Language, Society and Power

An introduction

Third edition

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CHAPTER 1

What is language?

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Even though we use language constantly, we don't normally pay a great deal of attention to it. When we do, it's usually because something has gone wrong, or because we're passionate about the topic or speaker. While we will consider cases where things go wrong, in this book we focus more often on how language works, in common situations, in different ways, for different people. Before we do this, we need to think about what 'language' is. This is not an easy task. What counts as a language is a political, cultural and technical question. At the same time, while a group of people may share a language, they will each have their own individual way of using that language. To make matters even more complicated, individuals don't consistently use language in the same way. The language we use when we talk to our friends is not the same as the language we use to write a letter of complaint. Language varies depending on the people using it, the task at hand, and the society in which it all takes place.

While some linguists work to describe the rules of word order (syntax) or the sounds that make up words (phonetics and morphology), here, we'll be looking at what language can tell us about people as individuals, as members of groups, and about how people interact with other people. Before we start thinking about differences, it's worth considering why language is worth studying at all. As we'll see, linguists look at language for very different reasons, with various questions that they want to answer. Whatever path this work takes, it always treats language as a system. Studying systems might sound tedious, but linguists do more than that.
they describe the systems. Linguists are like spies, describing the rules of complex and changing systems, working with pieces of data from the everyday world. And this is not just any set of rules – language is a system that allows people to tell jokes, write poetry, make an arrest, sell you washing powder, pay a compliment and wish you good night. Language allows us to be precise and persuasive, ambiguous and evasive, charming and charismatic.

1.2 WHY STUDY LANGUAGE?

While not everyone studies language in a formal way, everyone has opinions about it. This is to be expected, given how central language is to our everyday life. If we canvass these opinions, we have an excellent starting place for the study of language generally and, more specifically, for thinking carefully and precisely about language. Norman Fairclough argues that a ‘critical awareness of language ... arises within the normal ways people reflect on their lives as part of their lives’ (1999: 73). Such reflection is well worth encouraging; Fairclough argues that the ability to understand how language functions, to think about it in different ways, is crucial to understanding society and other people. Critical awareness isn’t important because it makes us more accomplished or more intelligent; there is much more at stake. Fairclough argues that to understand power, persuasion and how people live together, a conscious engagement with language is necessary. That is, critical thinking about language can assist in resisting oppression, protecting the powerless and building a good society. Ferdinand de Saussure, sometimes referred to as the founder of modern linguistics, puts it rather more starkly. He writes: ‘In the lives of individuals and societies, speech is more important than anything else. That linguistics should continue to be the prerogative of a few specialists would be unthinkable – everyone is concerned with it in one way or another’ (1966: 3). In a way, all people are linguists, whether they like it or not.

If arguments about protecting people or challenging power seem abstract, consider a concrete case where language has a very precise value. In the first chapter of a recent book, Stephen Pinker describes ‘the world’s most expensive debate in semantics’ (2008: 3). After the events of 9/11 in the United States, the owners of the twin towers wanted to claim insurance for the catastrophic damage. They had insurance for ‘destructive events’, and the amount they were entitled to receive related to how many ‘events’ there had been. Was the crashing of hijacked planes into the twin towers one event or two? You might think this is an inappropriate or even trivial question to ask. After such a terrible event (or events) is it really important to make a decision about whether the ‘event’ was singular or plural? It certainly mattered to the owners, as a specific monetary amount was involved. In this case [Pinker] can put an exact value on it: three and a half billion dollars’ (2008: 2). That is, for each ‘event’, the owners would receive three and a half billion dollars. Pinker concludes, ‘There is nothing “mere” about semantics. When it comes to the billions one, the jury heard.

Semantics is the branch of linguistics that is concerned with how our brains understand and process language. Here we will consider closely at language and its subfields:

- how our brains work;
- how we learn language;
- how social norms determine language;
- how it might be that language is just a simple code (for communication) (artificial intelligence);
- what it is good for;
- how people misuse language;
- the relation of language to history (philosophy);
- whether science is needed.

This is far from a complete list of the many subfields here. The list I have chosen is offered to suggest. The idea that language is central to a variety of ways of understanding the world is important to point out. It is not enough to say ‘I want to know something’; one needs to find out how to find it. In the case of language, these areas generally attempt to explain how a kind of analysis might be used to explain the work done by language and the detail of language.

1.2.1 The meaning of words

As mentioned, we can use language to describe use. Looking at the meaning of words is important to the radio world. People talk about songs... There may be no absolute meaning, perhaps because the words are always ‘wrong’. Judge Roy Bean, the old-timey amusing cases, said it best: ‘Learn your meaning (http://literally.com) or I’ll cut you to the quick!’ The cases of Santa Claus are funny, because that nobody else can say a word that means ‘heart out’ (postcard)

"literally" in a literal sense...
What is language?

Everyone has opinions about language. This is just one of the areas of linguistics that looks at how we understand and construct meaning. But there are many others. Looking closely at language can tell us about:

- how our brains understand and process language (psycholinguistics)
- how we learn languages, and so how best to teach them (applied linguistics)
- how social factors (age, gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) affect the way people use language (sociolinguistics)
- how it might be possible to have a realistic conversation with a computer (artificial intelligence)
- what it is distinctive about literature and poetry (stylistics)
- how people in different cultures use language to do things (anthropology)
- the relationship between words and meaning and the 'real' world (philosophy)
- whether someone is guilty of a criminal offence (forensic linguistics).

This is far from a full account of the various kinds of linguistics. The subfields here are much richer and further reaching than the bullet points suggest. The important point is to realise that language can be examined in a variety of ways with diverse and specific concerns in mind. It’s also important to point out that these areas aren’t completely separate. We may want to know something about how brains process language if we’re interested in finding good teaching methods, for example. The way in which linguists in these areas go about looking at language may overlap. For example, the kind of analysis that is done in stylistics will be similar in some ways to the work done by forensic linguistics because there is a similar attention to the detail of language and some of the same tools of analysis are used.

1.2.1 The rules of language: prescription vs description

As mentioned, most people have opinions about language and language use. Looking at the letters pages in a newspaper, on blogs or even listening to the radio we notice that people have very strong ideas about language. There may be particular words or expressions that are commented on, perhaps because they cause offence, or because they are considered to be 'wrong'. Judgements about what is 'correct' language abound. Several amusing cases can be found on a blog dedicated to the use of 'literally' (http://literally.barelyfitz.com/). One striking example is from a man who plays Santa Claus in the United States, 'You see things behind the beard that nobody else will ever see or hear. I've had children just literally tear my heart out' (posted 30 March 2009). Clearly this is incorrect if we interpret 'literally' in a literal way; had the children actually torn Santa's heart, he would have died.
be dead. Nevertheless, we all understand 'literally' here as an intensifier, an exaggeration which we grasp immediately.

The disapproval of this use of 'literally' is echoed in a usage note in the online edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED): 'Now often improperly used to indicate that some conventional metaphorical or hyperbolic phrase is to be taken in the strongest admissible sense.' On the basis of this, you might conclude that the blogger is right: 'literally' shouldn't be used in this way, it's 'improper', even according to the OED. What do you think? Is Santa's use of 'literally' correct or not?

While it may seem to be a way of ducking a hard question, in deciding whether 'literally' is acceptable for Santa, we need to know what our definition of 'correct' is, or if we even have one. For linguists, meaning is use. That is, we don't judge a use of a word as correct or incorrect; rather, what the word means alters as it is used in different ways. This can be captured more precisely by talking about the difference between description and prescription. Linguists are concerned with describing what people are doing with language (description) while people who want to say that a certain use is incorrect are setting down rules for proper language use (prescription), quite apart from what people actually do.

But wait a minute; the OED said that it was an 'improper' use. You might be surprised to know that the OED note dates from 1903; the 2005 print edition is rather less dogmatic: 'This use ... is not acceptable in standard English, though it is widespread'. Note how there is a distinction made between 'standard English' and something else: 'widespread' language use (see Chapter 10). While in 1903 the use of hyperbolic 'literally' appears to have been stigmatised to the extent of being considered 'improper', now it is only seen as unacceptable in 'standard English'. This is an excellent example of how language changes and how the rules of language change. The prescriptive rules don't seem to have changed; but usage rules have. While the prescriptivist would argue that the 'rules of English' dictate that you can't 'literally explode', a linguist would argue that given we all understand what it means for a person to 'literally explode' (without blood being involved) the rules about what 'literally' means must have changed. Prescriptivists seem to think that if language changes, if their rules are broken, that the heart of language will be torn out. For linguists, these changes are interesting and inevitable. As languages are used, they change; while old descriptive rules may no longer work, new ones can be found. Even though language changes, it is always systematic - that is, language remains part of a system that reorganises itself around changes in language use. This idea might take some getting used to; but it is fundamental for any study of language.

Many prescriptivist requests to respect the 'rules' also come with some kind of warning: breaking the rules will lead to breaking the language itself. 'The crisis is imminent,' we are told. 'Things have never been this bad, it's all the fault of young people, foreigners and poor schooling.' While language changes, the theme of prescriptivist arguments barely shifts. Disapproving of the way some people use language, especially in relation to grammar and the meaning of words, such as 'literally' is a common theme in recent years (Milroy and Milroy 1992). You can find this complaint in newspapers or advertisements, or even the children's section of spelling.

There can be no doubt that the print editions of the OED have been more conservative. The modern programme is...'

Here, print media is replaced by online media. On the one hand, there is a problem of overgeneralising 'literally'. In American English, this is not uncommon. Note the effect of the change in words, adding emotional force. This shows that the OED also has particular rules about what can be considered incorrect, the rules are respected, but they're not so new; this example is from 1903; the note about Santa dates from 1891.

1.2.2 Bad language

Another complaint is that the use of jargon may also inform our language. When deceptions such as expressions we are using rules being broken and cases of overcomplicated language are not to be considered aspects, we can communicate with expressions that are difficult to understand a group. It's important to remember that it's sometimes necessary to communicate with a surgeon who is to perform a bit out of her task area, of using bad language. Thus, the use of bad language (in negative sense) does help us communicate:

The difficulty is that it comes in a mixed variety of cases. People are threatened by such fields as
the meaning of words, has a very long history known as ‘the complaint tradition’ (Milroy and Milroy 1999). The idea that language is in decline and that this is someone’s fault dates back to at least the fourteenth century (Boletta 1992). You can find many contemporary examples of the complaint tradition in newspapers or any mass media. The following, from a newspaper, relates to spelling.

There can be no doubt, I fear, that the newspapers are the great corrupters of the English language. The ignorant Americanism programme is gradually creeping in through this source.

Here, print media is blamed for the problem as well as being the place where the problem is identified! Obviously this is from a British newspaper; blaming America for the destruction of the English language is rather common. Note the use of ‘corrupters’ here, a word with particularly strong emotional force. The underlying message in such letters is that language has particular rules which should be followed. Those who don't adhere to the rules are responsible for ‘ruining’ the language. As mentioned, this is hardly new; this extract, from the Pall Mall Gazette, a London newspaper, dates from 1891, and doubtless you could find the same argument today.

1.2.2 Bad language: jargon

Another complaint tradition, with a similar longevity, is that which bemoans the use of jargon. Depending on the context of use, this language problem may also informally be called ‘gobbledygook’, ‘management speak’, and when deception is involved, especially in politics, ‘weasel words’. In such expressions we also see complaint; the complaint is not so much about rules being broken, but about language changing such that it becomes overcomplicated or incomprehensible. If we remove the judgemental aspects, we can define jargon as the use of specialised words and expressions that are difficult to understand for people not part of the specialised group. It’s important to remember that the use of specialised language is sometimes necessary. You probably wouldn't want your doctor to try communicating with a surgeon in lay terms. It would be rather frightening to hear a surgeon say to his colleagues, ‘we're going to operate to get that nasty bit out of her tummy’ when what you need is to have your appendix removed. Thus, whether or not something is jargon (especially in the negative sense) depends very much on who is speaking to whom. As Crystal argues:

The difficulties arise only when others come into contact with [a specialised variety of language], by accident or design, and find themselves threatened by its lack of familiarity or clarity, as happens so often in such fields as science, medicine, religion, and the law.

(2005: ch 72)
There is also an important element of power involved in jargon that we need to be aware of. The issue of power and how to define and detect it with respect to language comes later in this chapter.

At this point, it is worth remembering that language has different kinds of power; one of these is the power to make us laugh. Here we examine a humorous passage which deals with jargon. The following 'news' story is taken from a satirical, comic publication, The Onion (www.theonion.com).

CHARLOTTE, NC—During what was described to them as 'a look-forward meeting to discuss and evaluate the company's event-chain methodology,' MediaLine employees stood with mouths agape Wednesday as they witnessed the very moment at which project manager James Atkins attained complete mastery over the fine art of meaningless corporate doublespeak.

According to his awed coworkers, Atkins' usage of vacuous administrative jargon reached an almost mythical apex with the pre-lunchtime announcement, during which a string of expertly crafted drivel rolled off the 28-year-old's tongue with the confidence of a seasoned executive. 'Due to the increased scope of the project vis-à-vis Tuesday's meeting, compounded with our aforementioned desire to maintain quality without increasing cost, an as-yet indeterminate amount of time will be allocated to our newest venture,' Atkins said without once stuttering. 'You should all be prepared to begin your tasks as soon as possible, and to remain prepared to discuss and evaluate the company's event-chain methodology, during which Atkins will attempt to maintain a complete mastery of the fine art of meaningless corporate doublespeak.'

