

WEEK 2: LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

Professionals are often required to write or speak persuasively and informatively, so how language functions is important to them as well as being aware of the techniques of *persuasive discourse* and the art of language in order for communication to be successful.

LANGUAGE:

*Language helps form the limits of our reality. It is our way of **ordering, classifying and manipulating** the world. Through language humans become members of a collective environment of mutual understanding.* Communication utilises language as its channel.

PERSUASION: USING SPEECH IN PERSUASION:

Spender states that language is our means of ordering, classifying and manipulating the world. The purpose of persuasion is to affect opinions attitudes or beliefs; opinions are viewed as the most subject to change whereas beliefs are considered the least. The effect and form of persuasion depends on the audience: to an intimidating audience the persuader may use language to gain the audiences hearing. However if the audience seem uncommitted to the issue the persuader will try to push them towards a supporting the argument. If they already accept the argument, the persuader will aim to gain a commitment from them.

PROXIMITY OF AUDIENCE vs. AVAILABILITY OF TEXT:

-The audience can respond positively or negatively to the persuader, so content and style of the content must be versatile to the specific target audience to keep in touch with their feelings; e.g. the speaker may encourage interruptions and questions.

-On the other hand a written paper **stands alone**. Its aim is to maintain a coherent argument which the reader should follow. In written persuasion it is important that the entire text focuses on the argument instead of beating around the bush. However it is easy for the reader to re-read the paper and hence reading is less stressful than listening.

-**SPEAKERS** can use **non-verbal** forms or communication to enhance and contribute to the presentation of their argument. Similarly a writer uses non-verbal aspects such as layout and design of the document to make the argument easy to follow.

-tone: Anger, friendly.... The speaker's tone may vary with the words and how they are said; on the other hand a writer only has words to convey meaning. Therefore they may use exaggerated descriptions or examples.

RETAINING COMPLEX ARGUMENTS: Simply speaking involves relying on the listener to absorb a lot of information, therefore strong points need to be made and restated in other forms e.g. an anecdote followed by a summary. The structure may need to be underlined with transitions etc... otherwise risking the loss of the reader's attention. Readers also have the option to skim through pages.

SHARED QUALITIES (of persuasive writing and speech): Readers and listeners prefer to be treated as equals. Writing (except for formal documents) can adopt tricks of speech such as colloquial style linking to the "voice" of the audience (thus a method of connecting with different audiences).

For both writing and speaking introductions need to be strong, short and attention-grabbing while the conclusion usually challenges the audience to consider the consequence of what has been communicated to them (alongside a sense of finality).

COMPLEX MEDIA: A message which has been written may be intended for speech and vice versa. It is unsuitable to read a paper written to read silently to a large audience. The formal and carefully constructed sentences can come across as dull to the ear. The piece of paper becomes a barrier between the speaker and the audience because they know that if it is in writing they will be able to read it later. Additionally the mechanical, unanimated medium is boring.

On the other hand, many written messages are tailored for speech such as display advertisements to directly appeal to the reader by utilising slang or contracted phrases.

DISCOURSE: *The totality of codified language (vocabulary) used in a given field of intellectual enquiry and of social practice, such as legal discourse, medical discourse, and religious discourse.*

Discourse is also **complete spoken and/or written texts created within social and cultural contexts.**

-Personal discourse is shaped by the occurrences around us (e.g. television programme or your profession) linking to the vocabulary of your profession, and the needs levels of understanding and expectations of your receiver. In its lowest form discourse is a collection of statements that construct our sense of reality. The way we talk about things can serve a strategic purpose –encouraging people to think about things in a certain way. *Mixing discourses is known as CONTESTATION and is very common.*

Writers and speakers therefore will often choose a particular discourse, or mixture of discourses depending on their audience and their rhetorical/persuasive purpose.

THE LANGUAGE GAME: The language game is played according to rules, norms and principles instilled in us since infancy.

-RULES: in writing the breaking of rules (grammar, sentence structure spelling etc) is more obvious because the words are permanent.

