

Reflection on “Language Bribery” and Its Governance Strategies——Based on the Analysis of Agenda-Setting Theory

Haowei Lei^{1,2}

¹School of Politics and Public Administration, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing, China

²Institution of Inner-party Laws and Regulations, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing, China

Email address

cqleihaowei@163.com

To cite this article:

Haowei Lei. Reflection on “Language Bribery” and Its Governance Strategies——Based on the Analysis of Agenda-Setting Theory. *Advances in Sciences and Humanities*. Vol. 4, No. 6, 2018, pp. 68-73. doi: 10.11648/j.ash.20180406.11

Received: November 19, 2018; **Accepted:** December 7, 2018; **Published:** January 7, 2019

Abstract: At present, the problem of micro-corruption such as “language bribery” is getting increasingly serious. It is of great practical significance to analyze the internal causes and put forward feasible countermeasures. On the basis of summarizing the existing researches of scholars in the academic circle, this paper summarizes the main performance of “language bribery”, and uses the Agenda-setting Theory to examine the influences and causes of “language bribery”. Finally, the article puts forward the corresponding governance strategies. “Language bribery” is characterized by the vague expression of “official duty” and “deputy duty”, caused by the prominent rank of “resume” and “ability”, and influenced by the bureaucracy growth of “relationship-seeking” and “rent-seeking”. According to the Agenda-setting Theory, correcting the communication idea of “official standard”, improving the communication method of “deliberative” and optimizing the communication strategy of “public opinion field” are the good strategies to control “language bribery”. In addition, tackling the problem of “language bribery” requires the joint efforts of the government, society and citizens. The government only plays a guiding role in the process of governance, and the society and citizens are the backbone force to solve this problem. For scholars, it is necessary to further elaborate the research issues and examine the causes and influences of “language bribery” from different perspectives. Only in this way can China’s anti-corruption governance be effective.

Keywords: “Language Bribery”, Agenda-Setting Theory, Micro-Corruption, Bureaucratic, Transmission, Governance

1. Introduction

The Agenda-setting Theory proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) laid the foundation of modern media communication theory. Agenda setting is an important way for mass media to influence society by providing information and arranging topics to effectively influence what facts and opinions people care about and the order in which they talk about. [1]

Table 1 presents four forms of “language bribery”: fawning “language bribery”, false “language bribery”, reported “language bribery” and ostentatious “language bribery”. [2] Therefore, it is not difficult to see that “language bribery” is an important embodiment of micro-corruption, which refers to purposeful linguistic deception, exaggeration and flattery. Compared with money bribery, “language bribery” based on verbal flattery costs less and is more concealed. It is also easier to spread and widely destructive and corrosive. [3].

Table 1. Types and main manifestations of “language bribery”.

Types	Main manifestations
Fawning “language bribery”	Sweet words are exchanged for the leader’s favor; cater to leaders’ preferences; adopt the adulation coping strategy; lie to the leader
False “language bribery”	Dare not point out the obvious mistakes made by the leader; build their own network for protecting themselves; feed the unhealthy tendencies
Reported “language bribery”	Willing to report and take credit to leaders, but no substantive results; report any problems to the leader, but do not know

Types	Main manifestations
Ostentatious “language bribery”	the actual situation Exaggerate their work with grandiloquence and highlight their leadership status; separate from the masses and flatter the leadership; empty talk

Through the comprehensive analysis of media communication and audience influence in the theory of Agenda-setting, this paper examines the main features, causes and effects of “language bribery” in micro-corruption and puts forward the core thoughts, methods and strategies of its governance. It is of great practical significance for further deepening the overall strict party governance and enhancing the anti-corruption efficiency.

2. Literature Review

On the macro level, the targeted research on “language bribery” is relatively thin. These studies started late and their results are very partial. Figure 1 is the literature search result of CNKI database. Search methods: the key word is “language bribery”, the retrieval condition is document title, the retrieval method is fuzzy search, and the search time is November 18, 2018.

