



LANGUAGE, SOCIETY AND POWER

An introduction

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Second Edition

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Language, Society and Power

'This is a book written by real academics, drawing articulately on their own research interests, and using an excellent range of twenty-first century examples to give the book a lively, contemporary feel. The extensive textual analysis is far superior to some of the banal tasks often to be found in introductory textbooks.'

Martin Conboy, *The Surrey Institute of Art & Design*

'This is an excellent, accessible new edition. The large number of examples, worked through in the text, make the book very student-friendly.'

Jonathan White, *Department of English, Dalarna University, Sweden*

This is a completely updated and expanded second edition of *Language, Society and Power*. Lively and accessible, it looks at the ways in which language functions, how it influences thought and how it varies according to age, ethnicity, class and gender. How can a language reflect the status of children and older people? Do men and women talk differently? How can our use of language mark our ethnic identity? The book also looks at language use in politics and the media and examines how language affects and constructs our identities, exploring notions of correctness and attitudes towards language use.

This second edition has been fully updated to include recent developments in theory and research and offers the following features:

- new, relevant and engaging examples drawn from everyday life: conversation transcripts, novels including Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, television and the internet
- new activities designed to give students a real understanding of the area
- an international perspective with examples from the world's press, including the *Washington Post*, the *Daily Mail* and the *New Zealand Listener*
- updated and expanded further reading sections and glossary

Language, Society and Power remains an essential introductory text for students of English language and linguistics, and will also be of use to students of media, communication, cultural studies, sociology and psychology.

Linda Thomas is Head of English and Modern Languages at Roehampton University of Surrey. **Shân Wareing** is Director of the Educational Development Centre at Royal Holloway University of London. **Ishtla Singh** is a Lecturer in English Language at King's College London. **Jean Stilwell Peccei** is a Visiting Lecturer in the English Language and Linguistics Programme at Roehampton University of Surrey. **Joanna Thornborrow** is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Language and Communication Research, Cardiff University and **Jason Jones** is Head of English at Strobe's Sixth Form College.

For Debbie and Jen

Newspapers

During the course of our discussions, reference is made to and data are taken from English language newspapers and magazines. A list of these publications is given below.

<i>Daily Mail</i>	UK national daily newspaper
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	UK national daily newspaper
<i>Daily Star</i>	UK national daily newspaper
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	UK national daily newspaper
<i>Evening Standard</i>	London daily newspaper
<i>Glasgow Herald</i>	Scottish daily newspaper
<i>The Guardian</i>	UK national daily newspaper
<i>The Guardian Weekend</i>	Supplement to Saturday's edition of <i>The Guardian</i>
<i>The Independent</i>	UK national daily newspaper
<i>London Metro</i>	London daily newspaper
<i>National Enquirer</i>	US weekly tabloid news magazine
<i>News of the World</i>	UK national Sunday newspaper
<i>The New Zealand Listener</i>	New Zealand weekly magazine
<i>Northwest Evening Mail</i>	UK daily newspaper
<i>The Observer</i>	UK national Sunday newspaper
<i>Observer Review</i>	Supplement to <i>The Observer</i>
<i>The Psychologist</i>	Monthly magazine for members of the British Psychological Society
<i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	UK national Sunday newspaper
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	UK national Sunday newspaper
<i>THES (The Times Higher Education Supplement)</i>	UK national weekly newspaper
<i>Time Out</i>	London weekly magazine

NEWSPAPERS

<i>The Times</i>	UK national daily newspaper
<i>The Times Weekend</i>	Supplement to Saturday's edition of <i>The Times</i>
<i>USA Today</i>	US national daily newspaper
<i>Washington Post</i>	Washington, DC daily newspaper

Contributors

Jason Jones, formerly a Lecturer in the English Language and Linguistics programme at Roehampton University of Surrey, is now Head of English at Strode's Sixth Form College.

Ishtla Singh, formerly a Lecturer in the English Language and Linguistics programme at Roehampton University of Surrey, is Lecturer in English Language at King's College London (Department of English Language and Literature). Her research interests lie generally in historical and sociolinguistics but a primary area of research is that of language contact, with a particular focus on variation and change in creole-speaking communities. She is the author of *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction* (Arnold, 2000).

Jean Stilwell Peccei is a Visiting Lecturer in the English Language and Linguistics programme at Roehampton University of Surrey. She is the author of *Child Language*, 2nd Edition (Routledge Language Workbooks series, 1999) and *Pragmatics* (Routledge Language Workbooks series, 1999).

Linda Thomas is Head of School of English and Modern Languages and Principal Lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at Roehampton University of Surrey. She is the author of *Beginning Syntax* (Blackwells, 1993).