Clearly The Onion is not a serious newspaper. This extract, however, points precisely to what people find frustrating and confusing about the use of jargon, especially in the workplace. There are a number of important points highlighted in this satirical piece. First, this language (jargon) is something that needs to be learnt, not just in terms of the words themselves but also how they are used. To attain 'complete mastery' requires that you are familiar with the terms and also how they go together in a sentence. Thus, there is a semantic and a syntactic element to learn. Second, this acquisition is not easy, but because of this, it is impressive. We can see this in the extract when we're told that the co-workers were 'awed'. The ability to provoke awe in an audience also points to the connection between jargon and power. People in positions of power often speak (and write) in a way that others find difficult to understand. At the same time, being able to use jargon is part of establishing and projecting power. The third issue, and one of the keys to the humour, is the inversion of the normal relationship between language and power. If powerful people speak in complex ways, perhaps speaking in complex ways also makes one powerful? Certainly our manager, Mr Atkins, has some real power over his colleagues. He is, after all, a manager. We've also noted that he impresses his audience. At the same time this language is described as 'drivel' and 'meaningless corporate doublespeak'. The clear message of the article is that while he has mastered the language style, he isn't using it effectively. The Onion isn't using a jargon word if you need to look it up. But can this be taken as an example of the danger? Of course, this paper professionals is not serious, but on the other hand, usage of jargon makes the message more difficult to understand. A typical of particular example of this is the ads for the ist's newspaper, The Onion (www.theonion.com), with the name 'Jobzilla-

The ads can be seen as humorous. This is a mutter of the issue of the use of meaningless corporate doublespeak, which seems to be the case. In this article, they help make the issue of the use of jargon more apparent. The more you can understand an argument, the more useful it is. The following questions make decisions a little easier.

1. Taking the questions seriously into non-
2. Make a list of the issues surrounding meaning.
   Consider the issue of the other four.
3. Make a list of the issues surrounding meaning.
   Include your own thoughts (by your own words).
4. Look at the article and note the points heard be your own words.
   a. www.theonion.com
   b. www.jobzilla.com
There is a certain amount of jargon that we need to learn, define and detect it with skill. Language has different kinds of jargon. Here we examine a recent 'news' story that is typical of particular professions. In the following example, the use of jargon is typical of particular professions. The journalist's newspaper, The Daily Mail, has 'christened' the 'bloated public sector' with the name 'Jobzilla'.

The ads can be identified by their ludicrously politically correct language. This is a mutant tongue, ungrammatical, littered with pointless and often meaningless words, where the simplest concepts are rendered impenetrable by the use of pseudo-scientific terms, corporatese and ugly management speak borrowed from the private sector.

These people talk about 'performance targets', 'service delivery' and 'sustainability'. They are obsessed with something called 'strategy'. In Jobzilla-land people are not helped, they are 'empowered'.

(Hanlon 2009)

We will return to the issue of political correctness later. Here, notice that some people seem to be allowed to make up new words while others are not. The newspaper seems to think that 'Jobzilla' is an important, or at least worthwhile, contribution to the language, while other new usages are not. It seems to be the case that new words and expressions are acceptable if they help make things clearer, or if they have a point, but not if they make messages more difficult to understand. That seems like a very reasonable argument. However, the question we need to think about is who gets to make decisions about which words are clear and thus acceptable.

Activity 1.1

1. Taking the extract from The Onion above, rewrite the last paragraph into non-jargon.
2. Make a list of jargon from the field that you are studying. Discuss the meaning of the term with a colleague. Do you agree on the meaning? Consider whether you think these terms are useful, or whether another term could do its work.
3. Make a list of words that you don't like because they are jargon. Include words and expressions that you have been told not to use (by your parents or teachers).
4. Look at the following collections of jargon and select twelve you've heard before. Provide a translation
   a. www.theoffice-life.com
   b. www.jargon-database.com
For the moment, we simply need to realise that people do have strong feelings about language generally, and their own language in particular. The words and practices that people find annoying or incorrect, and the reasons given for this, can tell us a great deal about our relationship with language and our ideas about communication. In the next section we'll look at how language will be approached in this book. When we have a way of examining language, we can better explore and understand what people say about language generally.

1.3 WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

Answering the question 'what is language?' can only be done once we know why we're asking it. In this book, we'll be looking at the way different groups of people are represented by and use language. To be able to do this, we need to understand what it means to say that language is a system.

1.3.1 Language: a system

If we look closely at language, we find that it is in fact a rule-governed system. This may make it sound like language is controlled by rules that prevent it from changing. However, this is not what we mean by system; we need to be clear about what kind of rules we're talking about. Language is not governed by rules in the same way that society is governed by laws. Linguists don't decide on rules and then try to make everyone follow them. Rather, linguists look at language to discover the rules that make it work — that is, the things that make communication possible. As language changes, new rules are described.

The rules in language tell speakers how to combine different parts of that language, as the comic in Figure 1.1 demonstrates. We all know that 'ngux' is not a word that is possible in English. The rules of English sounds (phonemes) tell us that we can't have 'ng' at the start of a word. In the same way, if I tell you that I recently bought a 'mert', you would be able to form the question, 'What is a mert?' Even though you don't know what a 'mert' is, if I tell you I bought one this lets you know 'mert' is a noun. You would already know how to make its plural ('merts') and how to ask what it is. This is because of the rules in English about where certain kinds of words go in sentences (syntax) and how to form plurals (morphology). Theoretical linguists work at discovering these rules for particular languages. This work can then be used to say something about language in general — that is, linguists can come to conclusions about all languages, grouping them according to certain structural criteria and even make arguments about how the language faculty itself works.

Other systems of communication have rules too. The light that tells us when it's safe to cross the road is green. Around the world, there are differences in the shape of the light. Sometimes a word is given, such as 'WALK', sometimes a picture that tells you whatever shape it is. Whether or not the light changes from place to place indicates that you have different rules in the way it works. However, there is one thing we need to watch out for: that is, to talk about whether or not the light is working, not of itself providing rules. The lights were illuminating the road, but if the lights are very limited, we can't talk about 'mermert' to us something very important. The creativity is possible.

1.3.2 Rules in language

We won't be considering these rules in this book. But it is worth noting that the type of linguistic analysis developed by linguist Noam Chomsky involving knowledge of the grammar of a language in order to produce that language is, whether or not you know which words go where, is possible (morphology), which means that you can use those words, even if you don't know the grammar of that language. In other words, of rules, language generally. The point is, what might be
people do have strong opinions about language in particular. The reason why is that language is correct, and the reasons for this relationship with language are many. In this section we'll look at how to examine the way people say about language.

As a first step, we can do a fundamental observation: language is a system. In fact a rule-governed system (controlled by rules that we don’t yet have mean by system; we will discuss this later). Language is governed by laws. We mean by law everyone follow them. Languages have rules that make it work - everyone is governed by a system. As language changes, we combine different parts of ourselves in different ways. We all know that the rules of English sounds are different for different parts of a word. In the same way, we would be able to form the word ‘truck’ if we know what a ‘merit’ is, if I don’t want you. You would already know many words and ask what it was. This is not just the way in which words go in grammar (morphology). Theoretical linguistics and their study of languages. This work generalizes to language in general — that is, the study of natural languages, grouping them into families. We don’t argue about how to make sense of this.

For example, the light that tells us to stop. If we’re outside, there are different lights that are given, such as ‘WALK’.
Competence explains well-formed sentences, and also how we can generate new meanings. The rules that speakers know (though not always consciously) allow new, acceptable and, most importantly, meaningful utterances. The rules allow speakers to generate new utterances but they exist at an abstract level. On the other hand, performance refers to the way individual speakers actually use language. Performance does not always faithfully reflect the rules described by competence. As such, performance is not of great interest to theoretical linguists. Dell Hymes argues that factors of performance 'are generally seen as things that limit the realization of grammatical possibilities' and thus actually are an impediment to the linguist interested in the grammar (1997: 13).

It is possible, however, for a well-formed utterance to be inappropriate because of rules of social relationships, taboo or other cultural convention. The speaker may have grammatical competence, but lack communicative competence. This has also been called 'sociolinguistic competence' or 'pragmatic competence'. Knowing how to greet someone or what constitutes appropriate 'small talk' are examples of this competence. Communicative competence allows speakers to avoid inappropriate utterances. Sociolinguistics looks at the variation that we find among speakers in their linguistic performance in order to understand the different forms of communicative competence that are required by speakers of different kinds. The variation that sociolinguists examine is systematic – that is, it appears to be amenable to description in terms of rules. Given that the variation isn't random, it is possible that it means something, that is, that the variation is motivated by a reason or factor – the standards and rules of communicative competence that apply in the particular speech community.

We can define sociolinguistics in contrast to theoretical linguistics, but there are two problems. First, we need to be more descriptive about what sociolinguistics is; second, to suggest such a contrast would also suggest that they are mutually exclusive endeavours. This is not to say that theoretical linguistics is not important; nor is it to suggest that there is no link between theoretical and sociolinguistics. It is rather the questions that these disciplines try to answer are different. Because of this, different tools, approaches and even definitions of 'language' occur.

William Labov, one of the founders of sociolinguistics, noted in 1972 that he had 'resisted the term sociolinguistics for many years, since it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social' (1997 [1972]: 23). In the same text he writes:

There is a growing realization that the basis of intersubjective knowledge in linguistics must be found in speech – language as it is used in everyday life by members of the social order, that vehicle of communication in which they argue with their wives, joke with their friends, and deceive their enemies.

(1997: 23)

This seems to me to be the key distinction between sociolinguistics in all kinds of people paying attention. The last section is about other aspects that speakers do not always exercise or resist.

### 1.3.3 The potential of society

We've already seen that society is used to create. It's not only that objects are made and actions are performed; deciding this, we find ourselves in whatever language we find a new way. The language we use is not used to be how we think, but to how at other times 'sick' was clearly used to mean a low temperature or to change the meaning of 'sick' as meaning that something is not as meaning that something is.

It's also possible to change, as an example, by changing the nature, as the following story suggests:

SIR – I was unhappy about the new obviously created market recently was now being.

Peter Cowley

It has become normal to call this the new obviously created market recently. This new use whereby the people who unhappy about them. Indeed, the verb has been continuing to the Oxford Dictionary, that suggested in words or 'the conditions of the economy': Never again, the word is! (noun, verb, adjective) will catch on and a new obviously created market will be the new obvious obviously created market is always right about.
This seems to me to be an appropriate account of what we understand as sociolinguistics in this book. The way that language is used in normal life, by all kinds of people, to accomplish all manner of goals is the subject of our attention. The last, the doing of action, reminds us perhaps more than the other aspects that language lets us do things and, as such, can be used to exercise or resist power.

1.3.3 The potential to create new meanings

We've already seen in the discussion of jargon that new meanings can be created. It's not only possible to create new words, it is essential. When new objects are made, for example, we need to know what to call them. In deciding this, we follow the rules about how to construct an acceptable word in whatever language we're using. It's also possible to use existing words in a new way. The language that teenagers use is often like this. While 'cool' used to be how one expressed admiration for or pleasure about something, at other times 'sick' has been used in this way. Is this a misuse of language? Clearly 'sick' can still be used to mean 'unwell' as 'cool' could always be used to mean a low temperature, but using these terms in a specific sentence can change the meaning completely. What sick shoes' will never be understood as meaning that someone's footwear is unwell.

It's also possible to create new words by changing their function; for example, by changing them from a noun to a verb or from a verb to an adjective, as the following letter to the editor illustrates:

SIR – I was unable to find a product in its usual place in our local supermarket recently, but a small notice redirected me to the shelf where it was now being 'marketized'.

Peter Carney, Northwood, Middlesex (Daily Telegraph London 21 November 2007: 25)

It has become normal to use 'market' as a verb; here, the verb has been further transformed into an adjective. This letter writer may be objecting to this new use when the word 'sold' would serve the purpose. He may also be unhappy about the whole process of 'marketizing' – that is, a specific way of promoting an item by drawing it to consumers' attention in a specific way. Indeed, the verb here is derived from a noun, 'marketization', which according to the Oxford English Dictionary refers to a very different process than that suggested in this letter: 'the exposure of an industry or service to market forces' or 'the conversion of a national economy from a planned to a market economy'. Nevertheless, new uses for old words and changes to the kind of word it is (noun, verb, etc) are far from unusual. Words that are altogether new obviously occur, but it is incredibly difficult to predict which new words will catch on and which won't. Each year the American Dialect Society nominates its 'words of the year'. However, even these experts are not always right about which new words remain in use and which don't.
What's fascinating about new words is that most of the time we understand what they mean without having to look them up in a dictionary (where we probably wouldn't find them because they're so new). Consider the following: 'There was so much tannoyance on the train, I couldn't sleep'. This fusion of Tannoy (a public address system in the UK) and annoyance usefully encodes the meaning:

Endless, semi-coherent burbling about beverages, station stops and remembering to take your legs with you – delivered through speakers that make everything sound like a bee in a jar – on trains. Scientists predict that by 2014 these announcements will take longer than the average railway journey.

