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Abstract

Language plays a crucial role in the exercise of power and the present article aims to study how language can be used as a strategic tool for power in different types of communications. It also helps to better understand why language should be studied in context and what impact its types may have on communication.

The methodology of this study is a systematic critical literature review combined with conceptual analysis, through which key concepts drawn from sociolinguistics, discourse theory, and related fields are examined and compared. The review follows a thematic synthesis procedure: relevant scholarly sources were identified, their core arguments on language, power, and discourse were extracted, and recurring themes; including identity construction, symbolic power, and institutional gatekeeping, were synthesised into a coherent analytical framework.

The **relevance** of this study lies in the examination of language as a tool of power contributing to a deeper understanding of how dominance is maintained through discourse.

The results of the review indicate that, although language can be defined in various ways, a core function attributed to it across the scholarly literature is its role as a medium of power. The **novelty** of the study is determined by the fact that unlike the traditional approaches the present study conceptualizes language as a dynamic mechanism of influence rather than a means of information exchange. The reviewed sources consistently argue that language operates as a means through which social identities are shaped and negotiated, particularly in political, institutional, and media contexts.

Keywords: language, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), communication, power, discourse.

Introduction

Although there is no definitive answer to the question how language originated, the role of language is profoundly strategic and transformative in communication. Language is defined in various ways. However, the main definition of language is that it is a means by which someone speaks or writes. It enables people not only to share ideas but also to direct thought, construct meaning, and establish social control.

CDA examines how language constructs, reinforces, and legitimizes social disparities, focusing on the interests served and negated within specific discourses. Fairclough in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) argued that language is a form of social practice [Fairclough]. CDA claims that language should be analyzed in context to better understand the speaker's intentions and that is the reason it does not analyze the words themselves. CDA looks at the things like the interlocutor's social identities, their backgrounds both historical and cultural and overall power network. The latter has a crucial role in the analysis as communication, verbal interaction, language use and discourse come under micro-level of hierarchy i.e. the micro-level of social order; however, inequality, dominance and power are a part of macro-level and the main objective of CDA is to connect the levels [Fairclough, 9].

Any human action is strongly influenced by language. So, language dominates in various human daily activities. It creates beliefs and values that guide our lives. The function of language as a tool to seek and reveal truth was recognized as early as in Ancient Greek by various philosophers, among them Aristotle. Thus, the history of world civilization mirrors the history of language. However, the use of language impacts the nation's perceptions, behaviour and more crucially the communication [Apriyanto].

There are ten types of communication: the formal types of communication, informal types of communication, oral communication (face-to-face), oral communication (distance), written communication, non-verbal type of communication, grapevine communication, feedback communication, visual communication and active listening. In all ten types of communication, language has a dominant and indispensable role having an impact on social, legal, educational and political practices [Kapur, 3].

Different communication systems mean different languages and although these differences between systems hinder understanding, they do not completely block it. This is mainly because of the fact that although animal language is limited, human language is infinitely creative and people can speak about things that do not even exist. The main purpose of language is considered to be a facilitator of communication through which people also express their local or national identity. So, language shapes every part of human life and should be understood and studied in social context taking into account the cultural and historical background of the speaker and interlocutor.

This study employs a systematic critical literature review as its primary method. Relevant scholarly sources were identified through database searches (Google Scholar, JSTOR, and institutional

repositories) using keywords such as 'language and power,' 'discourse and dominance,' 'Critical Discourse Analysis,' and 'linguistic capital.' Sources were selected on the basis of their direct relevance to the relationship between language and power, their citation impact, and their disciplinary diversity across linguistics, sociology, and communication studies. The identified literature was then subjected to conceptual analysis: core arguments were extracted and organised thematically around four areas: the theoretical foundations of power, language as symbolic and social practice, practical manifestations of linguistic power, and the mechanisms that enable it. This thematic synthesis constitutes the analytical framework of the article.