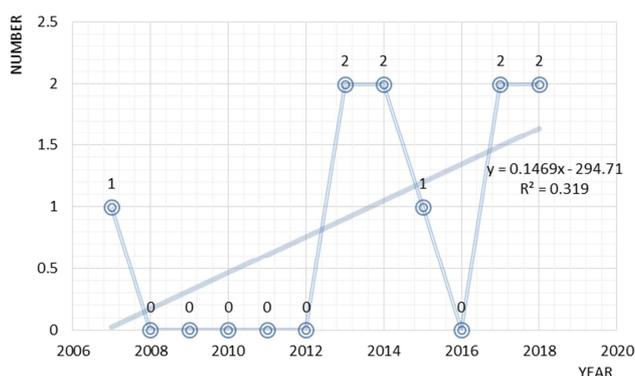


Figure 1. Trending analysis of literature searching for the keywords of “language bribery” on CNKI.

The emergence of “language bribery” is closely related to the dislocation of ideological guidance. Therefore, a large number of Chinese scholars have made detailed studies on the essence of socialist core values. Some Chinese scholars focus on the cultivation and practice of socialist core values. Socialist core values are highly condensed expressions of the socialist core value system. [4] On the one hand, the socialist core values are rooted in China’s excellent traditional culture and have rich traditional cultural connotations. [5] On the other hand, the national spirit with patriotism as the core constitutes the philosophical tradition of socialist core values.

Table 2. Statistical analysis of typical documents and main contents of “language bribery”.

Date	Title	Main contents
2013-12-09	Beware of “language bribery”	The connotation concepts, types, influences and countermeasures of “language bribery”
2014-04-23	Officials need to prevent “language bribery”	The bad influences of “language bribery” and its countermeasures
2017-04-05	Use seven words with caution to help you stay away from “language bribery”	Seven words that can easily cause “language bribery” and their impacts
2017-09-25	Four measures to prevent “language bribery”	Prevention measures of “language bribery” in knowledge, sentiment, intention and action

[6] On the important issue of sorting out the relationship between the socialist core values and laws, Chen Rong (2018) pointed out that there are still many deficiencies in the guidance, practice and guarantee of socialist core values in the existing laws. [7] In order to embody socialist core values in the law, the lawmakers must properly incorporate some basic and recognized moral requirements such as public morality, professional ethics and business ethics into the law. [8].

Specifically, the theoretical research on “language bribery” mostly focuses on the connotation concept of “language bribery”, the type composition of “language bribery” and the governance measures of “language bribery”. Jing Fengqi (2013) summarized the types of “language bribery” as “flattery, polite, reporting and ostentation”. This article analyzed the disadvantages of “language bribery” in the objective evaluation of the overall image of leading cadres, promotion of work and career development, etc. In view of these problems, this paper then put forward “telling the truth”, “doing practical work”, “strengthening the discrimination”, “supervising severely” and other countermeasures. [9] Liu Xinmin (2017) argued that the performance of greasiness and grandstanding brought by “language bribery” seriously affected the integrity and self-discipline of leading cadres. In this regard, this article put forward four countermeasures to prevent “language bribery”, such as “improving self-awareness”, “cultivating high interests and hobbies”, “accepting criticism from subordinates” and “working realistically and pragmatically”. [10] “Language bribery” is an expression of flattery, which is closely related to the use of words and sentences. Therefore, some scholars have sorted out and summarized words that are likely to cause bribery, such as “in person”, “very important”, “respected comrade”, “busy”, “leadership” and “big”. (Xu Wenxiu, 2018) [11-12].

However, some scholars think that the current definition of “language bribery” is overcorrected. Yu Xiaoqi (2018) made a dialectical analysis of the behavior of “giving someone a tall hat”. In reality, this is often a “polite gesture”, and “listeners are less likely to be in awe of what they are calling them”. Therefore, the social from all walks of life need to dialectically view the behavior of “improving the position and title” and accurately define the connotation and extension of “language bribery”. [13] (Table 2 is a statistical analysis of typical literature and its main contents).

