But there's also an unbelievable will and resiliency by the
18 Iraqi people. Twelve million people voted last December...Admittedly, it seems like a
19 decade ago. I like to tell people when the final history is written on Iraq, it will look
20 **like just a comma** because there is…my point is, there's a strong will for democracy.

(bold emphasis mine)

Interpretation

The Dogwhistle Message: "it will look like just a comma"
What the General Audience (American viewers) Heard: Bush speaking insensitively of dead soldiers.
What the Target Audience (Conservative Christians) Heard: Recognition of a quote by comedian Gracie Allen. "Never put a period where God puts a comma," co-opted by the Universal Church of Christ as their slogan for a major marketing campaign during the time of the Bush/Blitzer TV interview.
Result: Justification for establishing several conflicting narratives, differing with respect to interpretation and background knowledge, but potentially offensive to all.

Table 7. Example 5: Dogwhistle Model Applied to George W. Bush Data

Criteria	Dogwhistle	Evaluation
1. Intent:	Necessary	We can assume intent, as this phrase is keeping with a major marketing campaign at the time.
2. Purpose:	Necessary	To reassure his Christian supporters that he is one of them, to comfort them during this tragedy.
3. Multiple Interpretations:	Yes; 2	Yes. General interpretation is that this just a momentary pause in a larger story. Target interpretation is that this is part of God's Plan.

4. Same Linguistic Packaging:	Yes	Yes. Both meanings are a result of line 20.
5. Audience Design Req's Met:	Yes	Yes. Christian supporters and secular people are separate audiences with different common ground knowledge.
6. Target Audience:	Yes; subset	Christian supporters are a subset of the general audience.
7. Method of Concealment:	Common Ground	The dogwhistle is based on extra common ground knowledge available to followers of Christ.
8. Degree of Concealment:	Necessary	Sufficiently concealed with the aim for target receivers to recognize the message.
9. Motivation for Concealment:	Necessary	To avoid overt religious messaging, which may alienate the general audience.
10. Coherence & Relevance:	Necessary	This is weak, as the general message comes off as insensitive to many hearers.
11. Next Turn Proofs:	Not aligned	Next turn proofs are not aligned — the target audience has been over-attuned to, leaving general receivers possibly confused and searching for relevance.
Result:	**Criteria insufficiently met**	**This is a dogwhistle, but not a successfully constructed one; criterion 11 is misaligned.**

This segment aired to a national TV audience of millions. The reaction to the statement "it will look like just a comma" (lines 19–20) was swift and angry. Eleven days after the show, The Washington Post ran an A-section news story titled *"'Just a Comma' Becomes Part of Iraq Debate: Opponents See Bush's Words on War as Insensitive or as Code for Religious Right"* (Baker, 2006). This is an instance of the media publicly

addressing the possibility of dual messaging, highlighted by the proposition set up with the use of 'or' in the headline.

On the surface, the easiest interpretation of 'just a comma' is one that led the general audience to believe that Bush was speaking insensitively of dead soldiers. The phrase "when the final history is written on Iraq" (line 19) sets up the HISTORY IS A BOOK metaphorical framework (Lakoff, 1980). With the book as the source domain, things that correlate with books and book-writing are mapped onto things that correlate with history and history-making. When bookmaking is discussed in terms of scale, we realize that a reference of dead soldiers being analogous to optional punctuation is one that marginalizes the importance of the referent. In this case, the 2,700 dead soldiers. Hearers that had no other common ground to pull from were left with a choice: to either accept the comment as insensitive or to search for an alternate meaning. Many chose the latter.

What they found was that it was more than likely that the comment 'just a comma' was a reference to a quote by comedian Gracie Allen. The quote, "Never put a period where God puts a comma," was co-opted by the Universal Church of Christ as their slogan for a major marketing campaign during the time of the Bush/ Blitzer TV interview. This quote, and the awareness of George Bush's conservative Christian beliefs, allows for the second interpretation of the comment — one that was readily available to those who already had the necessary credentials for decoding.

Armed with this new knowledge, the comment in lines 19–20 can be understood within the same metaphorical HISTORY IS A BOOK framework, except that in this interpretation, it is God's book that is being written. Therefore, Bush was effectively reassuring his Christian base to not worry about the loss of life in the war, because it is part of a grand plan that God has for His people. By saying

this, Bush was also attempting to remind his followers of Christian faith that he is looking at the bigger picture, and while he is the leader of a country, he is also a servant of God. From this perspective, for these hearers, the comment can be reinterpreted from insensitive to one that is religiously motivated.

