The Interplay of Language, Ideology, and Power

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Abstract

Language is a powerful vehicle for ideology, serving not only as a means to political ends but also as a fundamental ground for attaining and maintaining positions of power. This article explores the intricate relationship between language, ideology, politics, and power, examining how linguistic devices such as implicature are utilized to influence public perception and shape political discourse. By analyzing specific political statements, the article demonstrates how language can imply more than what is explicitly stated, subtly indoctrinating individuals or groups with certain ideological positions. It delves into the role of language in reinforcing dominant ideologies, highlighting the challenges faced by those who question these ideologies. Through this analysis, the article underscores the critical function of language in both reflecting and propagating power dynamics within society. The study also investigates the concept of linguistic determinism and its potential implications for thought control. By understanding these mechanisms, we gain insight into how language is employed to seek consent, legitimize authority, and perpetuate ideological beliefs, ultimately shaping social, political, and power structures.

Keywords: language, ideology, rhetoric, politics, power, linguistic determinism

Language serves as a potent vehicle for creating and disseminating ideologies, enabling individuals or groups to propagate their worldviews to a broader audience. This linguistic phenomenon is particularly evident in how those in positions of power utilize language to maintain their authority. As Wareing (2023) notes, "the oppression of those with less power, and less access to the media and the production of written records, can seem 'natural', 'normal', or even invisible" (p. 12). This subtle manipulation of language can normalize power imbalances and societal inequities.

The interpretation of historical events provides a clear illustration of how language reflects and reinforces ideological perspectives. Consider the phrase "Columbus discovered America." From a European colonial viewpoint, this statement represents a triumphant achievement. However, for indigenous peoples of the Americas, this same event signifies the beginning of a traumatic loss of autonomy and cultural identity.

The word "discovered" in this context carries significant ideological weight, implying a Eurocentric perspective that disregards the pre-existing civilizations and cultures of the Americas. In contrast, if indigenous voices were to describe the same event, they might use language such as "Columbus encroached upon America," conveying a markedly different ideological stance that emphasizes invasion and violation of sovereignty.This understanding is essential for navigating the complex interplay between language, power, and societal structures in our increasingly interconnected world.

Politicians make political discourse that relies very much on the principle that "people's perceptions of certain issues or concepts can be influenced by language" (Jones and Wareing 35). One of the goals of a politician is to persuade people of the validity of his claims. This can be achieved through a linguistic method known as implicature. This method helps to "manufacture common sense by communicating the speaker's opinions without spelling them out" (35).

The linguistic device of implicature is used to persuade people to take things for granted, which in fact is open to debate. The following statements suggest ideology that contains implicatures (Jones and Wareing 35):
- We will save the NHS (British Labour Party manifesto, 1997)
- Put country before party election (British Referendum Party election pamphlet, 1997)
- Invest in a future we can *all* enjoy (British Labour Party election pamphlet, 1997; original emphasis)

- Make the difference (British Liberal Democrat Party manifesto, 1997)
- The green alternative for a better quality of life (British Green Party manifesto, 1997)

Of the five statements, the first statement implies that the present government is damaging the NHS. The second statement implies that voters had given more importance to political parties than the country. The third statement implies that people did not enjoy the past; so this slogan wishes for the enjoyable future. The fourth and fifth statements imply that there is enough room for improvement in this political system. These examples show how language can mean more than what it directly by says and how it implies something different from what it directly states.

While language and thought are closely intertwined, our experience of the world is not direct or unmediated. Instead, we rely on linguistic structures to apprehend, comprehend, and represent reality. As Montgomery notes, "there is no absolutely neutral and disinterested way of apprehending and representing the world" (p. 228). This observation underscores how language shapes our understanding, often unconsciously, by providing the framework through which we organize and evaluate experiences. Our linguistic tools influence not only how we communicate but also how we categorize, analyze, and interpret the world around us. Recognizing this linguistic mediation of reality promotes critical reflection on our perceptions and biases, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the diverse ways in which humans conceptualize and engage with their environment.

Social groups of power often use certain lexical items in pejorative sense to dominate the powerless social groups. Social divisions of race, class, gender etc. are reflected in language. In a considerable degree social groups of unequal power relations and also reflected. When language is deliberately used to create, maintain, and change power relations between social groups, the users of it have certain ideological and political bias.

We can observe the interested nature of linguistic representation by looking at the distribution of English vocabulary in terms of different social groups. We can see it used to distinguish between white and black, rich and poor, and male and female.As the white community holds power over the black, they use the kind of vocabulary that dominates the black who are powerless despite their number. The white community labels the black as nigger to mean a black dark-skinned person who is in no way equal to the white. The use of this term in

derogatory sense can be found in the works of Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad and Mark twain without probably being much conscious about the offence, but now their use of this term ranked as "the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in English" (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 784).