(Wyse 2008)

Indeed, 'Tannoy' itself is an example of meaning change, as it is actually a trademark of a particular public address product that is now used in the UK as a generic term.

You probably use words that other people don't like or understand. Write down a definition of one and describe the ways in which it can be used. If it's an adjective, for example, can it be used about people or just things? Can it be used about all things or just a subset (such as clothes)? To find examples, think of informal terms that you use with your friends.

You can find examples of completely new words at www.unwords.com.

### 1.3.4 Language: multiple functions

We've already seen that language can have different functions. It can be used to refer to things, to demonstrate status and power and to amuse. A single utterance can do more than one thing. Roman Jakobson argues that 'Language must be investigated in all the variety of its functions' (2000: 335). It's helpful to look at Jakobson's functions in a bit more detail as it helps to have a framework to think about the different functions. Without this, it can be difficult to think about the various ways that we use language.

He starts by describing the features one needs to take into consideration. On one side of his schema we find the speaker, the person who is speaking. On the other, we find the addressee, or the person being spoken to. To fully account for the message from the addresser to the addressee we need to examine four things. For the message to be communicated, there has to be a medium of communication, which may be verbal, written or even visual (contact). This will have some influence on how the message, the content, is encoded; whether through words or hand signals for example.

Whatever code is chosen, the addresser and addressee have to take into account what they receive in a context depending on their relationship that frames the situation. For example, the relationship of the addresser and addressee might be one of authoritarian and subordinate. The addresser will probably want to be seen as polite, while the addressee might want to be seen as respectful.

**ADDRESSER**

'Each of these six functions... (Jakobson 2000: 335)' follows a specific format. The first function is in the position of the speaker's attitude, for example, the referential function of communication, or the denotative function of objects and conventions. The second function allows us to observe a specific level (rather than the pepper, salt, or custard level of language. This function has a specific effect on the meaning, whether it be an insult, or an attempt at amuse.

**EMOTIVE**

While we often start to find out what information is in a message, this to account for the implicit things. For example, 'it's cold in here', you would think about the level of air conditioning that there is. It would be reasonable to then surmise that it's a message to correct the stereotypes about British weather. In such a situation, it would be reasonable to make a conversation about the weather (depending on how much to communicate with the addresser, which may be the temperature is), but this is also socially acceptable, it is polite to make 'small talk'.

It's important at this stage to consider the connotation. Connotation is something that is visible or encodes meaning, which can be implied or stated. While denotative...
1.3.5 Language diversity

As mentioned above, how we decide what a language is really depends on the kind of question we’re asking. Even though English is widely used around the world, there are many different varieties. We look at some of the variation here as it highlights issues central to the study of language. Variation in language is a challenge, as it prompts us to think about how we can classify different varieties in relation to each other.

How we choose to classify these varieties can vary according to linguistic and political considerations. We might think that a language variety can be identified geographically, such that everyone in England speaks English, while everyone in the United States speaks American English. But, if you listen to someone from Liverpool in England and then to someone from Brighton, it’s clear that there are some important differences.

There are differences in the way in which people pronounce words, which varies systematically and very often on the basis of geography. Such differences can be dealt with in terms of accent. There are other differences between speakers of English in relation to the words they use for particular things (vocabulary) and even the order in which words are placed (syntax); we can talk about this in terms of dialect. Especially when coupled with an unfamiliar accent, this can make understanding different dialects of English rather difficult. Because today many people move to other places, it’s easy to find great variation in the same city. Language varies among people for reasons other than where they’re from. In the following chapters we’ll be looking at variables such as class, ethnicity, gender and age that may influence the way in which language is used differently.

The political dimension of how to describe or delimit a language should not be overlooked. To say, for example, that Australian English is not a variety in its own right but merely a dialect of British English, immediately places Australian English in a subordinate position to British English. Remember that language is closely connected to identity. Similarly, nationality is an important marker of identity; thus language and national borders are sometimes spoken of as if they conform (see Chapter 6). Different governments as well as people have distinct views on such issues. Ferdinand de Saussure comments, ‘The internal politics of states is no less important to the life of languages; certain governments (like the Swiss) allow the coexistence of several idioms; others (like the French) strive for linguistic unity’ (1966: 20).

Because language and identity are closely linked, people have strong views about their language, about what it should be called and how it should be used. We saw some evidence of this when dealing with jargon above. The terms of discussion around accent and dialect are very often those of beauty and correctness and thus related to something we’re already discussed: prescriptivism. But if there are prescriptive rules, should these vary according to variety (see Chapter 10)? In the following, one letter writer connects Singaporean English (Singlish) to the particular culture of the country.
Singlish encapsulates culture

Let us abandon the belief that Singlish is bad English. To me, it is a unique vocabulary that encapsulates decades of local culture. One could throw in the occasional 'lah' and jargon like 'bo chap' ('can't be bothered' in Hokkein) to retain a wonderfully local flavour and still keep to grammatical English.

Singaporeans using Singlish are no different from Britons using unfamiliar local slang. ('Good English – whose line is it anyway? The Straits Times Singapore, 1 September 2008)

In the same letters page there were many other contributions that took different stances on the issue. One writer despairs of the standard of British English, 'When my British housemate's sister from Manchester came to visit last month, I was appalled by her poor grammar and thick accent. She had to repeat herself many times to be understood' (ibid). Both writers are preoccupied with what is grammatically correct. The first writer appears to accept a wider definition of what counts as 'grammatical', while the second takes as the measure some form of standard British English, one that is not even uniformly spoken in Great Britain.

How decisions about what is 'correct' and grammatical in language are taken and what languages should be called is very often related to power. There are different kinds of power that we might want to consider and which will be relevant in later chapters.

1.4 POWER

Finding a full definition of power with respect to language is not straightforward. The many functions of language mean that there are different ways in which power can be exercised. While there are some examples of power being used to change language directly, the relationship is generally more subtle.

The former president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, exercised his political power directly over language. In 2002 'He decreed that the month of January should be named after him and April after his mother' (Parfitt 2006). He also named a town after himself (or more correctly the title he insisted upon – Turkmenbashi – 'leader of all Turkmen') and decreed that 'bread' also be called by his mother’s name (Paton Walsh 2006). This is an example of straightforward legal and political power being used to change language. Such action is generally only possible where there is absolute singular authority, as was the case with this dictator.

Influence over language, and influence over people through language, is far more commonly achieved in less obvious and direct ways. Of course there are situations where physical or institutional power has a direct influence on how language is understood. When a police officer asks you to stop your car, for example, the institutional power (and perhaps even their weapon) lends weight to the request: insisting that you stop is not an option. How the situation is contextualised in the Anglophone world ranges from the kind of personal authority that being given an order from a police officer has (and is not the same as someone saying 'it is very relevant in later chapters. You can think about the relationship between power and language in this context).
language is not straightforward.

There are different ways in which power is used. What

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(2008)

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often related to power. We

want to consider and which


There are two new ideas here. The first is ideology, and the second that of manufacturing consent, which we will come to presently. The general idea is

that language plus ideology can encourage us to do things, not because someone has commanded us at a particular point in time, but because we

have internalised certain values that mean we want to do certain things. This internalising of values takes place over longer stretches of time. Language

is crucial to the creation and maintenance of 'common-sense' ideology. But to understand how this works, we need to know what ideology means. You

can think about it as a way of structuring how language is used to communicate a more general message involving values and beliefs, in short, a world

view.

It is important to emphasize that I am not suggesting that power is just a matter of language. ... Power exists in various modalities, including

the concrete and unmistakable modality of physical force ... It is perhaps helpful to make a broad distinction between the exercise of power through coercion of various sorts including physical violence, and the exercise of power through the manufacture of consent to or at least acquiescence towards it. Power relations depend on both, though in varying proportions. Ideology is the prime means of manufacturing consent.

(2001:3)
1.4.1 Ideology

In everyday contexts, 'ideology' is something negative or, at the very least, marked. We think that only groups such as terrorists have an ideology. But as an ideology is simply a way of describing a set of beliefs and behaviours that are thought of as natural, everyone has an ideology. There are things we take for granted, values that we hold and ideas that we believe in that seem perfectly natural. It is this common sense, this natural and normal way of thinking and acting which we can talk about in terms of the dominant ideology, or hegemonic ideology. Ideology is a way of talking about a whole set of these ways of thinking and acting. Moreover, ideologies aren't just efficient ways of seeing and thinking: they have another purpose. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu writes:

Ideologies serve particular interests which they tend to present as universal interests, shared by the group as a whole.

(1991: 167)

Bourdieu's words remind us that every group has an ideology. Thus, 'ideology' is used in at least two ways as William J. Thomas Mitchell explains:

The orthodox view is that ideology is false consciousness, a system of symbolic representations that reflects an historical situation of domination by a particular class, and which serves to conceal the historical character and class bias of that system under guises of naturalness and universality. The other meaning of 'ideology' tends to identify it simply with the structure of values and interests that informs any representation of reality; this meaning leaves untouched the question of whether the representation is false or oppressive. In this formulation, there would be no such thing as a position outside ideology.

(1986: 4)

The critical linguists Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge define ideology as a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view' (1993: 6). Given that we all have a particular point of view, we all have ideologies. We tend to only talk about them with the term 'ideology' when we want to draw attention to their power or the particular interests they serve. To label another group's values as 'ideology' is common; to talk about one's own values in the same way is not common at all. However, thinking about our own 'taken for granted' values, as members of groups or as individuals, is an important task for critical thinking.

Ideology may seem a long way from jargon and 'incorrect' uses of language. But power, and especially symbolic power, is supported by ideologies. Looking at language closely allows us to map these ideologies. In the same way that we can deduce the structure of a language by looking at the way people use it, we can also map the structure and content of an ideology. In the following, we describe one such mapping, which generates a more general theory: the manufacture of consent.

1.4.2 The manufacture of consent

The notion of the fifth filter was developed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. While advertising is examined in this text, they also point out that the manufacture of consent is not just a function of advertising. It can be seen as a general process by which information is filtered. The filters they examine in their book, Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's The Manufacture of Consent (1993: 6), are:'In terms of a fifth filter, media are normative. They represent what is bad and that we must avoid. While the orthodox view is that ideology simply represents what reality is not covered at all; something which stories are intended to do (for example, editors often complaint, for example, that television news 'must be avoided'.)'In the manufacture of consent, ideology is a way of talking about group as a whole. It is a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view' (1993: 6). Given that we all have a particular point of view, we all have ideologies. We tend to only talk about them with the term 'ideology' when we want to draw attention to their power or the particular interests they serve. To label another group's values as 'ideology' is common; to talk about one's own values in the same way is not common at all. However, thinking about our own 'taken for granted' values, as members of groups or as individuals, is an important task for critical thinking.

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The mention of the American linguist, Noam Chomsky, in the middle of the paragraph is surprising.
They tend to present as normal.

(1991: 167)

Ideology. Thus, 'ideology'... 

According to Mitchell, it is 'consciousness, a system of symbolic representations, which conceals the historical and social processes of naturalness and normality' (1986: 4).

These define ideology 'as a viewpoint or a particular point of view' (1993: 45). All of us, we all have ideologies. We use the term 'ideology' when we want to identify the interests they serve. To label another's viewpoint as 'wrong' or 'incorrect' is to talk about one's own viewpoint. However, thinking about our beliefs and values, or as individuals, is an essential part of our development.

This is supported by ideology theory. In the study of language, by looking at the content of an ideology, we can deduce what values are. We do this by looking at the language used.

1.4.2 The manufacture of consent

The notion of the manufacture of consent originates in the work of Noam Chomsky. While Chomsky is well known as a theoretical linguist, he also examines media and political representations of events. In a seminal book, written with Edward Herman, an argument about how propaganda works is made. Focusing on the mass media, they point to a number of factors that influence what stories we read and hear and in what form we receive them. They identify five 'filters' that influence the representations finally produced. Media ownership is one of these filters, along with the importance of advertising income. Where our news stories come from (from large news agencies, for example), how groups and individuals respond to stories, whether they complain, for example, are also filters. The fifth filter is that communism must be avoided at all costs. Since the end of the Cold War this looked like it was taking a detour. The new analogous filter for a while appeared to be terrorism. Whether this will persist is not clear. Indeed, at the time of writing, there is a distinct move to anti-socialist discourses in the USA in relation to some of President Obama's initiatives, suggesting the continued relevance of the fifth filter.

The manufacture of consent seeks to capture the effect of these five filters. The filters can be understood as structuring language at an ideological level. Though audiences are unaware of these filters when reading or watching the mass media, they are nevertheless important. These filters present what really happened in particular ways. Some events may not be covered at all; some may be given a great deal of importance. The way in which stories are told -- for example, who is to blame or what the real issues are -- is also influenced by these filters. Because we are only exposed to the filtered representations, over time audiences find the values of the mass media are normalised. For example, it is common sense that terrorists are bad and that we need to be protected from them. In effect, Chomsky and Herman argue that such 'common sense' is constructed by the sustained representations of the mass media and that these representations are a product of the five filters they identify.