Date	Title	Main contents
2018-06-07	The formulation of “language bribery” is worth discussing	The motivation of the behavior of “high hat”, the discrimination of “language bribery”
2018-10-01	Use five words carefully, stay away from “language bribery”	Five words that can easily cause “language bribery” and their impacts

To sum up, the theoretical research on “language bribery” is relatively trivial but not systematic. Although there are some valuable arguments, it is not conducive to the in-depth theoretical research. This paper does not agree with the view that the behavior of “giving someone a tall hat” is not “language bribery”, but believes that such behavior is an important feature of such micro-corruption phenomena as “language bribery”.

3. Core Questions and Main Methods

3.1. Core Questions

Based on a large number of micro-corruption phenomena in reality, this paper aims to re-examine the performances, characteristics, causes and effects of “language bribery” under the new situation. As a key point, this paper aims to use the Agenda-setting Theory to innovate the governance concepts, methods and strategies of “language bribery”. The specific problems are as follows.

1. What are the characteristics of “language bribery” in the new situation?
2. What causes the emergence of “language bribery”?
3. What influences will “language bribery” bring to national governance and government governance?
4. How to use the Agenda-setting Theory to innovate the concepts, methods and strategies of “language bribery” governance?
5. What reflection does “language bribery” bring to us?

3.2. Main Methods

Based on the theoretical research and the practical problems of the governance of “language bribery”, this paper analyzes the problems and puts forward countermeasures by inductive summarizing and deductive reasoning. The specific methods are as follows.

3.2.1. Research Method Combining Theory and Practice

Firstly, according to literature review and analysis, this study summarizes the beneficial results of existing studies and analyzes the deficiencies, in order to enrich the research materials and explore the new perspective. Secondly, this study comprehensively uses the Corruption-governance Theory to analyze such micro-corruption phenomena as “language bribery”, and then uses the Agenda-setting Theory to analyze the actual “language bribery” behaviors. Thirdly, combining theory with practice, this study summarizes the characteristics, causes and effects of “language bribery”.

3.2.2. Research Method Combining Induction and Deduction

Firstly, this study comprehensively summarizes the academic achievements of existing studies and applies them as

the research basis. Secondly, this study systematically summarizes the current practical problems of “language bribery” and aims to summarize the main features and influences of “language bribery”. Thirdly, this study uses relevant theories, and then deduces the cause of “language bribery”. Fourthly, according to the general logic of corruption governance and media communication, the governance strategies of “language bribery” are analyzed and summarized.

4. How to View “Language Bribery”: Features, Causes and Effects

The vague language of calling “deputy duty” as “official duty” is an important manifestation of micro-corruption. [14] Through the change of daily discourse system and address form, it becomes more and more serious under the influence of the information provided by mass media and the issue setting. Therefore, the “relationship pulling” caused by flattery undoubtedly makes “power rent-seeking” and “bureaucracy” possible.

4.1. The Vague Expressions of “Deputy Duty” and “Official Duty” Are the Main Features

At present, in the daily communication and news media reports of the party, the government, the army, the people and the school, it is an unspoken rule for the subordinates “respecting” the superior and the people “loving” the officials. Although the previous “Lao-Ban”, “Da-Ren”, “Jia-Zhang” and other secular and vulgar terms have been convergence, vague expressions, such as omitting the word “deputy” in the title (for example, calling an associate professor as a professor, calling a deputy director as a director), and calling directly ordinary cadres as the chief (for example, calling ordinary cadres of grassroots investigation and study as the chief) are very common. There is no doubt that “language bribery” is covered by a hidden veil, which is hard to detect and easy to ignore.

4.2. The Rank Outstanding of “Curriculum Vitae” and “Competence” Are the Main Causes

In the process of providing the public with basic information on public officials and technicians in different fields, highlighting administrative duties in their resume and highlighting professional titles in their capabilities are the main ways to measure their competence. In the case that some media introduce a public figure, they often significantly put forward the information such as “someone hold a position in a certain place at a certain time and obtain a title”. This kind of information provided choices and preferences may create psychological implication to the public, like “officials one rank superior crush the inferior”. Therefore, the public is

concerned about the administrative position of public servants and the professional title of technical personnel, and then “language bribery” may arise.