Joanna Thornborrow, formerly a Lecturer in the English Language and Linguistics programme at Roehampton University of Surrey, is now Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Language and Communication Research, Cardiff University. Her main research interests are in discourse and conversation analysis, and stylistics, with a particular focus on media and institutional talk. She is the author of *Power Talk: Language and Interaction in Institutional Discourse* (Longman, 2002) and co-author (with Shân Wareing) of *Patterns*

in Language: An Introduction to Language and Literary Style (Routledge, 1998).

Shân Wareing, formerly a Lecturer in the English Language and Linguistics programme at Roehampton University of Surrey, is now Director of Educational Development Centre at Royal Holloway University of London. She is the co-author (with Joanna Thornborrow) of *Patterns in Language: An Introduction to Languages and Literary Style* (Routledge, 1998).

Preface to the second edition

The first edition of *Language, Society and Power* was published in 1999, when the majority of the contributing authors were lecturers at Roehampton University of Surrey (then Roehampton Institute London). The book had evolved out of an identically titled course on which we had all taught, and which is still running as a required course for students on the English Language and Linguistics programme, and as a popular option for students in other departments. Since that first edition, several of us have moved to other universities and colleges, but we have all maintained an interest in studying language as a social entity. Thus, even though producing this second edition has required a great deal more co-ordination than the last time, we were all willing to be involved in revising and updating a project which has not only been enjoyable for us but which has also had a favourable reception from its intended audience.

The second edition has remained faithful to the first in many ways. We have maintained a focus on English (primarily British and American varieties). The first edition's glossary of terms potentially new to the reader (printed in bold in each chapter) has been retained but also updated. We have continued to make use of personal reference (something not typically found in academic texts), addressing the reader as *you*, and referring to ourselves as *I* or *we* as appropriate. We have also continued to assume that our readers are generally not, or not yet, specialists in the areas of language study and linguistics, and therefore need an introduction to the kinds of topics which feed into a broader examination of language and society. As such, the book does not offer comprehensive coverage of every possible issue within this vast subject area but instead, provides a stepping-stone to exploring and thinking about at least some of them. Thus, each of the chapters deals with a topic that has been the subject of academic sociolinguistic investigation, and is supplemented with references to useful reading and other sources of material. There are substantial Activities

throughout the text to help the reader engage more actively with the ideas being presented.

We have maintained the distinctive authorial ‘voices’ of the first edition, since they make for a more varied and interesting approach to analysis and discussion. One of the things that the majority of the chapters do have in common, though, is that they seek to interpret the ways in which language and language issues can be deconstructed to reveal underlying ideologies, or beliefs. While all of the chapters have a solid academic grounding, it is important to bear in mind that any interpretation of what people do and say is necessarily going to contain a certain measure of bias. Thus, while we can justifiably analyse a newspaper headline about immigration, for example, and state that its ‘slant’ reveals an affiliation to politically left- or right-wing principles, it must be remembered that any such approach is in itself ideologically determined: it reveals the analyst’s belief that language is not a neutral tool of communication but instead a channel for how we see and construct the world around us. This tenet will become clearer as you read through the text.

Each chapter of this book deals with a different area of language, although there are connections between many of the chapter topics. We have designed the book so that it can be read from cover to cover as a continuous text, but also so that individual chapters can stand alone and be read in their own right. We have divided chapters into subsections, partly to indicate the structure clearly with subtitles and partly to help you find the sections you need to read if you don’t need to read the whole chapter.

Chapter 1 interrogates the notion of ‘language’, and raises some of the underlying questions and ideas that will be relevant as you move into the other chapters. Chapters 2–4 all concentrate on the ideological properties of language, and on how it can be used to influence the ways in which people think and behave. Chapter 2 is concerned with the connections between language, thought and representation, and considers the extent to which language can be said to shape and perpetuate our worldviews. Chapter 3 moves on from the conclusions of Chapter 2 to consider whether, and how, language can be used in politics, and in other fields, to persuade people of particular points of view. Chapter 4 considers how language is used, and to what effects, in media such as newspapers and television with particular reference to news reporting and advertising. Chapters 5–7 deal with language use in connection with particular subgroups within a population. The terms or ‘labels’ that can be or are applied to members of those groups, and the effect of those labels, are considered. The chapters also look at the kinds of language choices members of those groups sometimes make. Chapter 5 focuses on language and gender, Chapter 6 deals with language and ethnicity and Chapter 7 with language and

age. Chapter 8 considers how a further set of subgroup divisions, namely those which go into the construction of social class, affect language use. The last three chapters, 9–11, are concerned with attitudes towards language, and the relationship between language and identity. Chapter 9 deals with language and social identity, and Chapter 10 with the debates that surround the use of standard English. Chapter 11 provides a conclusion to the whole book with an overview of attitudes towards language.