What Makes Language Powerful: Perception, Legitimacy, Identity, and Knowledge ***Defining Power: Key Theoretical Perspectives***

Individuals shape, and are also shaped, by communicative processes, which affects how people interact and perceive each other. The role of language in our societies prompts questions about its use as a tool that may carry great power in terms of how our lives are influenced via communication. This idea has been explained and defined in different ways. According to Weber, power refers to one's ability to make his or her demands felt in society despite any opposition from those around him or her. On the matter of domination, Weber further clarifies the idea of a probability that a person's will or desire might be enforced on another person or group of people. In this sense, these aspects are intrinsic to all forms of social structures. Therefore, the study of the role of language in power, especially its connections to dominance or subordination have become a crucial topic to study and research [Weber].

Bertrand Russell compared power with energy claiming the importance of power in social science as energy is crucial for physical science. In his book Russell fell back on Weber's perspective that power is the act to obtain intended effects by some people over others; however he didn't distinguish the fact whether people obey a power holder involuntarily or voluntarily [Russel, 35].

Most researchers who studied power after Weber embraced the idea that power over people is a fundamental question of domination and submission, freedom and restraint. Well-known power theorists as French and Raven, Simon and Lukes also defined power as a control over people and claimed power to be an issue of domination and submission, freedom and restraint as mentioned above [French and Raven, 150], [Simon, 46], [Piper, 136].

Sturm and Antonakis later have started to study the notion and the nature of interpersonal power and claimed that interpersonal power has three subcomponents: agency, means and ability to enforce one's will [Sturm and Antonakis, 139]. Moreover, among the means of the interpersonal power through which it is applied, they listed charisma, expertise, incentives and punishment. In the

case of charismatic leadership, the sources of charisma are considered to be characteristics of both leaders and followers.

Language as a Medium of Power

Power is not only based on physical force, legal constraints, material wealth or even charisma as one of its means; much of it operates literally, through language. In fact, language is defined as a channel for conveying information; however it is also a social practice; thus, it plays a fundamental role in creating, resisting, and changing power relations. According to current sociolinguistic and philosophical theories influenced by Michel Foucault, power is not a static “possession” held by some individuals or institutions; it’s a dynamic “strategy” embedded in everyday social interactions and discourse. Thus, language as discourse becomes the arena in which power circulates: by shaping discourse, power shapes what is the actual reality. In that sense, any type of communication which can include an utterance, a political speech, institutional communication, or even an everyday talk takes part in the micro-mechanics of power [García et al., 5], [Kalbayev & Abduramanova, 95].

It is crucial to mention that language does not just passively mirror reality; it actively constructs reality. This is the reason why people who run dominant discourses control not only what is said, but how people perceive their talk and; therefore the world; they can define norms, values, identities, and even hierarchies. This makes language a powerful medium for legitimizing authority, controlling knowledge, and organizing social life [Nwanyanwu].

Symbolic Power, Identity, and Knowledge

Later, another important notion has been discovered and introduced by sociologists. Pierre Bourdieu introduced linguistic capital, the idea that mastery of certain language forms, styles or registers becomes a source, enabling social prestige or access to opportunities in a hierarchical society [Bourdieu, 163].

The repeated use of particular discourses can cause the normalization and later acceptance of certain world-views. Furthermore, language can frame reality in ways that acquire consent, naturalize dominance and make power seem legitimate rather than imposed. So, language doesn’t just reflect power, what is more crucial it produces it, maintains it and enables its reproduction across social contexts [Fairclough, 76].

Language is considered a strong power because it is deeply intertwined with social structures: it shapes how we perceive and accept the world, how social authority and legitimacy are granted, how identities are formed, and how knowledge that is considered true, valid, and realistic is produced and maintained further.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described language as a form of “symbolic power” that “constitutes the given through utterances, of making people see and believe the world itself”

[Bourdieu, 170]. In that way, language both reflects reality, through its lexical and syntactic categories. Consequently, people's perception of themselves, others, and the world is formed by language. What seems "natural," "normal," or "common sense" often comes from the dominant language practices and discourses but not from some neutral reality. Therefore, language becomes a means through which power subtly, continuously, and almost invisibly exercises by shaping perception and structuring reality [Kramsch, 12].