Thinking about ownership of newspapers and television channels and the significance of advertising revenue to their success, it is tempting to think that this 'manufacturing' is consciously planned by powerful people behind the scenes. This may well happen. However, the choice of the term 'filters' points to the automatic processes that occur without conscious intervention being necessary on the part of the producers. Newspaper editors do not need to be told to print or to withhold particular stories that may make large advertisers unhappy. In terms of running the newspaper as a business, which it obviously is, it's common sense to keep advertisers content. This is how ideology works; the ideology acts like a filter to remove anything that doesn't fit its values. By looking at what is left behind, we can deduce what these values are.
1.4.3 Ideology in action: advertising

Powerful words and slogans are common when companies want us to buy something. Advertisements are an excellent place to see the way in which language can have power as well as seeing certain ideologies at work. Further, the speaker in these advertisements is very often crucial to their persuasive effect.

You're probably familiar with the use of celebrities, film stars and models to advertise goods, especially cosmetics and hair care. They tell the audience how scientifically advanced the product is, often with animated sections to make this visually meaningful. A television advertisement from 1998 for a hairspray featured Jennifer Anniston, the American actor. She tells us that she is 'being held by an invisible force' as she floats on air. This 'invisible force' is also active in her hairspray. But she leaves it to the voice over to explain how it works: 'Here comes the science' she says. Just as she trusts her hair (and visually her body) to an invisible force, we are invited to trust the force of celebrity endorsement of a product.

The use of celebrities is not accidental. Audiences have a positive emotional connection with these famous people: they want to be successful and beautiful too. So when a supermodel says that she uses a particular face cream, audiences are inclined to believe her and the words she uses. The power here, to persuade people to buy the face cream too, is partly the words spoken and partly also who is speaking them. To connect this to ideology, we can say that for women to look a certain way – to have long shiny hair, and even tanned skin – is considered to be attractive in many Western countries. This is, for us, common sense. We are consistently told that these physical attributes are desirable. But this is not a 'natural' state of affairs; it is a set of naturalised beliefs – an ideology. This particular ideology serves the interests of those companies that manufacture products to make hair shiny and skin tanned.

It's not uncommon for advertising campaigns to be global in their reach. Advertisements may be translated or made to suit local audiences in other ways, but the basic message is constant. This suggests that some ideologies have a wide appeal. A recent (2009) campaign from Gillette uses the idea of 'the moment' when men need to have courage. The advertisement mixes celebrities and 'normal' men, showing them in various situations of stress: about to shoot a basketball, wanting to ask a woman out, and so on. At this crucial moment, the voice tells us, it's important to be confident. 'What's gonna win?' the male voice asks, before the men succeed in their various endeavours. 'Here's to confidence' it answers, before commanding viewers to 'Look your best. Feel your best. Be your Best'. As we should already know, Gillette is 'the best a man can get'.

The link between looking, feeling and being is implied but nevertheless important. This message is trying to persuade us, through simple imperative statements, that when you look good you will feel good and ultimately be good. There is an implied causality here and the company's products are at the start of this causal chain. While the voice acknowledges at the start of the advertisement that the men included are only 'good', the shift in the ideology is clear. This shift is an endorsement of the ‘celebrity man'.

Choose an advertisement you have seen recently and consider whose audience it is addressing. How does it persuade you? What ideologies does it use to persuade you?

You might think that we have focused on celebrity endorsement of goods, but it is not an easy field to compete in: we've already seen that other forms of persuasion, especially advertising announcements, are more common than this, with advertisements for a programme (infomercial) that seems to sell something rather than a product. Such products are known as 'ambassadors'.

1.4.4 Interpretation

The way we use language to translate and interpret the world is complex and ideology. While language is used in a particular way it positions the speaker and listener. That language has a function and that function brings with it implications in terms of who is speaking to whom and the audience being addressed. Advertisements are used to address specific audiences: that is, the police officer asking us to feel safer when we wear a police badge. The person is positioned in a particular way in the text, which is called pellation. Think about a recent advertisement or an informative example of media language. How is this language used by (or hailed by) the audience? What ideologies are not necessarily present in the advertisements but are less perpetuated in advertisements?
of the advertisement that ‘we all have confidence’ and ‘we all have doubt’, the men included in this ‘we’ are nevertheless encouraged to have confidence. This shift from doubt to confidence mirrors the shift from real man to celebrity man.

Choose an advertisement, either from television, radio, print media or the internet. Watch it or read it a few times. How is it trying to persuade the audience? What values is it endorsing? What arguments is it actually making?

You might think that advertisements are generally all the same. Here, we have focused on the kind that uses celebrities. But as Crystal argues, ‘it is not an easy field to make generalizations about. Its boundaries blur with other forms of persuasive language such as speeches, sermons, and public announcements’ (2005: ch 72). The boundaries may be even more blurred than this, with advertising often looking like a news story or a ‘real’ television programme (infomercials). Someone might even start a conversation with you that seems quite normal, but is really just a way of promoting a particular product. Such placement of products in everyday contexts is done by ‘brand ambassadors’.

1.4.4 Interpellation

The way we use language in less commercial contexts also links to power and ideology. We’ll look at this in some detail in later chapters. The way that language is used in relation to addressees can be thought of in terms of the way it positions that audience, the way they are addressed. Above, we noted that language has a number of different functions, one of these being the conative function – that is, oriented towards the addressee. This can have implications in terms of relations of power. Louis Althusser theorises this as the audience being ‘hailed’ in a particular way. This means that language is used to address people and thus position them in some way. We can take a police officer as an example. When an officer speaks to a person, that person is positioned in relation to the officer as an individual and also positioned in a relationship of power. Althusser calls this positioning interpellation. Thinking of an actual speech event, however, is merely an illustrative example of what Althusser is talking about. We can also be positioned by (or hailed by) an ideology. More specifically, Althusser describes the Ideological State Apparatus (or ISA), which comprises institutions which are not necessarily part of the state (that is, the government), but that nevertheless perpetuate the same ideological values. The church used to be an
important part of this ISA, and in some places still is. Perhaps the most powerful components now are educational institutions and the media.

For Althusser, ISA communicates and confirms the dominant ideology, most notably in relation to political and economic structure. Globally, we can argue that the dominant mode of political organisation is democracy and that of economic structure is a form of capitalism. Clearly there are alternatives to these; however, in most parts of the world these are the common-sense, taken-for-granted values that are sanctioned by education, the media and the government. We are hailed by the dominant ideology and asked to respond to it. The very fact of being hailed puts us in a particular position. To understand this position, and perhaps to challenge it, we need to look closely at the messages that hail us.

1.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I’ve introduced some of the themes and issues that are taken up throughout this book. Understanding language as a system, with rules, is important in exploring the kinds of variation that we find. Studying language allows us to understand the way in which people exercise power and, in turn, ways in which this can be resisted. The rules that we’re interested in are those which explain what people actually do, rather than being rules about what people should do. While some people are uncomfortable about language change, it is inescapable and unstoppable. It is also exciting, as such change is possible exactly because of the creative possibilities that language provides. This is an important language function, but there are others. We started thinking about the relationship between language, ideology and power. This relationship is one that we take up again in the following chapters as it can take some time for this complex interaction to make sense. Studying language allows us to think critically about power and helps us see that what we might think of as ‘common sense’ is nevertheless, ideological. In the next chapter, we consider the tools we need to think about some of these questions in more depth.

FURTHER READING


NOTES

1 Semantics is the study of meaning.
2 ‘Marketization’ is a term used by Catherine Soar.
3 www.americas.mtu.edu/.
4 You can listen to accents and dialects at Accents-and-dialects.

FURTHER EXPLORE

http://www.singlish.com/
Dictionary of American English
Macquarie Dictionary
‘Sounds Familiar? A Language Library’ www.bl.uk
The Speech Accent Lab www.gmu.edu/
CHAPTER 2

Language thought and representation

Annabelle Mooney

2.1 Introduction

To be able to look in detail at the functions of language discussed in the last chapter, we need to have terms for talking about the way language works. In this chapter, we explore Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of signs which will provide a way of discussing how meaning is constructed at the level of the word, how this can change, how words fit together into larger structures (sentences) and what happens when we make choices in sentences. Thinking about words as signs may take a while to get used to; likewise, the use of ‘sign’ in the technical sense introduced in this chapter can also take some time to feel familiar. These models of meaning matter, though, as they help articulate the way in which small changes can have significant consequences for the meaning communicated. Only when we have this model is it possible to discuss what ‘politically correct’ means and how such language functions. We will also revisit jargon by exploring the concept of Newspeak, a way of thinking about language deriving from Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.

2.2 Language as a system of representation

Language is one way of representing reality. There are other signs that we can use to do this: I could take a photograph of something, paint a picture or even write a piece of prose. ‘Signs’ have two parts to them: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the part of the signal which invokes the concept, because of the connection between the signifier and the signified. Without the signifier there would be nothing to invoke the concept. Words in language are made up of two things: a sound pattern and a concept. The sound pattern makes a distinction between different concepts and the concept it invokes makes a distinction between different sound patterns (1916:113). A signifier needs both a sound pattern and a concept and is no such signifier is a word; it is not a signifier to just say ‘the word’.

Figure 2.1 Signs and signified

The connection between the signifier and the signified is not arbitrary. It is the product of Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of signs which breaks down the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Words can mean different things when the signal (signifier) is constant, and when the signifier is the same, different signs can mean different things. The signifier and the signified are part of the system of language and language change constantly (Saussure 1986).
or even write a piece of music. In the definition that we're working with, all 'signs' have two parts: a concept and something that is connected to the concept. The pedestrian signals that tell you when to walk or not are signs because of the connection between the red light and the concept of stopping. Without these two parts, the red light would just be a red light. When we know that red means 'stop', the red light becomes a sign.

Words in language, therefore, are signs. For de Saussure, a sign is made up of two things: a signifier and signified. His definition of the sign makes a distinction between the sound we hear (the signifier) and the concept it invokes together form a sign. It is important to note 'A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern' (1966: 66). These cannot be separated in the sign; to try and do so would be like trying to cut only one side of a piece of paper (1966: 13). A signifier needs at least one signified for there to be a sign. If there is no such signified, the alleged signifier is merely a sound that could be a word; it is not a sign by de Saussure's definition.

Language discussed in the last way language works. In theory of signs which will be discussed at the level of the larger structures in sentences. Thinking to: likewise, the use of a word can also take some other, though, as they help significant consequences of this model is it possible to think language functions.

Figure 2.1 Signs are made of signifiers and signifieds

The connection between words and their meaning is accidental: there is no reason why bread should be called 'bread'. Indeed, in the previous chapter (section 1.4) we saw how one dictator renamed bread after his mother. The arbitrary connection between words and their meaning was one of Ferdinand de Saussure's great insights. Saying that the connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary doesn't suggest that words can mean whatever we like. 'The term [arbitrary] simply implies that the signal [signifier] is unmotivated: that is to say arbitrary in relation to its
signification [signified], with which it has no natural connexion in relation' (de Saussure 1966: 69). You might be thinking that signifiers do have a natural connection with their signifieds; for example, in the case of onomatopoeic words or those we use for the sounds animals make. However, while a bee in English will 'buzz', in Japanese it makes the sound 'boon boon'. This shows that there is no straightforward connection between concepts and sounds. Even the sounds of the natural world that we might assume are heard in the same way by everybody are represented differently by different languages. At best, such examples of animal noises and the like are marginal cases and depend on conventional associations (especially when written) or the speaker's imitative ability (in speech).

There is more to de Saussure's work than his work on signs. He is also usually credited with being the founder of structuralism, which had great influence on linguistics, literary criticism and the social sciences. We'll look at structuralism when we consider signs later in the chapter. We've already established that language is a system (see section 1.3.1); systems have rules and these rules structure the language. The system of language allows us to talk about and represent the world around us. But just as the relationship between word and meaning is arbitrary, so too is the way in which language divides up the world.

### 2.2.1 Different kinds of language

De Saussure distinguishes three kinds of language. Recall in the previous chapter the difficulties of knowing exactly what we mean when we talk about 'language'. The three aspects de Saussure details help with some of these difficulties. The first of these is 'langue' which has been translated as 'human speech' including its psychological and physical aspects, belonging both to the individual and to societies. It is the most general category and contains the following two, which will be our focus here. These two parts of langue are 'langue' and 'parole'. You can think of langue as competence and parole as performance (both in Chomsky's terms). The former is the overarching system, the latter being individual instances of language. While they are treated as separate by de Saussure, they are also closely linked.

Langue is the system that makes parole possible. In so far as langue makes speech possible, it has a social element. As we'll see when we look more at definitions of signs, the social and conventional agreement on how they are constructed is crucial. You can think of langue as the rules of the game, the entire system. A loose analogy would be the rules of chess. When you play chess, you don't play the rules; you play by the rules. The rules tell you what is an acceptable move to make and what isn't. You can also think of it in terms of performance and script. De Saussure provides a musical metaphor, comparing langue to a symphony; how good it is as a composition is not related to how a particular orchestra may perform it (1966: 18).