The breakdown occurs because Bush over-attuned to his target audience and neglected to account for the general message, which came across as insensitive to his general audience. They searched for relevance and discovered the insufficiently crafted dogwhistle.

This dogwhistle was spoken at a time when the tactic was less known and response to it was more shocking than it may be today. In our next example, we analyze a more recent dogwhistle from 2016 — a much more divisive political landscape than ten years' prior.

Donald Trump's use of 'globalists'

If a speaker is perceived as someone who dogwhistles often, such as the case with Donald Trump, their speech may be scrutinized more heavily by others.

Many journalists and influential figures have categorized Trump's inflammatory speech as dogwhistles (Shapiro, 2020), even when there has been no attempt at message concealment—a defining feature of a dogwhistle. Others use this lack of concealment to challenge the dogwhistle assertion, stating that it is more like a bullhorn (Schertzer & Woods, 2022) or megaphone (Blades, 2016).

The typological model can measure the metaphorical volume on this, revealing which sentiments are likely dogwhistles and which are different types of speech acts or tropes, such as figleaves (Saul, 2017).

Often it is the case that these speech acts are simply explicit racism (Marshall, 2016; Albertson, 2020), such as Trump referring to the Coronavirus as "the Chinese virus" or the "kung flu" (Lopez, 2020). For an extensive summary or Trump's racist remarks and actions dating back to the 1970s, see Lopez (2020).

One example of strategic racism in the form of a dogwhistle is the term "globalist". This term has a long history of dual interpretations. While its surface meaning is *"a person who advocates the interpretation or planning of economic and foreign policy in relation to events and developments throughout the world"* (AJC, 2022), the coded, dogwhistle meaning is quite different.

'Globalist' as an anti-Semitic slur against Jews was part of the core ideology of the Nazis. Again, from American Jewish Committee (AJC, 2022):

> *Hitler often portrayed Jews as "international elements" who "conduct their business everywhere," posing a threat to all people who are "bounded to their soil, to the Fatherland." Today, Globalist is a coded word for Jews who are seen as international elites conspiring to weaken or dismantle "Western" society using their international connections and control over big corporations.*

Findings from Anti-Defamation League's 2018 research report covering a year of anti-Semitism on Twitter shows how the term 'globalist' is often used by anti-Semites as a slur (ADL, 2018, p. 14):

> *A noteworthy anti-Semitic theme in 2017 was the use of the term "globalist" as an anti-Semitic slur. Although the term is not inherently anti-Semitic, "globalist" is often used as a pejorative term for people whose interests in international commerce or finance*

> *ostensibly make them disloyal to the country in which they live, or who are willing to undermine the financial security of their neighbors in order to benefit transnational interests. Because of the long history of anti-Semitic associations of Jews with money and commerce, and allegations that Jews place their transnational ethnic affiliations ahead of the interests of their non- Jewish neighbors, these pejorative subtexts quickly take on anti-Semitic connotations when the term is applied to individual Jews, groups of Jews, or places where Jews are known to live (i.e. "New York globalists"). Anti-Semites frequently use the term "Globalist" as a code word for Jews.*

Other related code words and phrases for Jews are 'International bankers', 'global financial powers' (or 'global power structure'), and 'special interests' (Kampeas, 2016).

These phrases are used to promote the "Jewish conspiracy" that claims Jews secretly control the world and the banks (Burack, 2020; AJC, 2022).

Several of these phrases and references to the Jewish conspiracy appear in Trump's 2016 closing election ad (C-SPAN, 2016). Using the typological model to examine a specific instance of 'global special interests' from this video advertisement, we can see how it functions as a dogwhistle in this case.

Example 6. "Global special interests"

21 Our movement is about replacing a failed and corrupt political establishment
22 with a new government controlled by you, the American people.

23 The establishment has trillions of dollars at stake in this election.
24 For those who control the levers of power in Washington
[image of George Soros, a prominent Jewish businessman and philanthropist]
25 and for the
[image of Janet Yellen, a Jewish economist, and former US Secretary of the Treasury and Chair of the Federal Reserve]
26 **global special interests**, they partner with these people that don't have your good
[image of Hillary Clinton]
27 in mind.
(bold emphasis mine)

Interpretation

The Dogwhistle Message: "global special interests"
What the General Audience (all viewers) heard: Corrupt people with power and control in Washington are aligned with Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton.
What the Target Audience (anti-Semites, white nationalists, Trump followers) heard: Hillary Clinton is part of a conspiracy with the Jews who control your money.
Result: Trump speaks directly to his white nationalist base who understand the hidden meanings behind his words, as well as to his supporters who do not — for them, anti-Semitic messaging evokes implicit biases and stereotypes, perhaps without them realizing this is occurring. Some of the general audience also hears the dogwhistle messaging and understands the strategic anti-Semitism occurring in the speech.