Language, dialect, and accent are considered social markers. Bourdieu states that a dialect or accent may reflect a person's status and position in the social hierarchy [Bourdieu, 55]. For example, standard or prestigious language is quite often associated with higher status in the society while, non-standard language, the example of which is a dialect, may be stigmatized by the others. Language is a means of social classification and an index of belonging; as the way a person speaks becomes part of one's identity, social background, and perceived legitimacy. Thus, language is one of the primary ways an individual is positioned in society. The connection between language and identity shows that power is exercised both externally and internally: people learn to see themselves and others through linguistic categories imposed by dominant social structures. [Bourdieu, 58]. Concrete evidence of this mechanism is found across a range of contexts: bilingual speakers who code-switch to avoid stigmatisation, students whose academic potential is evaluated partly on register competence, and job candidates who are assessed on accent as a proxy for social background. These documented patterns demonstrate that language does not merely reflect social hierarchies, it actively reproduces them.

Language institutionalizes certain discourses, making them dominant. When a discourse starts dominating, it shapes public consciousness, social norms, and power dynamics: and based on this, conflicting voices may be excluded or marginalized. Through this mechanism, language becomes a tool for gate-keeping knowledge, distributing legitimacy, and promoting existing power structures [Leezenberg, 215]. Therefore, by identifying who can produce or control knowledge, language exercises control over truth, belief, and hierarchy.

Thus, language is embedded in social structures, institutions and habits. Through discourse language shapes perception and social reality; grants legitimacy and symbolic capital; constructs identity, social belonging, and hierarchy; regulates access to knowledge and control over what counts as truth. And this is the reason why language becomes a primary medium of power.

Practical Manifestations of Linguistic Power & Mechanisms that Enable It

Language, as a means of power reveals its strength most clearly in everyday social, political, institutional and media practices. Below several domains in which language is used to enact, maintain, or challenge power are discussed and the common mechanisms and linguistic strategies that underlie these manifestations are highlighted.

Political Discourse and Rhetoric

Political leaders continuously use language to define social groups, institutionalize authority, legitimize policies and shape public perception. For instance, a study has recently been carried out using a 3-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how Nelson Mandela's speeches exercised to mobilize ideology, promote unity, and reform collective identity in South Africa. By using stylistic devices such as metaphors, repetition, inclusive pronouns, and moral appeals, Mandela's rhetoric demonstrated how political language can reconstruct social consciousness and institutional legitimacy [Khan & Rehman, 168]. Likewise, analysis of speeches by famous socio-political leaders shows how executive choices, i.e. modality, repetition, ideologies, presupposition, assert dominance or challenge existing power structures [Ali & Jamal, 50].

Media Narratives and Public Discourse

Mass media often dominates through various means, including representation, framing, and discourse management. Various types of mass media, including social media platforms, standardize certain worldviews or the opposite stigmatize certain social groups, or they can also reinforce ideological dominance or primacy. For example, in news coverage of social conflict and immigration, which has recently become popular due to the wars between Artsakh and Azerbaijan, and Russia and Ukraine, certain choices of labels, such as "terrorists," "refugees," "protestors," "illegal immigrants;" and metaphors, such as "wave," "threat," "flood" impact public opinion, social attitudes, and even policy support effectively exercising symbolic power [Critical Discourse Analysis | Unpacking Words, Power & Society, n.d.]. In addition, any media discourse that is periodically repeated and institutionalized becomes powerful and is later internalized and standardized by the audience as "common sense." Such narratives might later make particular power relations seem natural and inevitable.

Institutional and Professional Discourse: Law, Bureaucracy, Academia

Institutional language, including legal jargon, bureaucratic register, and academic discourse, is considered a gatekeeping tool. Proficiency in such language affords authority, legitimacy, and access to resources. Bourdieu argues that institutional discourse implicitly maintains hierarchical structures by controlling who is authorized to speak and whose voice is recognized as legitimate. Because institutional discourse is codified and demands specialized knowledge, it functions as a form of symbolic capital: competence in it signals status, power, and legitimacy, while those without it risk being marked as "outsiders" [Bourdieu].

