Lee Kuan Yew and his Use of Spatial-orientational Metaphors

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Background of Singapore's National Day Rally Speech 1966

The Prime Minister's message to the nation after Singapore separated from Malaysia was one of consolidation and moving ahead. This was not an easy task for the speaker as the year before Singapore separated from Malaysia, the race riots had claimed 34 lives.1 These riots were even more prolonged than the Hertogh riots of 1950. Maintaining racial harmony and social integration was an uphill task. The hope for consolidation and a united sense of nationhood seemed distant.

The following speech, delivered on the eve of the National Day in 1966, is representative of Lee's rhetorical skills, which is marked with an idealism sponsored by industry and strategy. He presents the case at hand in vivid terms, strategising ways to overcome difficult storms and implementing the course of action that will propel Singapore's relative productivity, worker attitudes and technical skills among the highest in the world. As we will see, Lee uses spatial orientational metaphors to the fullest advantage.

The Case for Spatial Metaphors

Building on the bulk of literature on the nature of metaphor provided by ancient philosohpers Aristotle, 2 Cicero, 3 Quintilian, 4 modern philosohpers Hegel, 5 Locke, 6 Rousseau, 7 Nietzsche, 8 early twentieeth century positivists Edie, 9 Mill10 and Black, 11 Ogden and Richards, 12 Goodman, 13 Beardsley, 14 Henle, 15 Jakobson, 16 and Loewnberg, 17 Lakoff and Johnson, 18 discerned "orientational" metaphors. Orientational metaphors do not really structure one concept in terms of another. Rather an orientational metaphor organises a group or system of metaphorical concepts in terms associated with spatial orientation, eg. "up-down" and "front-back". An example would be the fact that so many metaphorical concepts concerning happiness (eg. feeling up, spirits were boosted, in high

spirits) have to do with the spatial orientation of up, whereas so many metaphorical concepts of unhappiness (eg. feeling low, feeling down, sinking spirits, falling into depression) have to do with down. Thus, we could say that the orientational metaphor in these statements is happy is up, sad is down.

Most of these orientational metaphors seem to suggest that they arise from the physical, social and cultural experiences of a particular group of language users. Perhaps we speak of sad events in terms of down because of the drooping physical posture that the human body assumes in times of sadness. This seems plausible, but whether it is definitely the inspiration for such a metaphor is immaterial.

The fact remains that users of the English language have a strong tendency to speak of certain things or events in terms of spatial orientation. This is true to such an extent that it is difficult to imagine talking of certain ideas without the accompanying spatial orientation. For example, we find it almost impossible to speak of good status without resorting to words like "high", which are part of the spatial orientational metaphor up is good. In fact, anything to do with the positive (eg. happiness, goodness, high status, good prospects and health) is usually spoken of in terms that suggest height. Negative things, feelings and ideas are expressed in terms that suggest lowness or down. Yet, we are not even aware that we are speaking metaphorically when we say something like "I rose to the occasion" because this is a conventional way of speaking about that paticular idea or event. But this is a metaphor nevertheless. These spatial orientational metaphors are so common that we often use them unawares. They even affect other aspects of our speech. For example, in the structural metaphor ìlove is serviceî, we see the appearance of the spatial orientational metaphor of up is good in the expression:

 There is no higher love than for a man to give up his life for a friend.

We now look at Singaporeís 1966 National Day Rally Speech by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and note the pervasiveness of spatial metaphors.

Text of Singapore's National Day Rally Speech 1996 - Private-

Source: Prime Minister's Speeches, Press Conferences, Interviews, Statements, etc. (Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 1966).

Friends and fellow citizens,

This time last year, my colleagues and I had already made a fateful decision on your and our behalf. In the nature of the circumstances, there was no time for consultations. We could not find out what the consensus would have been had we refused to acquiesce and had we insisted on going on with the kind of Malaysia which we envisages it was, at the time when we agreed to join.

It is useful this evening not so much to go back to the past - the whys and the wherefores - to apportion blame but more to search deep into our hearts to ask if the things we set out to do were right or wrong; were good or bad. And I say that we have no regrets. We are completely unrepentant that we set out to build a multi-racial and, for some time, a multi-lingual, a multi-cultural community, to give a satisfying life to the many different kinds of people who foregathered here in over 150 years of the British Raj.

And we, in the end, on balance decided to carry on with our multi-racial experiment - if you like to call it - just in Singapore alone rather than be forced into large-scale conflict in Malaysia.