4.3. The Bureaucracies Growth of “Relationship-Seeking” and “Rent-Seeking” Are the Main Effects

The “language bribery” of “giving someone a tall hat” will encourage the unhealthy tendency of formalism and bureaucracy. It will also affect the seriousness and purity of the internal relations between the party, the government, the army, the people and the school in different fields. Furthermore, it will seriously undermine the unity between the government and the people, and increase the estrangement between them. The “language bribery” of subordinates to superiors and the public to officials is no doubt the actual manifestation of making connections and intimacy. On the one hand, this will cause the leading cadres to be overstaffed, which will further aggravate their bad style of ostentation. On the other hand, it will lead to cliques and provide a breeding ground for rent-seeking. In addition, the public opinion trend of “giving someone a tall hat” will affect the public opinion direction provided by the mass media. Thus, a vicious circle is gradually formed.

5. How to Deal with “Language Bribery”: Concepts, Methods and Strategies

According to the theory of Agenda-setting, “building consensus and realizing dialogue”, “improving responsibility and guiding public opinion” and “constructing events and attracting attention” are the governance strategies to guide people to correctly understand, reasonably provide public opinion information and effectively regulate the expression of speech. In the light of such micro corruption problems as “language bribery”, it is of vital importance to correct people’s misunderstanding of “official standard”. It is also important to improve and optimize the methods and strategies of information dissemination of cadres.

5.1. Correct the Communication Concept of “Official Standard” and Correctly Guide People’s Cognition

Correcting the “focusing on rank and focusing on attraction” communication idea of mass media and correcting people’s wrong cognition of “official standard” are the measures to eliminate the source of “language bribery” thoughts.

Traditional media such as radio, television, publishing and news as well as new media such as Micro-Blog and WeChat should adhere to the concept of fair, just and realistic. All kinds of media need to present facts objectively and guide public opinion correctly to avoid putting too much emphasis on “rank position” and “attracting attention” in information dissemination and news reporting. Only in this way can the decision makers effectively reduce the public’s attention and sensitivity to the words such as “position” and “title”, “leader” and “superior”, so as to correct the wrong cognition of “official standard” imperceptibly.

5.2. Improve the Communication Method of “Multiple Negotiation” and Reasonably Provide Information

Improving the previous communication method of “media being active and strong, but audience being passive and decentralized” and providing reasonable content and accurate official information by means of “multiple negotiation” are the feasible governance measures to prevent the evolution and development of “language bribery”.

Governance theory emphasizes the collaboration between government, society and citizens. It is no exception to the governance strategies of “language bribery”. Currently, mass media communication needs to overcome its past disadvantages, such as audience decentralization, silence, passivity and vacancy. The decision makers need to turn media-dominant to cooperation, turn monism to multivariate participation, and should also build the “expression community” to improve the way of information dissemination. [15] Only in this way, can the content of “position” and “title” as well as “leaders” and “superiors” be corrected to the greatest extent.

5.3. Optimize Communication Strategy of “Public Opinion Field” and Effectively Regulate Expression

The establishment of public opinion topics such as official-oriented and employee-oriented issues, relying on the new media platform of “Internet +”, is feasible governance strategy to solve the crisis of “language bribery”. In addition, the decision makers must confront this problem head on without deliberately evading it.

In the era of “Internet +”, new media platforms like Micro-Blog and WeChat should be good at creating positive public opinion topics. The mass media should actively guide the public to correctly recognize the division of ranks, dispel the blind worship of “official standard”, and make them treat “leaders” and “superiors” rationally at the same time. In response to the “language bribery” issue like “giving someone a tall hat”, based on the public interest orientation and core value guidance of the official public opinion field, the decision makers can avoid the appearance of vulgar and secular official titles to the greatest extent by the way of regulate and correct the expression of public opinion field.