Finally, we hope that you will enjoy reading and using this second edition, and that it will add another dimension to how you think about language and language use. We have certainly enjoyed putting it together, and we hope that at least some measure of our passion and interest in this everyday but extraordinary faculty will prove infectious!

Preface to the first edition

This book is based on a course of the same name that runs in the English Language and Linguistics Programme at Roehampton Institute London, and on which all the authors have taught. It began life as Language, Power, Politics and Sexuality, a short (five-week) introduction to language issues for students studying literature. Over the years the course has grown as interest in language study has grown, and it is now an introductory course for students studying language and linguistics, while continuing in popularity with students of literature. Many of the students taking the course are combining their studies with subjects such as sociology, media studies, women's studies, education and history, where they find that the issues raised are also relevant.

In preparing this book, we have assumed no prior knowledge of linguistics. We hope that students taking courses on the social and political dimensions of language use will find this a useful foundation text. Students of disciplines that include the study of language use, discourse and ideology, power relations, education, the rights of minority groups and equal opportunities should also find this a helpful text. Learners of English may find this a useful route to a better understanding of language use. Since we see language use as being central to many, or most, human activities, we hope that students studying apparently unrelated disciplines may also find it helpful to have a book which covers the range of issues we deal with here. And we have tried to make the text appropriate and interesting for the general reader.

The ideas covered in this book have been explored and developed with groups of students since the early 1980s. They are presented here as eleven topics, currently covered in a modular course on a week-by-week basis. Although they may look it, the topics are not discrete, but have overlapping themes and common threads which we have tried to bring out. Nor are they exclusive. As you read, you may well think of other areas of language use which are worthy of investigation or consideration, such as the relationship

between language and health, or language and the law. Issues such as these are not omitted because we think that they are unimportant but because in a book of this length there is not space to cover everything. We hope what we have covered will assist your thinking about the relationship between language and the different dimensions of the societies in which we live.

The authors have taught as a team the course from which this book was generated. We felt that as a group we shared common values both about the topics we taught and our approach to teaching, and that this provided us with a solid foundation for writing this book also as a team. We distributed the topics amongst the six of us, according to our areas of special interest, and met regularly to review the drafts of our chapters and to discuss revisions. Our aim was to produce a coherent text that still reflected the ideas and writing styles of individual team members. To some extent, the different 'voices' of the authors should still be apparent.

Amongst other decisions we had to make as a team of authors, we had to decide on how we would use pronouns such as *I*, *we* and *you*. We could, for example, have decided to write impersonally, and avoid using personal pronouns as much as possible, which is quite common in academic writing. We had to decide whether we should refer to ourselves in the chapters as *I* (the individual writing the chapter) or *we* (the team of writers). We also had to decide whether we should use *you* to address our readers. The conventional, impersonal academic style is often criticised by people with an interest in the social and political functions of language because, as is discussed in Chapter 3, it can be used to make ideas seem less accessible than they need be, and to increase the apparent status of the writers by making them seem 'cleverer' than the readers. In the end, we felt the most honest and sensible thing to do would be to use *we* to refer to the team of authors, to acknowledge the input we have all had in each others' thinking and writing, but to use *I* if we write about our personal experiences. We have addressed you the readers as *you*.

Throughout the book we concentrate on the English language, although we occasionally use another language to illustrate a particular point. The main varieties of English looked at are British and American English.

There is a glossary of terms with brief explanations at the back of the book. Words which appear in the glossary are printed in bold the first time they occur in a chapter. You will also find at the end of each chapter recommended further reading which you can follow up if you want to learn more about a topic. If you want to check whether a topic is covered in this book, and where, the index at the back gives page numbers.

We have included Activities throughout the text. Some ask you to reflect on your own use of, or feelings about, language. Some ask you to talk to other people, to elicit their language use or thoughts on certain issues. Some require

you to collect data from other sources around you, such as the newspapers or television. Some you will be able to do alone, and some need group discussion. One of the main reasons we have included Activities is that we believe that the ideas we are discussing in this book really come alive when you begin to look for them in the language which goes on around you. We have seen students' attitudes change from mild interest, or even a lack of interest, to absolute fascination when they have started to investigate language use for themselves.

If the ideas we have presented here are ones you have come across before, we hope we have presented them in such a way as to provoke further thought, or make connections you hadn't previously made. If you haven't thought about some of the ideas we raise here before, we hope that you also find them exciting and spend the rest of your life listening to what people say, reading newspapers and watching television commercials differently.

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