Nothing has altered, not the basic data nor our basic thinking. What has altered are the circumstances in which we now find ourselves.

I think it is reassuring on an anniversary to weigh the odds to see how we have performed, the promises against the performances. And my experiences of Singapore and her young, active, energetic if somewhat exuberant people is that given honest and effective leadership, an honest administration within which to bring forth themselves, they will make the grade.

It has been a year of great and sudden change. Very few countries in the world go through this kind of climacteric we have gone through.

From 1961 to 1963, we fought for merger, to sink ourselves in the identity of a bigger whole. Between 1963 and 1965, we found ourselves gradually embroiled in something which we half suspected but never quite admitted was possible within such a multi-racial situation. And in 1965, with decisive suddenness, we found ourselves asunder.

All the while, despite all the political unpleasantness that followed, we were making progress. Imports went up and so did exports.

These are hard facts and figures, not fictions of the imagination of my colleague, the Minister for Finance. They have checked against every indent that goes in and out of the Port of Singapore Authority. They have checked against our revenue on the same rates of taxation; the number of factories,

the people they employ, the goods they produce, their value; the houses being built. And they tell a story which we have very little to be ashamed of. Almost in spite of ourselves, we have forged ahead; revenue has gone up 10 percent; the economy is surging forward.

I am not saying that this will be so far all the time with no effort on our part. But we will progress so long as we reward initiative and resourcefulness; and was long as whenever we face peril, courage and resolve are never found wanting.

But more than just making material progress, like other groups of human being wherever they are found in the world, we seek permanent salvation, security to time immemorial, to eternity.

We believed - and we still believe - that that salvation lies in an integrated society. I use the word advisedly - "integrated" as against "assimilated".

I would not imagine for one moment a Singapore Government trying to assimilate everybody. You know, 5 percent Chinese trying to convert 10 percent Tamils and Hindus and Tamil Muslims and Northern Indian Muslims into good old "Chinamen" - or not even good old Chinamen: good old "Overseas Chinese", Singapore brand, Singapore type.

I would not try it; it is not worth the effort. Nor would I try it with the other groups. Certainly, not my colleague like Encik Othman who has been here for many, many generations; or even my colleague like Tuan Haji Ya'acob from Kelantan where he was born.

Why should we try the impossible?

But I say integration is possible - not to make us one gray mass against our will, against our feelings, against our inclinations, but to integrate us with common values, common attitudes, a common outlook, certainly a common language and eventually, a common culture.

It is important that we should understand what is it we are after in the long run. And, if we are after a permanent and secure future for ourselves, then this must be done: to build a society which, as it progresses, improves, flourishes and gives an equally satisfying life to one and all.

If groups are left behind either on the basis of language, race, religion or culture, and if with these groups, the line of division coincides with the line of race, then we will not succeed in our long-term objective of a secure future.

For so many other countries in this part of the world are faced with the multi-racial societies that gradually formed themselves over the period of colonial rule.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which we in Singapore can set the pace.

First, prove that the migrant element is dynamic, is thrustful, is industrious and can get on - of that, I have no doubt - but that in the process of getting on it is unmindful of its wider responsibilities and its long-term interests, leaving in its train a whole trail of frustrations and bitterness which must have its repercussions throughout the whole region as men's minds begin to ponder on the unpleasant consequences of what we have done or what we have manifested.

The other way is to demonstrate that we are a forward-looking, not a backward-looking society, not looking to the past examples of patterns of behaviour and conduct completely irrelevant in the modern society that we now find ourselves ... Man reaching out for the moon and the stars ... It is to show we do not find our solutions by turning over the dusty pages of some chronicle of some ancient time telling us about some ancient customs more relevant to his days, but that we have the forward, the inquiring outlook, and are keen to learn, keen to make a success of the future.

If we can give everyone - regardless of race, language, culture - an equally satisfying life, then surely that must be a benevolent or a beneficial influence on the whole region as other people turn their eyes towards us and say, "It is not true ... Given the right political attitudes and the aptitudes and the framework of a good, effective administration, all can thrive and prosper."

It is in the nature of things that we must talk in parables. And the older I become, the more I am convinced that sometimes perhaps, the Prophets spoke in parables because they had also to take into account so many factors prevailing in their time. But, I would like to believe that we are a people sufficiently sophisticated to understand parables and the value of ever searching for new solutions, new ways to achieve old targets.