Mechanisms and Linguistic Tools of Power

Language functions as a tool of power not only through what is said, but how it is said, who says it, and what is more important who has the authority to define meaning. Several mechanisms and linguistic strategies enable power to exercise across political, media, institutional, and everyday contexts. Those mechanisms include framing and labeling, narrative repetition and discursive structure, specialized registers and jargon, modality, etc.

Framing refers to the demonstration of reality, that was selected by the speaker, to shape perception and legitimize actions, while labeling assigns identities or even moral value to individuals or groups of people. For instance, media outlets often narrate the same group as “refugees” or “illegal immigrants,” which in its turn impacts public attitudes and policy support [Coschignano et al.]

Repeated narratives and carefully structured discourse standardize certain ideologies, because of which they might appear natural or practical. They might as well reinforce dominant viewpoints and social hierarchies [Fairclough, 95].

Specialized Registers and Jargon

Mastery of institutional, legal, or bureaucratic language grants legitimacy and symbolic capital excluding those without expertise. So, in this case legitimized authorities and expertise play an important role. A good example of this might be legal or academic documents that rely on technical language that restricts understanding to qualified individuals [Abolarin-Egbebiola & Dada, 14].

Modality, Vagueness, and Presupposition

Speakers can indirectly claim authority through modal verbs (must, should, may), hedging, or implied assumptions. It can influence obligations, responsibilities and even social expectations; however, it maintains a plausible negative response or as it is called deniability. This is very often used by politicians to make implicit demands [Ali & Jamal, 55].

Pronouns and Identity Construction

The use of inclusive or exclusive pronouns (we, us, they) forms social identity and group membership. For example, the use of inclusive pronouns can build solidarity, identify groups and even convey legitimacy [Khan & Rehman, 169], [Ali & Jamal, 57].

Code-Switching and Contextual Adaptation

Switching between languages, dialects, or registers is a very good strategy to reach diverse audiences or negotiate political/social contexts. For instance, Euromaidan activists altered languages to mobilize support across communities, which was a very effective strategic step. This strategy does not only signal inclusion or exclusion but maximizes social impact [Slobozhan et al, 4].

These mechanisms emphasize that language is not neutral. Each tool enables actors to define reality, control knowledge, legitimize authority, and construct identities. Together, they explain why language is a primary means of power in both subtle and plain forms.

To conclude, we can claim that the analysis of language as a vehicle of power proves that power is not merely applied through pressure or institutional authority, but what might be more crucial through symbolic, discursive, and ideological means. Language is the main way to build perception, negotiate identities and legitimize authority; and knowledge is controlled within the different spheres of politics, media, institutions and society.

Conclusion

Language can be defined in various ways, including that of a way to convey information to a primary means of power that shapes social reality, legitimizes authority, and forms identities across political, media, institutional, and everyday contexts.

The systematic critical literature review conducted for this study synthesises a substantial body of scholarship demonstrating that language is deeply intertwined with power relations. The reviewed sources: spanning sociology, linguistics, CDA, and communication studies, consistently show that language operates as a mechanism through which social identities are negotiated, hierarchies are maintained, and authority is naturalised. While the study does not apply CDA as an empirical analytical method, the thematic synthesis of the literature provides a coherent account of the multiple pathways through which language exercises power: through framing, symbolism, register gatekeeping, and discursive normalisation.

Understanding the mechanisms through which a language gets its power is key in analyzing social dynamics, promoting critical literacy, and ethical communication. In examining language as a tool of domination and resistance, the current study underscores that power is discursive, dynamic, and pervasive-operating both at subtle and evident levels.

The results obtained can be **significant** for linguistics and discourse analysis as well as sociolinguistics and communication studies as it highlights the role of rhetoric, framing and narrative strategies in shaping public opinion.

As for the further **practical application** the findings of the study can be relevant for educators, policy makers, media professionals and all those who promote and encourage more ethical and responsible communication practices.

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