6. How to Reflect on “Language Bribery”: Discussion, Conclusion and Prospect

6.1. Discussion

In response to the problem of “language bribery”, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC published an article titled “Don’t Call a Tall Hat Inside the Party” on the website, and clearly pointed out that “to call ‘deputy position’ as ‘official position’ is ‘language bribery’”. [16] *The Code of Conduct for Intraparty Political Life Under New Circumstances* also clearly stipulate that party members should call each other comrades rather than official titles. [17] However, why is it still common to omit the word “deputy” in daily communication? What is causing this problem? There

are still a lot of reasons, such as the lack of supervision mechanism and the existence of feudal decadent concepts, which deserves further consideration.

In addition, the cultivation and practice of socialist core values is an extremely macro topic. However, “language bribery” is an extremely microscopic field. How to refine the specific research path remains to be further explored by scholars. At present, some scholars in China have made bold attempts and breakthroughs. The topics of these studies include “governance of spiritual bribery” [18], “elimination of covert bribery” [19] and “micro-cultivation of socialist core values” [20].

6.2. Conclusion

Under the influence of the bureaucratism in feudal social, the official title in Chinese context is inevitably accompanied with the emotion of flattery. Therefore, the “language bribery” of “giving someone a tall hat”, which highlights the rank of official, has a deep-rooted history.

At present, the power of mass media to guide public opinion is growing stronger and stronger. With the setting of the agenda of mass media as the starting point, the decision makers can correct the false communication concept of “official standard” of mass media and then guide the public to correctly understand. On the one hand, the decision makers should strengthen consultation and cooperation in the process of information dissemination and reasonably provide citizens with correct official information. On the other hand, the decision makers must actively construct a positive public opinion field and constantly regulate the public’s expression. Only in these ways can the decision makers effectively solve the problem of minor-corruption such as “language bribery”.

6.3. Prospect

The research on “language bribery” is a cross-research field. The scholars should not only analyze from the perspective of political science and law, but also from the perspective of psychology, sociology and other different fields. On the one hand, when “language bribery” becomes the normal state of society, its negative effects may be less obvious. If so, the scholars need to define “language bribery” as a normal social phenomenon rather than a social pathology. On the other hand, the governance of “language bribery” requires the joint efforts of the government, society and citizens. The government only plays a guiding role in the process of governance, and the society and citizens are the backbone force.

Annotation

Based on the Chinese background, this paper conducts a targeted study on the problem of “language bribery” in China’s social reality. Therefore, this study does not involve the relevant issues in other countries outside China.

Acknowledgements

The fund projects for this article are as follows.

No. 1 The national rule of law and legal theory research project in 2017: Study on Legal Issues of National Supervision System Reform (Department: Ministry of Justice of the People’s Republic of China, Item number: 17SFB002)

No. 2 Major application projects of social science planning of Chongqing in 2017: Study on the Interest Guidance Mechanism of Integrating Socialist Core Values into the Construction of the Rule of Law (Department: Philosophy and Social Science Planning Office of Chongqing, Item number: 2017ZDYY20).

No. 3 Postgraduate research innovation project of Chongqing in 2018: Study on the Standardization of Inner-party Legal System Interpretation — Investigation and Analysis Based on Typical Cases and Texts (Department: Education Commission of Chongqing, Item number: CYS18158).

No. 4 Research fund projects of National Prosecutors College of P.R.C: Study on the Legal Supervision of Procuratorial Organs under the Background of Judicial System Reform, Supervision System Reform and Litigation System Reform (Department: National Prosecutors College of P.R.C, Item number: GJY2018B02).

In addition, it would like to thank Prof. Liao Xiujian (Executive Director of the Inner-party Law Research Center of Southwest University of Political Science and Law) and Ms. Hui Yang (Graduate student in the School of Politics and Public Administration, Southwest University of Political Science and Law) for their keen help in the topic selection, framework revision and data collection. Without their help, the study would have been difficult to carry on.

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Biography



Haowei Lei (1993-), academic assistant of the Research Center of Inner-party Laws and Regulations of SWUPL. Research interests are administrative law, inner-party governance and public policy analysis. In recent years, the author has led and completed 1 provincial-level subject, 2 ministerial legal subjects and 1 department-level subject, and has published many academic papers in internationally renowned academic journals such as *Journal of Chongqing University of Technology (Social Science)*, *West Forum on Economy and Management* and *Decision & Information*.