Never be depressed, never be deflated by setbacks. We suffered setbacks. In 1964, there were two communal riots. And we do not pretend to ourselves they were not communal riots - they were. We face facts.

And this is one of the greatest strengths about Singapore: its willingness to face reality including the 9th of August.

We used to celebrate the 3rd of June; then, it was the 16th of September, when we promulgated Malaysia. Then, it went back to the 31st of August because other people celebrated the 31st of August. And then it had to be the 9th of August, and the 9th of August it is, not because we wished it to be but because it was.

This capacity to face up to situations, however intractable, however unpleasant, is one of the great qualities for survival. A people able to look facts squarely in the face, able to calculate the odds, to weigh the chances and then to decide to go it, are a people not likely to go under.

And when this time last year, before the news was broken to the world, my colleagues and I carried that heavy burden in our hearts of having made the decision on your behalf, we consoled ourselves with this thought: that whilst thereafter, the multi-racial society that we had set out to create could be implemented only within the confines of Singapore, we knew deep down that ultimately, its impact must spread far beyond its shores.

No geographic or political boundary contain the implications of what we set out to do when we succeed. And, there is no reason why given patience, tolerance, perseverance, we should not, in this hub, in this confluence of three indeed, four great civilizations, create a situation which will act as a yeast, a ferment for what is possible, given goodwill, forbearance and good faith.

Every year, on this 9th of August for many years ahead - how many, I do not know - we will dedicate ourselves anew to consolidate ourselves to survive; and, most important of all, to find an enduring future for what we have built and what our forebears will build up.

Thank you.

Analysis of Speech

This speech offers several areas of analysis for the speech critic. The metaphors used fall into different categories within the framework of metaphorical concepts. These include orientational metaphors as well as structural metaphors.

As discussed earlier, much of ordinary experience is expressed and thought of in terms of spatial orientation. This is seen in the number of everyday events and occurrences that resort to spatial references:

"Are we on for tomorrow?"

"I look back at my past with regret."
"It was an upbeat speech."
"He was down hearted."

One observation that can be made from these examples is that metaphors using the spatial orientation of "up", "forward" and "on" seem to be associated with positive feelings and events, while terms like "down" and "back" seem to be associated with the negative. Another observation is that these metaphors are common expressions rather than novel ones. It seems to be part of the convention of English speech that certain spatial orientational terms are used to express the positive, as well as the negative.

The majority of spatial-orientational metaphorical terms employed in the speech can be divided into those that are used to convey a positive experience or feeling and those that convey negative or less satisfactory events and emotions. Positive ones are:
"set out to build a...community, to give a satisfying life",
"to bring forth",
"go through the...climacteric",
"making progress",
"imports went up, and so did exports",
"forged ahead",
"revenue has gone up",
"economy is surging forward",
"what it is we are after in the long run",
"we are after a permanent and secure future",
"build a society which, as it progresses, improves, flourishes and gives...satisfying life",
"the migrant element is thrustful...and can get on",
"forward-looking",
"man reaching out for the moon and the stars",
"we have the forward, the inquiring outlook",
"other people turn their eyes towards us",
"face reality",
"face facts",
"face up to situations",
"look facts squarely in the face",
"set out to create",
"set out to do" and
"build up".

The negative expressions are:
"go back to the past...to apportion blame",
"sink ourselves in the identity of a bigger whole",
"embroiled in something",

"against our will...feelings...inclinations",
"groups are left behind",
"leaving in its train a whole trail of frustrations",
"backward-looking society",
"not looking to the past",
"turning over the dusty pages",
"deflated by setbacks" and
"go under".

A closer look at the spatial elements in the positive set of metaphors yields an interesting result. The spatial orientations referred to are:
(1) "out" (set out to build/give/create/to do, inquiring outlook),
(2) "forward" (bring forth, making progress, forge ahead, surging forward, build a society which, as it progresses gives satisfying life, thrustful, get on, forward looking, have the forward, the inquiring outlook),
(3) "through" (in the sense of successfully enduring in "go through the climacteric"),
(4) "up" (exports, imports and revenue went up, build up), and
(5) "towards" (people turn their eyes towards us, face reality/facts/up to situations, look facts squarely in the face).

Thus, it seems that the common concept in these orientational statements is "out, forward, through, up and towards are positive". Since all these directions have in common the concept of going outwards rather than inwards, we can, for convenience and without sacrificing accuracy summarise the metaphorical concept as 'outwards is positive'.