-NORMS: the specified procedures expected of people in a particular discourse and in a particular culture. Violating norms can occur while using 'vulgar' words in a formal environment. Norms depend on the situation, but in most cases, obvious norms are: waiting our turn to speak, not abusing other speakers with whom we disagree, not telling lies...

-PRINCIPLES: it is important to understand and be in control of the principles of the game. Being good at the game could involve: persuading the customer to buy; inspiring or convincing the audience (these all require pulling something extra). For example:

-Good leaders speak firmly and with confidence, humorous language may disarm a hostile audience, an exam essay should address the terms of the question, developing a sound argument and using original ideas and examples related to the main theme.

e.g. Winston Churchill could have said "I must warn you there will be heavy fighting and many deaths, hard work..." before WW2, instead he said "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat"

LANGUAGE AND MEANING: Meaning can change from one context to another, one moment to another and is thus an elusive concept. Word like "mean" have so many meanings in different contexts.

The problem with this is that most meanings of a communicated message differ between the source or sender and the receiver or destination.

"many pairs of people may say the same thing on different occasions in conversation, each occasion is observably different in many aspects from the others; such differences depend on accents, experiences, present states of mind, the environment, future consequences of interpreting the message, knowledge of each other, and many other factors."- Colin Cherry

Senders and receivers often misinterpret meaning as it is so complex and hard to pin down, perfect mutual understanding would be mental telepathy.

LANGUAGE AND REALITY: Meaning exists (not in words), in the minds of the senders and receivers of a communication exchange, it is important for senders and receivers to understand and acknowledge the impact of their personal perspectives on how they interpret and use the language. The language each of us uses is not reality but a representation of reality a personal interpretation of the world as we know it. This is because we all view the world differently and language is the medium in which we come to some kind of agreement on our individual experience.

-Naming not only leads to familiarity with, and easier classification and memory of, what is named, but what is named can be easily shared. Normal perception works by constant feedback in which the gap between the real world and the socially constructed is constantly reduced.

-Our reality can be hindered by the metaphors we use as they create structure in the way we conceptualise our experiences, to the extent that what we think and the way we think is what we say.

NEW WORDS FOR NEW MEANINGS: Modern life and technology continue to churn up new words and ways to denote new ideas, relationships, jobs and inventions.

-Social media has created online communities allowing the sharing of information, ideas and personal messages by so many mediums.

New words and concepts include: “tweet”, “crowdsourcing {obtaining needed services, ideas or content from a large group of people-online communities, rather than traditional employees/suppliers}”.

-**Pop-culture** introduced the idea of a cougar, bromance etc...

-**Neologisms/Buzzwords:** alienism, aerodrome etc...



It is therefore difficult to predict the lifespan of a word; some disappear while others extend their original meanings (e.g. radar).

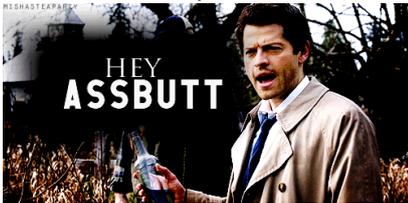
TECHNICAL TERMINOLOGY & JARGON: a restricted use of language by a professional, administrative, trade or religious group. Jargon may have the same meanings but it often connotes incomprehensible, longwinded

statements to either make the speaker/writer seem important OR to reveal information. Each profession has its own technical terminology, this is what differentiates it.

Information technology is a source of new technical terms (cyberlanguage), it has created new acronyms, utilised words such as mouse and bookmark to familiarise with most computer users (even non-users) and created blends and inventions (cyberloafing).

Jargon is language designed to exclude non-experts it can lead to obscurity and subterfuge, and deliberate miscommunication, even within the profession.

-**SLANG:** friendly, colourful and creative. it is irreverent and funny, sometimes vulgar. Essentially informal and usually colloquial language-not meant for formal writing, but for conversation. Slang depends on its suitability for the audience concerned; it is often easy to decipher the age of a person by the slang they use.



Additionally, each profession will have its own slangs alongside the jargon.

-**TEXTSPEAK: (SMS)** e.g. “u wot m8????”

-**DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION:**

Denotation is the literal or straightforward meaning of words. Denoting is pointing, it I meant to be objective and unemotional, “keep left”.