Table 7. Dogwhistle Model Applied to Donald Trump Data

Criteria	Dogwhistle	Evaluation
1. Intent:	Necessary	As advertising is very deliberately crafted and Trump approves this message (and it is consistent with a history of similar dogwhistle messages by him), we can assume he has intent (Marshall, 2016).
2. Purpose:	Necessary	To establish his views and promote the Jewish conspiracy.
3. Multiple Interpretations:	Yes; 2	Yes. General interpretation is that his opponent is corrupt. Target interpretation is that his opponent is part of the Jewish conspiracy to steal your money.
4. Same Linguistic Packaging:	Yes	Yes. Both meanings are a result of line 26.
5. Audience Design Req's Met:	Yes	Yes. Trump's base and general audience (Democrats, other Americans, non-Americans) are separate audiences with different common ground knowledge.
6. Target Audience:	Yes; subset	Trump's base is a subset of the general audience.
7. Method of Concealment:	Common Ground	The dogwhistle is based on extra common ground knowledge available to his followers.
8. Degree of Concealment:	Necessary	Sufficiently concealed with the aim for target receivers to be explicitly or implicitly aware of the message; some supporters may wish exercise plausible deniability if challenged directly about their views.

9. Motivation for Concealment:	Necessary	To hide the full offensiveness of the invective, even from portions of the target audience that don't want to consciously realize the racial resentments, stereotypes and harmful attitudes contained within.
10. Coherence & Relevance:	Necessary	General and target interpretations are both relevant to their respective audience(s).
11. Next Turn Proofs:	Aligned	Both next turn proofs are aligned to the expected reactions to his statements.
Result:	**All criteria met**	**This is a successfully designed dogwhistle.**

While the dogwhistle message is packaged covertly, the way it is received can vary. Some audience members will be able to unpack the message to understand that 'global special interests' refers specifically to Jews, while others may only hear the dogwhistle in so much as their pre-existing attitudes about Jews have been called upon. As Haney-López claims, *"This is how Trump convinces his supporters they're not racist"* (Haney-López, 2016). As such, many target receivers could consciously hold onto views of themselves as not racist, while being simultaneously manipulated by messaging that capitalizes on their implicit biases (Saul 2018a; Wetts & Willer, 2019). They may even go so far as to consciously reject racist attitudes, while yet still being influenced by them (Saul, 2018a).

Others, seeing the imagery of prominent Jewish figures in finance paired with the speech, may come to realize that something nefarious has occurred—they recognize the stereotype, but they don't personally hold the pre-existing attitudes the statement entails.

It is possible that Trump intends the general audience to hear the dogwhistle message too. Perhaps because he does

not care or maybe because he welcomes the fear that this might create in his adversaries. Or as some have suggested, conservatives may be tired of "playing a shadowy game of coded bigotry" (Blades, 2016) and view explicit sentiments as more "honest" and a way to push back against "political correctness" (Blades, 2016).

Yet still, a deeper and more widespread audience contempt may be at play. As quoted from Shapiro (2020):

> *"When people criticize racist dog whistles, they're not just objecting to a specific coded speech act; they're calling out a system that makes such acts of coded power possible. And when people knowingly use dog whistles to spread racist messages, they show contempt not just for the people they're speaking past, but to the people they're speaking to. Even if those who leap at the dog whistle revel in the insider knowledge that makes them the intended audience, this still places them not in the role of the master, but the dog."*
> (Shapiro, 2020)

Regardless of his precise intent or the extent of contempt Trump may have for his audience, this analysis allows us to see how dogwhistling is employed as a form of strategic racism to appeal to his supporters and thereby further cement his position of power while also fomenting division, extremism, and violence.

As with any audience manipulation tactic, dogwhistles have a high risk of backfiring. Even when successful, political dogwhistles often reinforce a dangerous power hierarchy. This can be detrimental to the speaker, but also to the institution that they represent, and ultimately to the legitimacy of the ideology that the speaker and their audiences subscribe to.

It is by applying the typological model to these speech acts that we can examine their construction, expose their deception, and fight back against the harms they cause. As others have already demonstrated the ways that dogwhistling can be a threat to democracy (Goodin & Saward, 2005; Haney-López, 2014; Stanley, 2015; Wetts & Willer, 2019), this model provides further grounding and support for those claims, allowing us to linguistically unpack speech acts and gain new insights from their inner workings.