That the nature of political language is different from that of general language is based on their characterizations. One assumption about politics is that "politics is concerned with power: the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behavior and often to control their values" (Wareing 32). When we make decisions to buy products in the market, we often do it in the political light. We may buy the brands of carpets which we are sure are not manufactured by using child labor. Sometimes we do not buy things that are exported by the countries with political principles and government policies that are opposed by our countries. South African products, for example, were boycotted during the apartheid era (Wareing 33). In making such decisions, we cannot avoid political influences. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between purely political decisions and ordinary everyday decisions that have political flavors. However, this paper analyzes some overtly political language forms that are used by 'career' politicians who govern countries. It also exploits some cases of language use which are not explicit but are implicitly political. Even the most extreme forms of apolitical language have in their hearts political ends to fulfill.

The word politics does not have one single meaning. It is used to mean several different things. The following extract from Jones and Wareing (33) shows this:

a. They made careers for themselves in politics
b. Sexual politics
c. Don't get involved in office politics
d. The personal is political
e. Philosophy, Politics and Economics
f. Environmental politics

The possible explanations of these expressions are (33):

a. the process of deciding national policy
b. gender equality
c. the jockeying for position which goes on in small, tightly knit groups, often achieved by the process of leaking and withholding information
d. the way people negotiate in their private lines (also related to gender)

  e. the history of political systems
  f. a whole range of activities that there is something do with transport, housing, and consumption.

These explanations suggest that there is no keeping out of politics.

  Language has two general components: structural component and use component. The structural component focuses on the hierarchical organization of language and consists of at least four parts such as phonology, syntax, semantics/ lexis, text or discourse. The use component consists of pragmatics in which we explore the meaning that is not literally expressed but it can be understood in communicative contexts. This paper tries to examine the extent to which variations in the use of political language have their effects on persuasive impact.

  The persuasive impact of the political language can be seen in phonological, syntactic, lexical/semantic, textual/discourser, and pragmatic levels. Although persuasive impacts can be seen in other levels, this paper examines the persuasive force of lexical variations of language and their semantic relations that hold between the sentences.

  Lexical variations can have effects on semantic associations. If things are said in usual clichéd language, they fail to produce effects on the audience. On the contrary, if a message is conveyed in metaphorical language, the effect is discernible.

  The persuasion process involves a persuader, often a politician, who makes lexical choices to convince the public to follow his ideology. Lexical variation can have special effect on the persuasion process. Lexical diversity of the speaker affects the listeners' judgments of speakers. Speakers should prefer lexical diversity because listeners prefer complexity which is interesting (Hosman 4).

  Language is used by politicians to persuade the mass to follow their ideologies, so it is closely connected with politics. Of the many ways to consider the connections between language and politics, "one way is to look at political language as a form of rhetoric, to see how politicians seek to persuade their audiences" (Beard 5). Political language involves typical structures through which politicians show their ideological stances. Those ideologies are covert or overt, latent or manifest implicit or explicit, round-about or straight.

  Persuasive behavior is essentially communicative behavior. Since all rhetorical acts aim at a perlocutionary effect upon the audience and try to trigger certain behavioral patterns in the listeners, language can be and has been used for such essential functions since time immemorial (Sornig 95).

If the persuader's effort is simply to win the addressee's favor, rhetorical strategies are fair. The word rhetoric itself refers to the attempt of the addresser to persuade the addressee. However, this term has negative connotations associated with the ulterior motive of the speaker. Every speaker has some purpose in mind; there is no such thing as "pure" unbiased statement. (Sornig 95).

One needs to distinguish between the persuasion and seduction. The process of persuasion involves the attempt to convince somebody or seduce them. While persuasion is the process of convincing the listener to do something at the persuader's will, seduction is the process of seduction involves the attempt to make people do things as if at their own will, but infact upon instigation from outside. The seductive mechanism involves coercive strategies.

Political leaders and groups use a special form of language to portray their beliefs, attitudes, ideologies. As Ruth Wodak says, "they define their territory by means of their language; they signal their ideology through certain slogans and stereotypes; their ideological structure is joined together in a certain way and so is their argumentation" (137). This sort of language may serve to produce provocation or to incite reflection. The connection between language and the experience of the world has long been debated and has been intensified since the investigations of Benjamin L. Whorf who tried to establish the point.

Some of the catchwords used in political discourse are capitalism, socialism, democracy, freedom, independence, election, autocracy, left opposition etc. Each of these terms refers to its usual concepts and practices in the political field. These terms denote positive aspects as they provide sources for inspiration to the people to be united for a cause. On the other hand, they are associated with negative connotations which trigger people to be divided and create political and social unrest. These catchwords therefore are used to achieve political ends.

The assumption that words have power does not necessarily mean that they have intrinsic power. As Sornig says, "words can, in fact, be used as instruments of power and deceptions, but it is never the words themselves that should be dubbed evil and poisonous, as has become the fashion" (96). The speaker as a partner of interlocution tries to arouse surprise or the sense of estrangement in the listener. By impressing the other partner of interlocution, the persuader tries to make his listener give up his own viewpoint and embrace that of the speaker.