Connotation is a subjective meaning we give to a word, a meaning or meanings that may depend on our emotions or attitudes, culture, age group, profession or personal memories. Connotations can be negative of positive.

Words can have both connotative and denotative meanings: Innocence=“absence of guilt” but could also lean towards immaturity or lack of experience. As a result connotations should be used consciously and intentionally. Words are often presented as though they were denotations when in fact they are heavily connotative. Some words are used to dodge reality and avoid accusation of value judgements. For example “downsizing” sounds more professional and denotative than “we have to dismiss several of our staff”.

-**EUPHEMISMS:** the practice of using non-offensive, brutal or painful action or states. E.g. “passing away” is used instead of “death”. Euphemisms are the norms of the language game→ being polite. On the other hand it can be used in anti-social ways: “culling kangaroos” instead of “indiscriminate slaughter”.

-**DOUBLESPEAK:** the term given to euphemisms to cover up horrendous crimes against human rights and life. The term implies hypocrisy: we are hiding the atrocities by using polite or vague phrases.

NON-DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE: Definition is not neutral and the way we define things indicates the power we have over them. "Negro" is still associated with the lower end of the American social scale. To some extent this shift in language was prompted by the view that the way we describe the world and reality forms our meaning of it and may lead to actions and behaviours that continue or even worsen discrimination. Biased language can also harm people as it communicates inaccurately about what it means to be male or female, black, white, homosexual etc...

Bias can occur by leaving people/ groups out, making unwarranted assumptions about individuals or groups, calling individuals or groups by names, writing as though all members of certain groups are alike and unnecessarily labelling individuals as belonging to certain groups when this membership is irrelevant to the issue.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: The term usually implies that these social considerations are excessive or of a purely "political" nature. These groups most prominently include those defined by gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. Is often used ironically by many people to complain about what they see as a restriction to their "free speech". Using names as labels to classify people, racially, religiously, culturally or sexually, loading them with negative connotations was seen to perpetuate and classify people to justify discrimination against particular groups.

1995 RACIAL HATRED ACT: making racial discrimination unlawful: some argue it suppresses expressing oneself. *freedom of speech vs. racial discrimination*

GENDER: language determines our perception of the world → without words we would be incapable of understanding and describing it. However, language has fabricated women as inferior to men, leading to discrimination in the workplace. "He, his or him" are generically used as pronouns while titles/professions are given in masculine contexts: "actor, poet, chairman" instead of actress, poetess etc...

Many words describing men are given positive connotations-(bachelor, master, governor) whereas the opposite for women (mistress, spinster etc...).

Women desire to be seen as socially equal, and perhaps language reform is working for women. Most writers today are careful to use gender inclusive language and not doing so can in fact be seen as offensive.

Instead of "the writer should include humour in his argument" → "his" should be replaced with "their". Using generic male terms such as man and he to represent all human beings is not an accurate reflection of reality, and readers react to these discrepancies. This will discredit the writing.

FEMINIST THEORY AND LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTION:

Women and men communicate differently with different language styles-yet no style is better than the other.

-Women speak in "**wh-imperatives**" (questioningly), 'tag questions' → a statement of opinion followed by a question as though seeking reassurance.

-'**Qualifiers**' and '**apologies**', that is, excessively hedging statements with conditions and appearing to be apologetic about having opinions at all.

Women tend to downplay their certainties while men downplay their doubts. Women use ritual apologies to maintain balance in relationships, men take these apologies literally.

-Men are likely to use '**agonism**'- a ritual, aggressive, confrontational debating style in workplace discussions whereas women are distressed by fighting and amazed by friendliness.

-Women give compliments more frequently than men, but expect a return whereas men don't fear "being put-down" if a compliment is not given/returned.

-Men and women have different types of humour and in meetings women speak in an attenuated/personal tone while men are more assertive.

-**The 'glass ceiling'** that holds women back from promotions is due to language: qualities sought out for promotions are decisiveness and abilities to lead. Men interpret the behaviour of women as indecisiveness causing an inability to assume authority and even incompetence.