The point is that while individuals draw on langue every time they use language, people don't have direct access to langue. Langue is 'not complete in any speaker; it becomes manifest through the use of parole' (1966: 12). We can only 'hear' langue by listening to the language of others and through our interaction with them. Language divides up the world, all actual Acts and Acts are acts of parole. While as speakers of a language we contribute to the langue system (accounted for by Saussure's rules), we have to perform parole acts. While as speakers of a language we haven't been done; the other speaker can be pretty sure that we speak the language. For example, The surface form of 'co' is not all that it is said to be in my new charters a system of European languages (representing clouds of paradigms, etc.). The langue is the system we all operate from, and parole is the act.

It is the relationship between langue and parole that is changing is to leg it is commonplace. It is not uncommon. It is the relationship between langue and parole that is changing. The three aspects of language are the result of acts of parole drawn from langue. The latter is the result of individuals using langue. One is not conceived as being separate from the other.' The terns langue and parole refer to different aspects of language use and development.

While this is all well and good, what do we actually do? How do we actually speak? We normally most common way is to look at the language of the act. We have a number of questions when we try to talk about language. We don't have direct access to langue. The only way we can get at langue is through parole, mapping what we say and map what the other person says.

The second part of this chapter is primarily interested in the role of at least one of the language means, language. Language is not only surprising. This is what allows us to describe and...
1.3.1); systems have rules. Systems are marginal cases and can be pretty extreme when written) or the system of language, which has been translated as 'langue'. This shows us that between concepts and sounds, words and sounds, that what we assume are heard in the world, all actual utterances, are parole. As speakers, we perform parole acts. While as speakers of a language we rely on shared understanding (accounted for by langue), as individuals we can do things in language that haven't been done before. You can construct a sentence that is so odd that you can be pretty confident that no one else has ever said or written it. For example, 'The surly clouds gathered their amusing faces and spat furiously on my new chartreuse coloured coat.' While this is a slightly poetic example (representing clouds as people, with faces and moods) because of langue, the system we all share, you should be able to understand this original parole act.

It is the relationship between langue and parole that is important. The system and rules of langue, unlike chess, can be changed. One way of changing is to legislate, like the dictator in Turkmenistan did. This is very uncommon. It is more usual for change to be slow and to involve many people. Individuals start using a new word, or an existing word in a new way (this is all parole), and other language users understand and adopt this (using it in their utterances). When this new linguistic behaviour is well enough established, we can say that it has become part of langue – that is, it has been accepted as a conventional rule of language, one that we all understand. The last part is important; the new behaviour has to become recognised and conventional, such that other people understand it. That is, acts of parole draw on and contribute to the abstract system of langue. As de Saussure puts it 'language has an individual aspect and a social aspect. One is not conceivable without the other' (1966: 8). The distinction between langue and parole, however, allows us to think through their differences, while understanding that they are linked. It allows us to understand how language use can be individual and original and yet still be communicative.

While this is only a model, it is a useful one as it helps us understand how language works and how it changes. It is the level of parole that we are normally most concerned with in this book, at least as a starting point. There are a number of reasons for this. The first, and most important, is that we don't have direct access to langue. While it would be very convenient if it were the case, langue is not a big book somewhere with all the rules written down. The only access that we have to the rules of langue is through the particular uses of language – that is, parole. From this evidence, we can try and map what the rules are.

The second reason we focus on parole is that as sociolinguists we're primarily interested in how people use language. The creative aspect of language means that speakers will always do things that are different, new and surprising. The concept of langue and its relationship with parole allows us to describe and account for this.

In any speaker; it exists perfectly only within a collectivity' (de Saussure 1966: 12). We can only talk about langue sensibly if we have a community of speakers. You can't have a language all by yourself. This is why there is a social aspect to langue.

The analogy with chess breaks down when we move to the kind of language that we do actually speak – parole. Every instance of language in the world, all actual utterances, are parole. As speakers, we perform parole acts. While as speakers of a language we rely on shared understanding (accounted for by langue), as individuals we can do things in language that haven't been done before. You can construct a sentence that is so odd that you can be pretty confident that no one else has ever said or written it. For example, 'The surly clouds gathered their amusing faces and spat furiously on my new chartreuse coloured coat.' While this is a slightly poetic example (representing clouds as people, with faces and moods) because of langue, the system we all share, you should be able to understand this original parole act.

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Because instances of parole both draw on and contribute to langue, as individual speakers we have some power over what langue contains. Were we all to decide to call ‘bread’ ‘dice’, for example, eventually that would become part of langue. Yet, while many speakers might not make conscious decisions to change linguistic signs, change nevertheless occurs.

2.2.2 Signs and structure

We have described how a sign needs both a signifier and a signified to be a sign. But there is even more that the sign needs: it needs other signs. ‘Signs function, then, not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position’ (de Saussure 1966: 118). That is, the meaning of a linguistic sign depends on its relation to other signs. I find it useful to think of this relation in spatial terms, where the meaning of each sign is contained in a space. The space that signs occupy fits together, such that if a space is occupied by one sign, then that same space can’t be occupied by another. If we take some signs that are related, that are in the same semantic field, it’s possible to be clearer about this.

walk, march, stagger, amble, run, jog, dash, sprint

All these linguistic signs say something about moving on one’s feet. We might group the first four together, as we can say that they’re all kinds of walking. In the same way, we might group the other four together as they’re all kinds of running. In semantics, we could look at the relationship between these words. We could argue that ‘walk’ and ‘run’ are more general than the others, in that marching, staggering and ambling can all be thought of as kinds of walking. We might want to represent this relationship as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walk</th>
<th>Run</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>march</td>
<td>dash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stagger</td>
<td>jog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amble</td>
<td>sprint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In any case, while ‘ambling’ is a kind of walking, it is slower than a ‘walk’. ‘Staggering’ is also a kind of ‘walking’, but one less orderly and even than a ‘walk’. What ‘march’, ‘stagger’ and ‘amble’ mean can be understood in relation to what they do not mean. The space that ‘stagger’ occupies is defined by the space that ‘march’ and ‘amble’ occupy. Given this metaphor of space, we can say that ‘stagger’ means what it does because it does not mean ‘march’, ‘amble’, ‘run’ or ‘skip’. It also doesn’t mean ‘breakfast’, ‘butterfly’, ‘snore’, ‘kitten’ and so on, but I find it easier to think of the structure of the system of signs in relation to concepts that are more similar to the word I’m looking at. We can say that the space a sign occupies — that is, what it means — is delineated by the spaces all other signs leave behind: ‘In language ... whatever distinguishes one sign from the others constitutes it’ (de Saussure 1966: 121).
In terms of new signs, this means the whole system of signs, the space they occupy, will be reconfigured when a new sign is introduced. If we imagine that only 'run' and 'walk' are the signs available to describe someone moving in a rhythmic way, but not particularly fast, we would have to use the sign 'walk'. However, when we introduce 'march', some of the space that 'walk' occupied will be taken away by this new sign 'march'. That is, 'walk' will no longer be the best way to describe this rhythmic way of moving. This structured space is in the realm of langue. We can alter this space and the place of signs in it by what we do with language in the world, in parole.

The way in which we've been talking about langue makes it sound all encompassing and monolithic. We can, if it helps us in a particular task, talk about the langue of the whole English language. This would include parole from all the different varieties of English: British, American, Australian, Indian, Singaporean and so on. Depending on the kinds of question we're asking, this may make sense. But in thinking about how to use language in a particular context, it only really makes sense to include, for example, Indian English if that is available to those involved in a communicative event. In Indian English, 'wallah' is used to refer to a tradesperson or worker, usually of a particular kind that is specified as the first part of a compound. Thus, taxiwallah is a taxi driver. While in the abstract langue that encompasses all English, 'wallah' would jostle for semantic space with 'tradesperson' and other similar terms, in other parts of the English speaking world it may not be relevant as a sign at all. It would simply be a sound, as there would be no conventional linking of this significer (wallah) to a signified.

Thus when considering the relationship between various signs, we need to know which signs and relationships are relevant in the communicative context we're looking at. In an environment where people from the Indian subcontinent are subjected to discrimination, it is entirely possible that 'wallah' will become an insult! Indeed, insult terms, especially those linked to ethnicity and nationality, are notoriously diverse and difficult to negotiate for the newcomer to a speech community. We have also to remember that language changes. What were once 'neutral' linguistic signs are now highly insulting. For example, many people object to the use of the word 'niggardly' because of its aural similarity to another word. 'Niggardly' has a very different meaning, however, and is unrelated to ethnicity.

We can talk about these changes over time with the following terms: synchronic and diachronic. The first, synchronic, refers to a particular point in time. The second, diachronic, allows us to talk about how language changes over time. We need to appreciate both aspects to understand language, as language 'always implies both an established system and an evolution; at every moment it is an existing institution and a product of the past' (de Saussure 1966: 8). We'll see in later chapters that changes over time and comparing variation in language at a particular time are crucial if we're to understand how people are using language and what the significance of any use may be.
Think back to words that you no longer use but that you once did. What did they mean? Do they mean the same now? Why did you stop using them? What would you think of someone who used them now?

2.3 THE SAPIR–WHORF HYPOTHESIS

2.3.1 Linguistic diversity

Because of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, and because signs take their meaning from their relationship to other signs, there is no single way for languages to describe reality. We can call this linguistic diversity, and it is the first part of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis. The world can be described in any number of ways and languages differ in terms of the signs that comprise them. Sapir was an anthropological linguist and, as such, encountered the different ways in which languages represent the world.

The familiar myth that 'Eskimos' have hundreds of words for snow is relevant here as this myth is based on the idea of linguistic diversity. In 'The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax', Geoffrey Pullum traces the history of this myth and provides the necessary evidence to debunk it. Even if it were true, however, Pullum asks us to consider how interesting this would really be. 'Horsebreeders have various names for breeds, sizes and ages of horses; botanists have names for leaf shapes' (1991: 165). There does appear to be a fascination with multiple terms for the same thing in other languages, but if we look at the variation in a single language – for example, in specialist fields of English – we also find various names for some things and different ways of representing reality.

Think of an area of your life where there are a lot of terms to make fine distinctions. This will probably be in an area in which you have expert knowledge, and you might not have noticed the variety of terms. You might refer to all contemporary music as 'pop music' or you might have a variety of words to designate differences. Discuss this with your colleagues; do you all have the same set of terms for different domains?

Figure 2.2 Speed Blood
you once did. What did you stop using them now?

...nifier and signified, and the relationship to other signs, reality. We can call this the Whorf hypothesis. The languages differ in terms of linguistic diversity. In The races of the history of this world, even if it were true, it would really be. There does appear to be learning in other languages, for example, in special-
There are a number of other principles that help decide which noun class things belong to. Some of this is linked to Dyirbal mythology. The point here is twofold. First, the specification of noun class is compulsory; a well-formed Dyirbal utterance needs this information. Second, the Dyirbal language divides the world in a particular way. In the example given here, it allocates nouns to specific classes.

The value of exploring this linguistic diversity – the way in which languages divide the world differently – is that it reminds us that linguistic signs are neither natural nor stable. While striking examples can be found in other languages' division of reality, we need to remember that our own division of reality is worth consideration. In a sense, we need to treat our own language as a foreign language, and examine the relationships between signs. In doing so, we can come to an appreciation of the representation of reality that language performs.

### 2.3.3 Linguistic relativism and determinism

The second part of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis is somewhat more controversial as is the issue of what these scholars actually claimed the hypothesis meant. Because of this disagreement about what they meant, the hypothesis is variously labelled, depending on the strength of the arguments, as linguistic relativism or determinism. As the name suggests, this hypothesis argues that our language has a bearing on the way we think. The strong version of the hypothesis, linguistic determinism, is often called the prison house view of language – that is, the limits of language are the limits of the world. The implication is that if a linguistic sign is not available for a particular concept, that concept is quite unthinkable. But, as we've seen, language allows us to create new meanings, whether these are words for new objects or examples of jargon to keep bureaucrats comprehensible. If the strong version of linguistic determinism held, it would simply not be possible to do this. As a result, linguistic determinism is not a widely held view.

The question then becomes: does language influence thought and behaviour in any way at all? Benjamin Whorf, who was an amateur linguist and fire inspector, argued that there was some connection between them. In his work, he noticed that people behave according to the ways things are labelled rather than in terms of what they really are. The best-known example from his work as a fire inspector is the way in which individuals threw cigarette butts into oil drums labelled 'empty'. Even though 'empty' may signal a benign absence, in the case of oil and other flammable materials, even a small amount of residual material in the functionally 'empty' container can be anything but benign. As Whorf puts it, the 'empty' drums are perhaps the more dangerous, since they contain explosive vapour (1954: 198). Despite the very real danger, the 'empty' sign appeared to encourage risky behaviour.

Linguistic relativism, the version of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis that does seem plausible, is much less confining than linguistic determinism. It suggests that language can influence the way we think, but thought is not necessarily caused by language. How does it go? It might be said that our habits of thought are linked to the way we work in the field; perhaps it is not the strong version of linguistic determinism that is of much concern, but the broader view that we are essentially blind to the way other speakers with other languages' division of reality think.

Lucy argues that

This is a much more plausible version of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis. It is a version that suggests large entities (for instance a bottle) are the language of botanists, while to a lawyer they might think about them in quite specific ways. To a botanist, a flower, it is all I can really say. But even so, to a lawyer they are a 'dangerous and flammable container'.