However, generally speaking, there are other terms employing similar orientations that convey positive experiences and actions. For "out", there are, for example, "venture out" and "step out" which both convey a pioneering spirit and firm intention. For "forward", there are expressions like "the future before us", "I look forward", and "the opportunities ahead". Perhaps, our cultural conditioning and even physical reality (after all, our eyes face front, in the direction we pursue), result in this tendency to associate "forward" orientations with a positive reaction.

Similarly, for "through", in the sense of going through or enduring hardship and coming out none the worse if not better for it, there are many expressions in common use such as "go through a baptism of fire". For "up", the list of conventional metaphors is seemingly endless. In talking of happiness we say "my spirits rose", of alertness we say "wake up", of health we say someone is in "top shape", and of power we say we have 'control over the situation'. The reader will no doubt recall the many other "up" expressions in common use. For "towards", there are many expressions,

especially references to the future or to success, for example, the "path to success" and "look ahead to" the year 2000.

On the basis of all these examples, we can plausibly conclude that we tend to organise many basic ideas in terms of metaphors that are spatially orientated. The orientational metaphors employed in the speech seem to be part of a somewhat coherent system as there are many commonly used metaphors using the same spatialisations in an equally positive tone. It seems that whether a particular spatialisation conveys a positive or negative connotation is reflective of particular cultures or language users. Further, there is a certain coherence among the positive spatial metaphors used in the speech. They all have in common the root or major metaphor that "outward is positive" and all have in common the concept of moving outwards. We can refine the root metaphor further by acknowledging that all these spatial metaphors have the concept of movement incorporated within them. Thus, we can identify the major metaphorical concept as ìoutward movement is positiveî.

How does the use of spatial metaphors affect the audience? It serves to reinforce the message that things are looking up and that the future will only get better. A look at the negative spatial metaphors strengthens this conclusion.

The negative metaphors can be categorised as:
(1) "backward" (go back to the past, leaving in its train a trail, dusty pages of some chronicle of some ancient time, left behind, backward looking, looking to the past),
(2) "against" (against our will, feelings or inclinations),
(3) "down" (sink ourselves in the identity of a bigger whole, embroiled in, deflated by setbacks, go under, be depressed).

The common concept in these orientational statements is "backward, against and down are negative". These directions have in common the concept of going inwards, rather than outwards. Thus, we can, for convenience and without sacrificing accuracy, summarise the metaphorical concept as "inwards is negative". As in the case of the positive metaphors, it is easy to realise that many conventional spatial/directional statements rely on this concept. For "backward", we recall statements like "regressed into a childlike state", "back to the drawing board", "backward in one's thinking", and not to mention the various insults that have to do with one's behind. For "against", there are statements referring to war and argument, eg. "go against an opponent" and 'go against the grain', (a statement, apparently from carpentry that has found its way into ordinary usage). For "down", examples include "down and out", "sink into depression", "fall from grace", "the stock market fell" and "the Great Depression".

In the speech, as the audience hears the negative statements that rely on the metaphorical concepts of "down", "backwards" and "against", they receive the overall idea that relying on the past or even looking at it has little value for Singapore at that point in time. The overall impression is that it is time they look to the future and rejoice in the steps that have already been taken towards realising the future.

In speaking of the future, Lee relies on the metaphor of pursuit. In Lakoff's and Johnson's terms, we can call this a "physical" metaphor, where events that have yet to take place are spoken of as being a physical entity or substance that can be pursued. Here, the future is referred to as "what it is we are after in the long run", "we are after a permanent and secure future", and "long term objective of a secure future", "man reaching out for the moon and stars".

These convey positive feelings about the future for the audience. Such a view of the future can motivate their actions and set goals that are seen as inherently achievable. The secure future is further reinforced by the metaphor "making progress" and ìforged aheadî. "Making" and "forged" convey intentionality, achievability and pursuit of an

Conclusion

The analysis reinforces the idea that speakers cannot help but speak of certain things or events in terms of spatial orientation. Spatial orientational metaphors are so dominant that we often use them unconsciously. The experiences and uses of good is up and down is bad/sad have become so much a part of everyday use that we seldom regard them as metaphorical expressions.

In the speech such as Lee's, where the motivation is for a population to consolidate and move ahead, spatial orientational metaphors were used to its fullest advantage.

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