Discussion

The definition and typological model of a dogwhistle is offered with the aim for other researchers to apply it, challenge it, and see what updates are required to ensure it reflects common understanding and captures the complexity and variety of evolving usage.

During the development of the model and writing of this paper, several areas have emerged that are worthy of further exploration.

Issues around plausible deniability could be a fruitful avenue of enquiry. The inverse relationship between plausible deniability and the amount of conscious crafting that goes into a dogwhistle message raises questions for

Criterion 1: **Intent**. For example, spontaneous speech is much more plausibly deniable than an advertising team creating a video message with strategically juxtaposed imagery. Therefore, should we adjust our assumptions about intent accordingly? What about examples of spontaneous speech with high levels of message concealment? In these instances, as the plausible deniability increases, it may be harder to make the case that these speech acts are indeed dogwhistles.

These examples speak to a broader challenge when defining dogwhistles. If intent is necessary for defining what is or isn't a dogwhistle—but intent can't be proven (and can always be plausibly denied)—then what are we to make of 'unintentional dogwhistles'?

If a word becomes imbued with anti-Semitic connotations, as is the case with Example 6. "Global special interests", innocent uses of the word 'globalists' by speakers who don't intend to dogwhistle will nonetheless be inadvertently introducing those negative connotations along with the rest of their message (Drainville & Saul, forthcoming). This poses challenges for the model and analysis as presented here. While not insurmountable, these challenges are beyond the scope of this paper and further exploration is warranted.

Another aspect to consider is the interactive relationships between the criteria. For example, the coherence of the message has a direct relationship to whether the next turn proofs will be aligned.

I argue that all criteria have relationships and interactions with each other. More complex modelling of this is possible, which could further define the mechanisms at play. This could advance dogwhistle research, as well as our understanding of other tropes, given that the right inputs and variables are defined for each type of trope.

In sum, intentionality and plausible deniability raise interesting philosophical questions around awareness and knowledge. While epistemological considerations are beyond the scope of this paper, this is an important area for further research.

Other perspectives

This paper takes the speaker's perspective in defining dogwhistles; we haven't explored hearer effects or audience impact. There is nuance and insight to be gained by a receiver account, or a more wholistic, interactive view.

Each perspective brings its own complications. A dynamic or interactive account of dogwhistling can perhaps most accurately describe the phenomenon, but also introduces new puzzles to solve around intentionality, explicitness, and impact on hearers.

For example, while we know that impact on hearers is necessary in determining whether a dogwhistle is successful or not (beyond a successful construction as a dogwhistle), what is the role of the hearer in defining a dogwhistle as such?

Criterion 11: ***Next-turn Proofs*** is critical, but what else must we consider?

Lastly, there are many other linguistic avenues to explore, enriching our accounts of dogwhistling. Choice of style, accent, code, or even language of a message are also possible resources that speakers can manipulate to send coded messages. As are paralinguistic cues such as breathing—a strategically placed pause or sigh—or gestures, such as the OK symbol, which can be used to dogwhistle an affiliation with white supremacy (Drainville & Saul, forthcoming). Incorporating these signs and signals can broaden our approach and foster collaboration with other disciplines to provide a more well-rounded understanding of the way linguistic phenomenon are situated within social behaviour.

Conclusion

In this paper, a linguistic definition of a dogwhistle was introduced. The 11-features outlined in the Typological model of a dogwhistle demonstrated the inner workings of these speech acts. Additionally, the model was applied to other tropes, with the intention of classifying and differentiating them from dogwhistles.

I examined several examples of data from genres not previously associated with dogwhistles, showing the ubiquity and flexibility of this form of covert messaging. Lastly, examples of data from politicians demonstrated some of ways dogwhistling is used to covertly signal to and manipulate audiences.

This model provides a more methodical way to answer questions that journalists (Marshall, 2016; Olasov, 2016), academics (Haney-López, 2016; Saul, 2017; Albertson, 2020), and others have about which speech acts are strategic racism (and anti-Semitism) via dogwhistling, e.g. "global special interests", and which are examples of overt racism through other linguistic means, e.g., "kung flu".

Reviewing the examples throughout this paper, we can see that speakers can come in many forms, ranging from individuals to advertisers and beyond. Audiences, too, can vary. From a handful of humans to a worldwide platform and its almighty algorithm, just about anyone or anything can receive a message. Within this discursive universe, there are endless possibilities for communication…and ways to manipulate it. Above all, we have the power to use our words to inform and influence. And the choice to do so with good intent, thereby uniting people, advocating for them, and also for exposing threats to our freedom and democracy.

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