Having thought about the language we use, particularly significant words, is very important. It can be very important in the way we think, and our will. More information about this will be given in a later study. You probably have a range of languages, spaces and times – that is, whether we all could learn these languages, we would probably learn better with a mental compass.

Research on language has been conducted on many areas of knowledge. It is used as a tool for communication as well as for the understanding of the world. We explore the hypothesis of linguistic relativism as an example of what
suggests that language, as in the case of ‘empty’ in Whorf’s example, does influence the way we think. However, if the connection between language and thought is not absolute (as determinism would have it), then how far does it go? It might help to think of linguistic relativism as exploring the habits of thought that language produces. John Lucy is one academic who works in the field; he uses the phrase ‘habitual cognition’ to indicate that it is not the strong version of the theory that he is advocating. That is,

the broader view taken here is not that languages completely or permanently blind speakers to other aspects of reality. Rather they provide speakers with a systematic default bias in their habitual response tendencies.

(Lucy 2005: 307)

Lucy argues that the signs and structure of language influence thought. This is a much more modest argument than that of strong linguistic determinism. It is also incredibly useful, not just in considering languages as large entities (for example, the English language) but also in paying attention to more localised and specialised language use, such as the language of botanists. You can imagine that when a botanist sees flowers, she will think about them and (depending on her audience) speak about them in quite specific ways, influenced by the terms of botany. When I see a flower, it is all I can do to identify it as a flower and name its colour. That’s not to say that I can’t learn how the botanist sees flowers – with enough patience I’m sure she could explain the differences to me. But unless I had become an expert in the distinctions, until I had become fluent in the language of botany, I would most likely still think of all such flora simply as ‘flowers’.

Having thought and language habits in relation to flowers may not seem particularly significant. In some areas, however, habitual modes of thinking can be very important. Obviously habits can be changed, but to do so takes effort and will. Moreover, generally, we’re not aware of our habits of thought. Have you ever considered it unusual that we describe space in terms of ‘left’ and ‘right’, ‘ahead’ and ‘behind’ – that is, in relation to a forward facing body? You probably haven’t, since this seems normal; it is habitual. In some languages, space and location are described in relation to compass points – that is, whether something is ‘north’ or ‘south’. This is certainly a habit that we all could learn, but it would take time before it was habitual. Until then, we would probably think in terms of ‘left’ and ‘right’ and then (with the aid of a mental compass) ‘translate’ into the new system.

Research on exactly these different ways of dealing with space has been conducted, specifically on how people describe objects in relation to each other. It ‘suggests that linguistic diversity aligns with cognitive diversity, as shown in people’s language-independent solutions to spatial tasks and unconscious gestures accompanying speech’ (Majid et al 2004: 113). We explore the habitual connection between language and thought with the example of what you might consider a very basic quality: colour.
2.3.4 Colour

The issue of colour has occupied a number of researchers over the years (Berlin and Kay 1969). You might be surprised to learn that not all languages have the same colour terms. Indeed, some linguists argue that colour itself is not a category found in all languages (Wierzbicka 2005). Here, we take just one example of a difference between two languages that do have colour terms: Russian and English. While English has one basic term for ‘blue’, Russian has two: ‘goluboy’ for lighter blues and ‘siniy’ for darker ones. Of course, it is possible to make this distinction in English, but the point is that it is not an obligatory distinction. In Russian, a speaker has to decide whether something is ‘goluboy’ or ‘siniy’ as there is no less specific term for ‘blue’. As Lera Boroditsky puts it, ‘Languages force us to attend to certain aspects of our experience by making them grammatically obligatory. Therefore, speakers of different languages may be biased to attend to and encode different aspects of their experience while speaking’ (2001: 2). With colour, we are dealing with a semantic rather than a grammatical category, but the argument is the same.

In psychology, the researcher Jonathan Winawer and colleagues investigated the case of blue in Russian and English in order to determine whether the difference in language can be said to lead to a difference in thought. The researchers first asked subjects to divide a spectrum of blue into light blue/goluboy and dark blue/siniy. That is, the experiments first established the boundary for each individual between the two categories. Despite the lack of basic terms for these two blues (English speakers have to qualify ‘blue’ in some way), the boundary for Russian and English speakers was about the same. The subjects were then given three squares of colour, two side by side and one square below these. They were asked which of the two squares was the same as the single square below. The time this took, and other information, was collected and analysed. Winawer and colleagues conclude:

We found that Russian speakers were faster to discriminate two colors if they fell into different linguistic categories in Russian (one siniy and the other goluboy) than if the two colors were from the same category (both siniy or both goluboy).

(2007: 7783)

Echoing the quotation from Boroditsky above:

The critical difference in this case is not that English speakers cannot distinguish between light and dark blues, but rather that Russian speakers cannot avoid distinguishing them: they must do so to speak Russian in a conventional manner. This communicative requirement appears to cause Russian speakers to habitually make use of this distinction even when performing [7784] a perceptual task that does not require language.

(2007: 7783–4)

This provides some insight into the way that the mind works, and the extent to which language can shape our perceptions and experiences.

2.4 ONE LANGUAGE, MANY IDEOLOGIES

Even in a single language, the way we think about the world differs around the globe. These differences in the way we think and speak are important, as they depend on the different values upheld by different cultures. Each culture classifies things differently and, as we have seen, it is important to categorise things in a way that is connected to a culture's ideas about what is important. For example, in Russia, trees and other forest elements are classified as animals, whereas in Britain they are classified as plants. Colour perception, for example, can vary widely depending on the culture and the person's cultural background.

We don't tend to think of our language as being a collection of categories, but as a set of beliefs and knowledge. In fact, a particular belief is only considered normal, natural and ordinary when it is defined as giving rise to a particular set of beliefs. In this sense, we can think of beliefs as giving rise to a 'set of beliefs'. This is why we can use the term 'ideologies' (1994) to describe these differences. Ideologies can be thought of as giving rise to a particular worldview, and the ways in which people think and speak are connected to these ideologies. We can see this clearly in the way we think about gender roles and relationships, for example. In many cultures, there are strict roles and expectations for men and women, and these expectations are reflected in the way we think and speak. This can be seen in the way we talk about gender, for example, and the way we use language to express ourselves.

And when we talk about gender roles, it is important to understand that these roles are not fixed and unchanging, but rather are shaped by the social, cultural and historical context in which they exist. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the ways in which our language is shaped by our cultural background and the way we think and speak is shaped by the way we interact with the world around us.
This provides some support for the influence of language on thought. Remember that this is not an absolute determinism, but rather that we form particular habits of thinking based on our language.

2.4 ONE LANGUAGE, MANY WORLDS

Even in a single language like English there are many ways of representing the world. These representations are often the result of particular habitual ways of thinking, or worldviews. The example given above of the botanist is worth recalling here. The way a botanist thinks and talks about plants depends on the botanical language available to them. Obviously if a new plant is discovered, that will have to be named. But when deciding how to classify this plant, the botanist will look at the kinds of features considered important in their discipline. The features that matter to botanists are directly connected to the aims of this science: to categorise and understand plants, trees and other flora. The features that the discipline gives importance to can be understood as being structured by the botanist’s (world) view of plants. Colour probably would not be important, but how the plant reproduces will be. We can say, then, that a particular set of values underlies this structure because some things are important and some are less important. Finally, we can call this world view the ideology of botany; that is, the values, ideas and features that define botany as a discipline; the things that are taken for granted in order to conduct the work of a botanist.

We don’t tend to think of fields of science as having an ‘ideology’, as in everyday conversation ‘ideology’ tends to mean a false or misguided set of beliefs. If we take away the value judgement here, we’re left with ideology being a set of beliefs. The reason we tend only to identify the beliefs of other people is because we consider our own (individual and group) beliefs to be normal, natural and obvious. Fairclough calls this ‘naturalisation’, which he defines as giving “to particular ideological representations the status of common sense, and thereby mak[ing] them opaque, i.e. no longer visible as ideologies’ (1995a: 42). For example, the concept and process of ‘globalisation’ can be understood as a result of a process of naturalisation in that globalisation is presented as a fact and a thing. We talk and write about globalisation as though it has an uncontroversial existence but, in fact, it has a variety of hotly contested meanings. As non-participants in these arguments, we usually only hear discussion of small details at the edges of globalisation – whether it’s good or bad, for example. Its existence (whatever it is) appears to have been naturalised.

While noting there are many definitions of ‘ideology’ available, Simpson writes:

An ideology therefore derives from the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value systems which are shared collectively by social groups. And when an ideology is the ideology of a particularly powerful social group, it is said to be dominant. (1993: 5)
Here is where ideology links to power. We all have beliefs. Such beliefs become significant with respect to other people when the belief holders are in a position to get their point of view accepted as the norm.

If we look at language, we can see evidence of particular ideologies at work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, ideologies work like filters, changing the way things are represented according to the values of the ideology. You might have noticed that there has been a real shift in the way delivery of government services is described in recent years. Rather than being ‘people’ or ‘citizens’, we are now ‘customers’, ‘service users’ and ‘clients’. This signals an ideological shift towards government services seeing (and speaking) being a ‘customer’, you will probably expect good customer service from your medical service provider. Thus, you will expect to get prompt service, to be able to choose your treatment and, if something goes wrong, you might be more likely to sue!

The idea that language influences the way we behave is perhaps most obvious in the case of certain metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that our thought processes are structured along metaphorical lines. For example, when we describe a verbal argument, we are likely to use words such as ‘attack’, ‘defend’, ‘won’, ‘lost’ and so on. From evidence of the language we use to talk about arguments, Lakoff and Johnson suggest the existence of the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. We use the language of war to describe arguments. They go further than this, and argue that this metaphor (ARGUMENT IS WAR) actually structures how we think about arguments. The words we use are thus evidence of the way we think for Lakoff and Johnson.

This way of speaking (and thinking) about arguments is probably so familiar that it doesn't seem particularly interesting. The familiarity of these expressions may hinder our attempts to explore any effect they may have. With newer linguistic signs it can be easier to look with a critical eye. At the time of writing, the ‘credit crunch’ is in full swing. In an article for the American publication Newsweek, Daniel Gross refers to George Orwell’s famous essay ‘Politics and the English Language’ which argued against using misleading and imprecise language. Gross draws our attention to the renaming of some of the financial products that were said to be at the root of the credit crisis:

Remember those toxic assets? The poorly performing mortgages and collateralized debt obligations festering on the books of banks that made truly execrable lending decisions? In the latest federal bank rescue plan, they've been transformed into ‘legacy loans’ and ‘legacy securities’—safe for professional investors to purchase.

(2009)
War metaphors are common. Make a list of war terms and then where they are used other than to talk about real battles.

As we saw above, some languages place things into different 'classes'. For this activity, it might help to work with some colleagues. Choose some objects around you, and either gather them in one place or mark them in some way. Develop a classification system that sorts the objects into classes. Try to develop some reasons for the classes. You may have trouble allocating objects to just one class! You'll need to think carefully about the objects and the features you use to construct your classes. You should give each class a name. Then, tell some colleagues which class each belongs to, but not what the classes are or how they are defined. They will need to try to figure out your classification system.

This is exactly the kind of task that Dixon had to work through when mapping the noun class system of Dyirbal.

While the previous activity asked you to work as investigator, in this task, the idea is to get a proper sense of how easy or difficult it can be to change your habits of speech according to an unfamiliar convention of communicative competence.

In the episode 'Utopia' of the British science fiction series Doctor Who, we encounter an alien whose speech community requires a very particular competence. Chantho is an insect-like humanoid alien; Martha is a human.

MARTHA: Do you mind if I ask? Do you have to start every sentence with 'chan'?
CHAN ThO: Chan—yes—tho.
MARTHA: And end every sentence with...
CHAN ThO: Chan—tho—tho.
MARTHA: What would you happen if you didn't?
CHAN ThO: Chan—that would be rude—tho.
MARTHA: What, like swearing?
CHAN ThO: Chan—indeed—tho.
MARTHA: Go on, just once.
CHAN ThO: (nervously) Chan—I can’t—tho.
MARTHA: Oh, do it for me.
CHAN ThO: No. (giggles)

Over the course of a seminar, or a day (as long as you can), start every utterance with the first syllable for your first name, and end every utterance with the second. If your name has only one syllable, you'll have to use it at the start and end of each utterance. You will probably need to ask people to monitor you, to remind you to do it. Does this start to feel 'natural'? How long does this take?
Naturally, the point in renaming ‘toxic’ assets is simply to make them appealing products for investors to buy. There is nothing negative about ‘legacy’, quite the contrary. Gross continues:

More insidiously, the word [legacy] is frequently deployed to deflect blame. Legacy financial issues are, by definition, holdovers from prior regimes.

This renaming accomplishes a number of things. The assets, formerly toxic, now have an attractive hint of grandeur about them, making them more appealing to investors. Second, if something should go wrong with these assets, a historical past can be blamed: those responsible for providing the ‘legacy’. Third, not only do the products sound more promising to investors, there is nothing negative about them, making them more attractive. Legacy financial issues are, by definition, holdovers from prior regimes.