As language can be used to achieve political goals, power is demonstrated through language. Political power exists by means of speech. Government

enforces law through language. Parents control their children through language. AsWareing says, "Language often serves the interests of dominant social groups, usually because these are the groups who have the most control over it: politicians and lawyers, owners of international media conglomerates, and other influential, high profile figures" (12). Suffice it to say that politicians tend to use language in its rhetorical form to persuade the people or to dissuade them so that they can achieve their goals.

The Judeo Christian scriptures state that theologians had explained the power of language even before the linguists gave systematic explanation about the concept of linguistic relativity. The following biblical account of the role of language mentioned in the Genesis reveals this. As the sons of men were building a high tower because they were endowed with divine power of language which enabled them to do anything they desired. God decided to scatter them to different parts of the world and to give different languages to them so that they would be devoid of power to control the universe and also to challenge the authority of God. Having noticed what the sons of men were doing in the land of Shinar, Yahweh says:

Behold, they are one people, they have only one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do: and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible to them. Come, let us go down, and then confuse their languages, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth… (qtd. in Laponce 58).

This can very well explain of 'inherent' power of language to control the physical world. The biblical notion of language can be termed as linguistic determinism which Sapir-Whorf hypothesis later systematized.

The extreme form of   linguistic determinism claims that language controls our thought process. According to this theory, "not only does our perception of the world influence our language but the language we use profoundly affects how we think" (Singh 224). It is thus very difficult, if not impossible, to think outside the framework provided by the language. Edward Sapir in this connection says, "we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation" (qtd. in Montgomery 223). This theory of linguistic determinism also states alternatively, as Benjamin Lee Whorf puts it:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages… We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do,

largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. (qtd. in Montgomery 223)

This suggests that the word has power to control thoughts, and that a specific word in a language can have more power to control the thought than relatively less powerful words in the same language or other languages.

If language can be used to manufacture ideology through various methods, language can also be used to control thought process. This extreme line of argument was initiated by Sapir and Lee Whorf in their claim popularly known as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. According to this theory, language determines thought as it provides a framework for our thoughts and, therefore, it is very difficult to think outside that framework. On the basis of this theory of linguistic determinism, George Orwell in the appendix essay written at the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* predicts that a totalitarian society of the future has Ingsoc (English socialism) as the dominant political system. In this system citizens will be enforced for mandatory use of a language known as Newspeak which will be radically revised version of the Oldspeak. The latter form of language will be made forgotten so that only Newspeak will be used, which will enable people to think only in socialist line of political system, the aim of Newspeak being not only to provide the medium of expressing socialist world-view but also to control thinking the other way round. In the appendix of the novel Orwell wrote:

> It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least as so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. To give a single example. The word *free* still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as "This dog is free from lice" or "This field is free from weeds". It could not be used in its old sense of "politically free" or "intellectually free", since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were

therefore of necessity nameless…. A person growing up with Newspeak as his soul language would no more know that *equal* had once had the secondary meaning of "politically equal", or that *free* had once meant "intellectually free", for instance, then a person who had never heard of chess would be aware of the secondary meanings attached to *queen* and *rook*. (qtd. in Jones and Wareing 36-7).

If we believe in what Orwell states, language is by far the most effective means by which ideology can be indoctrinated, political goalscan be achieved, and power can be obtained and maintained.

As politics is inevitably connected to power, politicians are involved in achieving power through various means. One obvious method of getting power is physical coercion. Dictatorial regimes control people by using force. Democratic regimes use legal methods to use force.

The intricate relationship between language and power is fundamental to understanding political discourse and social dynamics. Language, far from being a neutral medium, serves as a potent instrument for exercising and maintaining power. Politicians and authority figures strategically employ linguistic techniques to shape public opinion, manufacture consent, and establish ideologies that appear as common sense. As Fairclough (2017) notes, power is often exercised "through the manufacture of consent" (p. 4), a process heavily reliant on language. Through careful word choice, rhetorical devices, and implicit messaging, politicians persuade people to act voluntarily in accordance with their objectives. This linguistic approach to power, often more effective than overt coercion, embeds ideological constructs deeply into our thought processes and social norms. As Jones and Wareing (2015) observe, those questioning dominant ideologies often "appear not to make sense" (p. 35) to adherents, demonstrating language's power in maintaining ideologies. The concept of linguistic determinism further suggests that language shapes our ability to conceive alternative ideologies or power structures. Understanding these linguistic mechanisms of power is crucial for critical analysis of political communication and social structures, enabling us to better navigate and potentially challenge existing power dynamics. As our grasp of this language-power relationship deepens, so does our capacity to critically engage with the discourses shaping our world.

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