2.5 OTHER ANGLES OF TELLING

It’s not necessary to create new words or expressions to convey ideological meanings. When speaking or writing, we constantly make choices. We decide which word to use from a number of possible alternatives, and we decide what kind of grammatical structure we’ll use. The structuralist model of meaning that we encountered earlier, when looking at how the meaning of signs depends on their relationship with each other, also helps us to understand the significance of these grammatical choices.

There are two axes we refer to in order to discuss the choices that are made in a sentence. The syntagmatic axis describes the order in which words are placed; the paradigmatic axis is used to refer to all the other words that could have been chosen for a particular slot. We can think of the syntagmatic axis as being horizontal and the paradigmatic as vertical, as shown in figure 2.3.

![Figure 2.3: Paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis](image)

If we take a simple sentence like ‘Mary ate the cake’, we can see that there are three possible forms of the sentence. Two are active voice and the third is passive voice. The active voice – that is, the verb immediately follows the subject – is foregrounded when we understand in relation to the active voice (the subject does). Passive sentences, on the other hand, are sometimes understood in relation to the passive voice (the subject is done by). The paradigmatic ‘to eat’ formalizes this distinction between the two voices: it has a slightly different meaning in each position a choice is made (e.g., ‘Mary’, ‘the cake’). The paradigmatic ‘to eat’ formalizes this distinction between the two voices: it has a slightly different meaning in each position a choice is made (e.g., ‘Mary’, ‘the cake’).

2.5.1 Transitivity

To pay this kind of attention to the paradigmatic, we need to factor in the parameters of transitivity and voice. Here, I provide a simple diagram of the paradigmatic. Transitivity usually refers to the grammatical relations of subject and object; ‘hit’ requires a transitive voice, whereas ‘see’ is intransitive. Thus, transitivity and voice are closely linked, and the difference between them is that one of the positions (subject, object) has a slightly different meaning. Any possible choices for a transitive verb will include a preposition or phrase (e.g., ‘by Mary’).
It looks like these headlines have a similar structure; but while the scientist is foregrounded in each (by virtue of being at the start), they have different roles.

- Actor: Scientist
- Process: denies
- Circumstance: linking H1N1 to NZ

In the second headline, we see an example of agent deletion (as well as the deletion of 'was' before 'misquoted' – this is common in headlines, so be careful when deciding whether you have an active or passive construction). Despite the surface similarities here, the transitive analysis reveals an important difference. In the first headline, the scientist is represented as doing something – that is, as denying something. In the second, the actor has been deleted. Someone misquoted the scientist, but we don’t know who. In this headline, the scientist is, by his or her presence, somehow connected with the error of misquoting, even though he or she was the one to suffer the injustice of being linked to the mistake!

Look at headlines about the same event and compare using the transitivity model. What are the angles of telling?
From 4 June 2009

- Al Qaeda says it has killed Briton (New York Times)
- Fury as al-Qaeda ‘behead’ British hostage (Mirror.co.uk)
- British hostage Edwin Dyer ‘killed by al-Qaeda’ (Guardian)
- British hostage executed by Islamists in Mali (Sydney Morning Herald)
- Beheaded (London Evening Standard)
- Briton beheaded by Al-Qaeda (The London Paper)

### 2.6 Newspeak and Political Correctness

Above, I noted that Gross invoked Orwell’s essay ‘Politics and the English Language’. Orwell is well known for his views on the connection between language and the political state of the world. In his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, the state controls and limits language to produce a new language: ‘Newspeak’. The motivation behind this was that if the state could control language, it could also control thought. Thus, newspeak depends precisely on a version of linguistic determinism. The limiting of language was an actual
paring down of words, a simplified version of (in this case) English. When jargon or other specialised language is criticised, usually on the basis that it impedes comprehension and indicates a lack of clear thinking on the part of the speaker, one often finds reference to Orwell's novel. But there is one important difference, noted by Nina Power in a recent article reflecting on Newspeak in the twenty-first century:

We are certainly surrounded by (even trapped in) a language designed to bamboozle, baffle and blindside – a lexicon that serves the same purpose as Newspeak, namely to make impossible all modes of thought other than that of the reigning ideology. But here it is not so much a question of attenuating language as expanding it. Recent years have seen an astonishing proliferation of coinages, buzzwords and neologisms.

(2009: 49)

While Power seems to allude to the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, speculating that we may be 'trapped' in language, it is important to note that there are different kinds of traps. The trap of linguistic determinism is an inability to think outside of the parameters of the language. One could argue that the trap of specialised language is the inability to think or communicate clearly. It is a subtle yet important difference. People expend so much energy in becoming fluent in what Power calls Nu-Language, that all attention must be focused on linguistic performance rather than, for example, problem solving: 'The Nu-Language that has so dominated the past decade is dangerously self-referential, and all too effective in enabling us to ignore urgent social issues' (2009: 50). This does suggest that there is some kind of reality that language refers to, and clearly at one level this is right. But language can also create things to refer to (ideas, qualities and perspectives) and this function (which doesn't depend on a 'real world' as such) can be an important tool in addressing social issues.

Specifically, what is often maligned as 'political correctness' may have at its heart a concern with what we could call representational justice; at least, it seems reasonable to think that language can be used such that it doesn't discriminate or demean. Here too, there are traces of linguistic determinism. If we start with a group that is discriminated against (let's call them 'martians') we could argue that the term 'martian' is pejorative. Then, one might argue that if the word used to refer to them is changed, for example to 'marsites', the discrimination will also end. As we've already seen in Chapter 1, people tend to have strong views about their own language, and may strongly resist any changes made to it, especially if it means that they have to change their own linguistic behaviour. Such resistance often uses the term 'political correctness', which has come to be associated with trivial and pointless changes in language that, as a strand of language reform, often prove offensive even when this is exactly what is trying to be avoided.

Deborah Cameron describes where the term 'political correctness' came from in her book Verbal Hygiene (1996). She argues that the history of the term is hidden in the media, rather than in print. It was a way to poke fun at political beliefs. Thus, jargon is used to disguise one's own reality. It could not stop my initial exposure.

Use of the term of the group, however. Remember, to say directly what it means is to use 'political correctness' but to 'correct' change or a political position too: 'the way right-wing positions about "political correctness" – as a sociolinguistic linguistic intervention – is to understand it to mean, a term directed at discredit, is not to advocate it. At the same time, the use of language, the command to speak, is that they argue, it breaks down.

Definitions and examples of the definition, and here again with the choices that the 'political correctness' paradigmatic axis (one slot) and these issues need a link between jargon...
of the term is hidden because it was mainly used in verbal communication, rather than in print. It was originally used in an ironic way by the political left. It was a way to poke fun at themselves for not strictly adhering to their own political beliefs. Thus it was a way of humorously acknowledging the contradictions in their own lives. I might say 'I know it's politically incorrect, but I just had to have one of those cheap dresses; the images of the sweat shop couldn't stop my instinct for a bargain.'

Use of the term 'political correctness' was not to be confined to this group, however. Recall that meaning is use; how a term is used influences directly what it means. Cameron notes that the circulating definitions of 'political correctness' all come from those denouncing a particular 'politically correct' change or attacking the concept as a whole. This tends to be political too: 'the way right-wing commentators have established certain presuppositions about "political correctness" over the past few years is a triumph – as a sociolinguist I cannot help admiring it – of the politics of definition, or linguistic intervention' (1995: 123). Thus, 'political correctness' and what we understand it to mean is a direct result of more or less conscious effort directed at discrediting certain kinds of language reform and those who advocate it. At the same time, and related to people's views on their ownership of language, others argue that PC is an imposition of authority, a command to speak (and perhaps think) in a particular way. In this sense, they argue, it breaches rights to freedom of thought and speech.

Definitions and representations are important. We see this with Pinker's example of the definition of 'event' in the previous chapter (see section 1.2), and here again with the concept of 'political correctness'. While we've looked at the choices that can be made along the syntagmatic axis in some detail with transitivity analysis, we need to see the link between choices along the paradigmatic axis (the other words we could decide to put in any particular slot) and these issues of representation. We can explore this by noting the link between jargon and politically correct speech. Just as expert language

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**Activity 2.5**

The following are some examples of 'politically correct' language: some are actually in common use, some have been reported by the media, but are not actually used at all. Which are 'real' examples.

What issue is each addressing?

- Winterval
- Vertically challenged
- Ethnic minorities
- Coffee without milk
- Differently abled
- Thoughtshower
- Senior
- Non-denominational Winter Solstice Evergreen Tree
- Herstory
can change the way one represents and thus views the world, so does PC language. An exchange of letters in an Australian newspaper (Too Young to Know', The Northern District Times, 22 April 2009, p 15) links political correctness with 'indoctrination' and a loss of 'innocence'. While one contributor points to the importance of awareness of 'political and social issues' the underlying attitude appears to be that one should 'speak plainly' and that limited or biased representations of the world only occur with politically correct language or jargon. In fact, all representations in language are partial. There is always an angle of telling.

2.7 SUMMARY

The way the world is represented matters. Every language choice, whether we intend it to or not, demonstrates an ideology. While we often consider ideology to be a bad thing, it's important to remember that we all have habitual ways of thinking about the world and this is reflected in the habitual choices we make in language. Because it's habitual, when we agree with the values expressed, we don't think about them. When we don't agree, we may well describe the language use as jargon or political correctness. To be able to think about these issues of representation we need tools such as transitivity analysis to describe these choices. We also have to be aware of the fact that arguments about language are very often political in the sense that they rely on certain assumptions about what is correct or standard. The way that correctness is defined is itself a political act as well as a way of exerting power.

FURTHER READING


You may enjoy a comedy sketch by Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie which you can find on www.youtube.com 'A Bit of Fry and Laurie...Tricky Linguistics'.
3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I look at politics and what this term might mean. I take a broad definition of politics and thus I examine political speeches, the politics of families as well as the politics we find in everyday conversations and in new media. We have already encountered the concept of ideology (Chapters 1 and 2) but it can be a difficult concept to fully understand. It is also important to remember that ideology and power are enacted through specific choices made in language; so ideology will be a point of discussion in relation to the issues in this chapter too. While we can often tell where someone's ideas and comments are 'coming from', in this chapter I introduce some linguistic tools that help us to be more specific about how persuasion works and how power relations are built and sustained.

3.2 What do we mean by 'politics'? 

We hear the word 'politics' every day, in relation to politicians, governments, law making and international conflicts. It is a term most often connected to those who run nations, states and cities. But how do we define politics, if we define it at all? A narrow definition says that politics deals with decision making and governing. In a democracy, politics is about the public, and the power relations of the public, and how the public gets involved. We have seen that this is one way of thinking about the language (see section 1.2 when defining politicians). When defining politicians have the power to make decisions, the relations of power and control, but politics is not limited to these domains. It is also important to take a broader view of politics, which deals with power relations of a range of other relations: family, friends and the public: a democracy is about sharing power over friends, and participating in society. As we will see in this chapter, politics might not always have to do with governing and a democracy.

3.3 Tools for persuasion

'Yes we can' by Barack Obama during the US presidential campaign is focused on the need for a sense of community, the concept in this phrase being an inclusive 'we', and the idea of an inclusive 'we', is essential. It is important to know that the exclusive 'we', is self and some other: a nation may use the term 'we' to address their members: 'We're working together to bring hope and its followers, 'they'.

3.4 Hidden in plain sight

We have seen that the language of defining politicians have the power to make decisions, the relations of power and control, but politics is not limited to these domains. It is also important to take a broader view of politics, which deals with power relations of a range of other relations: family, friends and the public: a democracy is about sharing power over friends, and participating in society. As we will see in this chapter, politics might not always have to do with governing and a democracy.

3.5 Ideological choice as political choice

We have seen that the language of defining politicians have the power to make decisions, the relations of power and control, but politics is not limited to these domains. It is also important to take a broader view of politics, which deals with power relations of a range of other relations: family, friends and the public: a democracy is about sharing power over friends, and participating in society. As we will see in this chapter, politics might not always have to do with governing and a democracy.

3.6 Analysing everyday conversations

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3.7 Summary

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making and government. In these terms, politics is carried out by politicians. In a democracy, politicians have the power to make decisions on behalf of the public, and the government creates laws that the public have to live by. We have seen that in rare cases, this institutional power is used to change the language (see section 1.4). The notion of power is therefore important when defining politics. The two concepts are closely linked. But while politicians have the power to make decisions that affect a nation as a whole, relations of power are also apparent in our daily life. A broader definition of politics is not limited to the activities of politicians and government. If we take a broader view, politics can be understood as any social relationship which deals with power, governing and authority. This definition includes a range of other relationships in addition to that between government officials and the public: a doctor has authority over a patient, friends can have power over friends, and parents have the authority and power to 'govern' the family. As we will see in this chapter, politics is not just limited to institutions, we might not always notice, but we engage in politics every day.

What does politics mean to you? Think of your everyday life — what situations do you engage in that can be described as dealing with power, governing and authority relations?

3.3 TOOLS FOR PERSUASION

'Yes we can'

What do you think of when you see these words? What associations does this phrase make? 'Yes we can' was a catch-phrase used by President Barack Obama during his electoral campaign in 2008. His election campaign focused on the need for change in America, and he tried to capture this concept in this phrase: we can make change happen. The use of the pronoun 'we' is essential. In using it, Obama aligns himself with the public. It is important to know that 'we' can be used inclusively as well as exclusively. The inclusive 'we', as you would expect, includes the people being addressed. The exclusive 'we' can function in two ways. It may be used to refer to the self and some other people, not the addressees. For example, the leader of a nation may use 'we' to refer to herself and other important government officials: 'We're working hard to fix this economic problem.' It can also be used to include some people, but not everyone. Thus, when political parties address their members at conferences and rallies, they will refer to the party and its followers as 'we' while excluding other political parties and their followers, 'they.'
particular voices, through their emphasis or erasure, are themselves forms of power. By speaking in particular ways, speakers activate complex webs of associations that link a wide array of discourses and contexts, and by using language in the specific ways they do, speakers construct linguistic selves and create linguistic images of their selves. (2006: 330)

Politicians certainly construct linguistic selves, but the difference between what they do and what we all do is one of degree rather than kind. We often say that a popular politician has ‘political capital’ – that is, that they have influence and a certain power to get things done. Those of us not elected to high public office still have certain kinds of symbolic or cultural capital available to us (see section 9.2). How we accrue such capital, and how we are able to use it, depends very much on the ideological context we find ourselves in.

3.5 IDEOLOGICAL CHOICE AS POLITICAL CHOICE

As we have already established, politics has to do with situations of power, governing and authority, be it national law making or where the family is going on holiday. In these situations, language is the tool with which these power relations are constructed and maintained. In the previous section we saw the semantic and syntactic choices people can make to gain political power. In addition, it is also possible to gain power through physical force. Dictators with armed forces do not need to use rhetorical skills to win power over a nation, and neither does a playground bully. They can use their physical ability to force people to give them power. But in a democracy, politicians want us to give them power willingly. For us to give them power, they need to persuade us of their argument – that their political agenda is the best one for us. If we give them power instead of them taking it by force, we are more likely to follow their governing. The same happens in our daily lives; we may buy certain products because an advertising campaign appeals to us, not because the company forced us to do so. But how is it that someone can persuade us to give them power? How is it that someone’s political agenda makes sense to us? Part of it is the rhetorical skills that they have, but another significant element is the ideologies they draw upon.

Ideology can be explained as a set of ideas that are used to view the world. As we saw in Chapter 1, everyone has an ideology, which we can understand as a way of describing the set of beliefs and behaviours we think of as natural or common sense. In addition, a community is often bound together at an ideological level – a mutual world view. As we saw, when there is a dominant world view, we can describe it as the hegemonic ideology. Ideological power struggles can ensue if people don’t agree with the hegemonic ideology in a society.
It's worth thinking about how all sorts of language can have an ideological side. We don't need to be talking about international power struggles for utterances to have an ideological level. If we take an everyday use of language, such as address forms, we see that these can signal dominant ideologies and how these ideologies are subject to shifting over time. In modern-day Norwegian, many forms of address previously used to signal politeness and respect have been removed. For younger generations, using formal modes of address for second person ('you'), such as 'De' (singular) and 'Dem' (plural), seem old fashioned and stale. The reason for the removal of these words from everyday Norwegian is not that Norwegians have become ruder, but rather that the language has been shaped by the dominant ideology in society. For centuries, Norway was under the rule of Denmark and Sweden. The upper class of Norwegian society was largely dominated by these nations. When Norway became a sovereign state in 1905, it was important to establish Norway as its own country. Language became a way of establishing Norway's identity. Remember that what counts as a language is often political (see section 1.3.4); 'language' is not just defined in technical linguistics terms. In the twentieth century, Norway went through a democratic process with strong focus on equality. While both Denmark and Sweden had aristocrats, upper classes and a monarchy, Norway was primarily a working-class society. Socialism became the dominant ideology of the nation, and this influenced the language. The focus on equality, seeing every person as the same, made the formal modes of address redundant and out of step with the values of society. Today, teachers, businessmen, priests and customers are all addressed informally and often by first name. Terms similar to 'Mr', 'Madam' and 'Sir' are rarely, if ever, used in contemporary Norwegian society. The only people to be addressed by their formal title are the royal family, where 'your royal highness' is still in use.

To take a very different example, in Lhasa Tibetan there are various address terms arranged in a binary system. Here, I describe a form of address which is gestural rather than linguistic: showing the tongue. This is used mainly by the older generation in encounters with highly competent or well-respected individuals such as a well known medical doctor (Feurer 1996: 48). Anecdotal information suggests that some young people are adopting it, suggesting a comeback. These younger users may also supplement showing of the tongue with 'a further sign of submission, scratching their hair with their right hand' (Feurer 1996: 48). Thus, where Norwegians will use the same term of address to most people they meet, where there are choices, you have to know something about the person to whom you are speaking in order to be able to address the person 'correctly'. (Notice that this knowledge is part of the communicative competence a speaker has to have.) In this way, we see that society's dominant ideology can influence language and that this ideology can change. But our world view can also be shaped by language (see section 2.3).

### 3.5.2 The entrepreneurial university

In the domain of higher education, there is a significant shift, especially in the last two decades. While particular discourses of efficiency, dynamism and restructure the organization of higher education, social success and economic growth are encouraged to happen in and by the universities.

The following was written in 2005, when the Norwegian universities aligned to the entrepreneurial university philosophy. The following words and phrases indicate? What do these words mean?

- 'Strong', 'market', 'rate', 'high competence',
- 'Highly', 'dynamic',
- 'Market driven',
- 'Meeting the challenge',
- 'Overflying',
- 'World-class',
- 'Institution',
- 'Entrepreneurial course',
- 'Social success',
- 'More than talent',
- 'World-class university' (Banja, 2005).

In 2005, Gerlinde Banja discussed the entrepreneurial university. It is important to note that there is a resistance to these kinds of sources [Feurer and Krensholm 1996: 48]. It is a very good thing for a university to have a strong, dynamic, market driven university. But universities are not just part of the society. They are, first of all, part of the institution, particularly in the kind of society we live in. In this sense, universities are not only a reflection of society, but are part of the society. They are not just a place where students learn, but are places where society is shaped. In this sense, universities are not just a reflection of society, but are part of the society. They are not just a place where students learn, but are places where society is shaped. In this sense, universities are not just a reflection of society, but are part of the society. They are not just a place where students learn, but are places where society is shaped. In this sense, universities are not just a reflection of society, but are part of the society. They are not just a place where students learn, but are places where society is shaped.
Other people are drawn to this world view as audience members at different levels of engagement. In other words, the guys use language and the particular identities they construct to persuade people to watch their channel and to engage in their social network. Significantly, over time, they develop their own group communicative rules and norms. Moreover, without specifying a political agenda, they may well shape people's world view and can be understood as being part of a political debate regarding gay rights. This is a powerful mode of engagement as it is entertaining, enjoyable and informative. New media technology allows interaction with people we might not otherwise be able to speak with. It also allows us to connect with people who share our values and world views. Political language and ideologies are not always just about government policies, elections and legislation. If we understand politics as being about how society is organised, how people interact, the choices that are made in representations and the kinds of things that can be thought and said without adverse consequences, everything is political.

3.6 ANALYSING EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS

Metaphors, pronouns, contrastive pairs and three-part statements are, as we have seen, important tools in political speeches. But as I established in the introduction, political language is not just a phenomenon that occurs in the world of politicians. Every day we engage in situations where we struggle for power. It is important to recognise the political aspects in these situations as well as being aware of the tools that are used by politicians to persuade us of their agenda. We have looked at how language can be used to influence ideas about the role of universities and the way language is used in new media such as the internet in order to move away from a restrictive understanding of the political. Hopefully, you will have realised that the persuasive strategies that politicians use are exactly the same ones you might use to convince someone to do something. Thinking about our own everyday communication as political reminds us that every communicative event negotiates and constructs a particular relationship. Power is always a potentially important part of this negotiation.

The home life of a family is one arena where political debate takes place. Families are political bodies in that certain members review, judge, formulate codes of conduct, make decisions and impose sanctions that evaluate and impact the actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings of other members (Ochs and Taylor 1992: 301). The different members of a family have authority over each other and can influence the way other members act and think. In their research, Ochs and Taylor looked at the family dinner as a political event. They looked at the way in which different family members talked to each other and exchanged stories, and questioned each other's behaviour during a family meal.
66 BERIT ENGOY HENRIKSEN

Example 1
Mother: Oh::: You know what? you wanna tell Daddy what happened to you today? (=)
Father: Tell me everything that happened from the moment you went in - until:
Example 2
Mother: Jodie tell Daddy then what happened.
(1992:32a)

Following these utterances, the child goes on to tell a story of the day’s events. These examples are similar to the conversations which happen in many other families. During the family meal, the children of the family tell more stories than the parents. But the stories they tell are very often initiated by the parents. The parents can control the conversation and positively or negatively evaluate their reported behaviour and the way they tell their stories. They have the power to decide topics and conversation direction. You can probably think of many other occasions in your home life where parents have authority and express this verbally.

Other forms of control exist and are obvious at a more local level. “Conversational dominance” is the phrase used to refer to strategies which enable speakers to dominate their partners in talk (Coates 1998: 161). The way one party in a conversation can dominate the other is a clear example of situations where the struggle for power is won. In a 1977 study, West and Zimmerman found that men often dominate women in conversations:

| Female: | How's your paper coming? = |
| Male:   | Alright I guess (-) I haven’t done much in the past two weeks. |
|         | (1.8)                     |
| Female: | Yeah::: know how that can |
| Male:   | Hey, ya’ got an extra cigarette? |
| (-)     |                           |
| Female: | Oh sure ((hands him the pack)). |
| Like my pa              | How 'bout a match? |
| Male:   |                           |
|         | (1.2)                     |
| Female: | Ere ya go uh like my pa |
| Male:   | Thanks                     |
|         | (1.8)                     |
| Female: | Sure (-) I was gonna tell you my |
| Male:   | Hey, I'd really like ta' talk |
|         | but I gotta run (-) see ya |
|         | (3.2)                     |
| Female: | Yeah                       |

(adapted from West and Zimmerman 1998: 172)

In this exchange (the conversation and section 5.6.2), West and Zimmerman used certain strategies such as delayed response or women (see Chapter 5.6.2). West and Zimmerman conversational power still tell.

Next time you are with friends, make some talk more talk. How their day was and some talk more talk. How to make a ‘political’ something you may

3.7 SUMMARY

Wherever there is power there is political. In this chapter, the politics and then express acceptance, maintain the power. In this chapter, the

Politics, parents, maintain the some kind or another, the view of the world that we have the ability to shape the minds of our audience, exactly the same the positions and so on. We can easily be hidden language to create this. Moreover, we are aware of the listening to politicians are critical about political power.

FURTHER READING

Daddy what happened to

ot an extra cigarette?

us

daddy

(1992: 324)

as to tell a story of the day's

sations which happen in

children of the family tell

they tell are very often initi-

conversation and positively

and the way they tell their

conversation direction.

in your home life where

us at a more local level.

referred to strategies which

Coates 1998: 161). The

example is a clear example

77 study, West and

in conversations:

the much in the past two

bog

got an extra cigarette?

other.

he can't

they

I gotta run (-) see ya

I Zimmerman 1998: 172)

In this exchange the female is completely silenced. The male dominates

the conversation and does not listen to a word of what she is saying (see section 5.6.2). West and Zimmerman found that the men in their data often

used certain strategies, such as interruption, giving no response, providing a

delayed response or simply remaining silent to dominate conversations with

women (see Chapter 5). Do these findings sound right to you? The study by

West and Zimmerman was carried out in 1977. Is the difference in conversa-
sional power still there today?

Next time you are with more than one member of your family (or a group

of friends), make a note of the roles people play. For example, who asks

questions? Does one member ask others for stories (perhaps by asking

how their day was)? Do some people question behaviour of others? Do

some talk more than others? Taking note of this kind of detail will allow

you to make a 'political portrait' of your own family/friends. This is even

something you might do using the classroom as your data site.

3.7 SUMMARY

Wherever there is power there is politics; wherever there is politics there is

power. In this chapter we started with what is traditionally understood as

politics and then examined how other situations can also be understood as

political. This was done to explore the different ways in which people use

language to create and exert power. We saw that ideology is a crucial part

of this. Moreover, the detail of language is essential in the construction,

acceptance, maintenance and indeed critique of ideological positions.

Politicians, parents, the media and individuals all have a political agenda of

some kind or another in that we all have ideologies. We all have a certain

view of the world that we accept as natural. As language producers, we all

have the ability to shape our messages in particular ways and thus influence

the minds of our addressees. The rhetorical tools that politicians use are

exactly the same that other people use. Nevertheless, metaphors, presup-

positions and so on are so much part of everyday language use that they

can easily be hidden in plain sight. As audience members, it is important that

we are aware of the bias that different media broadcasters can have. When

listening to politicians or other people with authority, it is important that we

are critical about what we hear and see.

FURTHER READING


Boussofara-Omar, Naima (2006) 'Learning the “linguistic habitus” of a politician: a

presidential authoritative voice in the making', Journal of Language and Politics,