PAPER ON LANGUAGE AND POWER

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INTRODUCTION

My paper deals with how language and power are related one another and also how language plays a major role, get influenced by power. One obvious feature of how language operates in social interactions is its relationship with power, both influential and instrumental. Neither rule nor law, neither discipline nor hierarchy sanctions influential power. It inclines us or makes us want to behave in certain ways or adopt opinions or attitudes, without obvious force. It operates in such social phenomena as advertising, culture and the media. (Strictly, we are not coerced into buying what the advertiser shows us, nor will we suffer any penalty for our "sales resistance".) Instrumental power is explicit power of the sort imposed by the state, by its laws and conventions or by the organizations for which we work. It operates in business, education and various kinds of management. (In many, but not all cases, if we resist instrumental power, we will be subject to some penalty or in trouble.)

> Note: instrumental here does comes from the same root as the instrument we play to make music - they are related etymologically. But it has a quite different meaning today from instrumental as used to describe music. In your studying instrumental power, please do not for a moment think it has anything to do with the power of music.

In some spheres of social activity, such as politics or law, both kinds of power may be present at the same time:
- we are subject to laws (enforced by penalties), but
- some legal processes, such as trial by jury, rely on attempts to persuade.

Politicians impose laws, taxes, and bureaucratic systems (instrumental power) but seek to influence us to endorse their policies or turn out to vote for them (influential power). They may wish to influence us to use our collective power to return them to office, where they will use their executive power to direct some aspects of our lives - a curious paradox of our system of parliamentary democratic representation. (That is they get us to give them the power to tell us what to do and how to live. And we really do have the choice, collectively, as we show when we vote for a change of government.)

In looking at how power is exercised through language, you should be able to refer to real examples you have found, and explain these texts. But you should also have a theoretical approach that will enable you to interpret language data you are presented with in an exam. Among other things, you should look at pragmatics and speech act theory, lexis and semantics (forms and meanings), forms that include or exclude (insiders or outsiders), structures (at phrase, clause and discourse level), forms of address, phatic tokens, as well as structural features of speech, which may be used to exercise or establish power. And in some contexts, you will need to be able to show how rhetorical devices are used to influence an audience Consider, for example, how conversational maxims may be adapted for reasons of expedience, rather than integrity. Does all power corrupt in language, as (according to Lord Acton) it does generally?

Persuasive techniques in language

This guide looks at the different subjects that examiners specify, but there are many techniques that are common to various contexts. In this section you will find some guidance on these. As well as looking for them in texts that you study, you may try to use them in texts that you produce - for example in original writing or editorial writing tasks.

Simile and metaphor

We may think of these primarily as devices in poetry, but they abound, consciously or unintended, in almost all spoken and many written texts, as when political reporters talk of a "raft" of measures. Satan (Andy Hamilton) in an episode (from 2001) of Old Harry's Game (a radio sitcom set in Hell) remarks of one of the characters that he is "shaking like a Millennium Bridge" and of another that he has "the willpower of Bill Clinton at a cheerleaders' convention". The first is a simile, the second a metaphor.

Both were topical in 2000, and exploit assumed attitudes in the audience - that we know (and are amused by) the engineering problems of the Millennium Bridge (good to look at, perilous to walk on) and the reputation of President Clinton.George W. Bush uses it for more serious effect when (in a State of the Union address) he describes the American faith in freedom and democracy as "a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations." You will find these techniques not only in grand and serious contexts. If you want to collect metaphors, listen to soccer reports on Radio 5 - some of the summarizers even have their own favourite stock of images. Stuart Hall can be relied on for these, whether he is using the dead metaphor "School of Science" for Everton FC or likening the soccer player Emile Heskey to a wildebeest.

Mixed metaphor or simile

Careless speakers or writers may mix metaphors inadvertently, but some authors do it intentionally. Even Shakespeare does this, as when Hamlet proposes "to take arms against a sea of troubles" - presumably both the playwright and the Prince realize that this is a strange action. The audience sees it as a metaphor of an impossible struggle. (W.B. Yeats used this idea in a poem called Cuchulain's Fight With the Sea) Mixing metaphors can have comic effects, as when a character in Mel Smith's 1989 film, The Tall Guy, remarks of an attractive woman that: "She's like a hungry leopard in full bloom." In fiction, mixing metaphors in dialogue is a stock way to make the reader question the intelligence of a character.

In other contexts it may come from the attempt to compare or relate things others have said. Many years ago, the late Enoch Powell, warning about the future effects of large-scale immigration referred to rivers of blood running in the UK. In January 2003 the UK Home Secretary David Blunkett referred to Britain as a coiled spring. In Any Questions(a radio programme in which various experts answer questions from the audience), Jonathan Dimbleby, the host, first said, (summarizing others' comments), "the country's like a coiled spring and this could spill over..." then asked, [is] "David Blunkett's coiled spring a tributary of Enoch Powell's river of blood?" Mr. Dimbleby appears to have seen that this is an inelegant mixing of metaphor, but his main purpose was, in posing the question, to relate the statements of others, who chose the original images.

Extended metaphor

In rhetoric, a speaker may return to or develop a metaphor, to make an argument seem more compelling. In John F. Kennedy's 1961 Inaugural Address to the American people, we find an extended metaphor of lighting a fire to give light to the world:

"The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavour will light our country and all who serve it, and the glow from that fire can truly light the world."

Allusion

Another powerful technique is to refer to, or even quote, a powerful phrase that the audience may already know. There is some risk in this, as the author needs to be sure that enough of the audience will be aware of the allusion or reference, unless the quoted phrase works well even if its origin is not known. In the lines quoted above, Kennedy seems to allude to the image, in St. John's gospel, of Jesus as "the light of the world".

Ronald Reagan's speechwriter, Peggy Noonan, borrowed an image from John Gillespie Magee's poem High Flight to explain the disaster in 1986 when the Challenger space shuttle exploded:

"We will never forget them (the crew), nor the last time we saw them this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye, and slipped the surly bonds of earth, to touch the face of God." (Magee's poem begins: "Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth" and ends "...I've...Put out my hand and touched the face of God.")

In commenting on language data, you may find it hard to detect allusion - in a way it is almost impossible unless you know what it is to which the speaker or writer alludes. On the other hand, there are many contemporary texts in which a young person has more chance of detecting a reference than an older one. A good example is a short feature (in the Guardian newspaper's tabloid supplement) that purports to be an extract from a chat forum, but is really a spoof. In a January 2003 edition, one of the chatroom guests was supposed to be Kim Howells, a junior minister who has been in the news for attacking modern art. He rebukes the other users of the chatroom for their non-standard spelling, adding: "I blame Mrs. Dynamite". The author intends the reader to be amused by the way "Kim Howells" tries to show an awareness of youth culture, yet reveals his ignorance in changing the title from Ms to Mrs ("Ms Dynamite", as younger readers will know, is the stage name of the rap singer Niomi McLean-Daley.)

Lists of three

Three-part structures and lists are memorable and resonant in many kinds of text. Here are some examples:
And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three...

St Paul, 1 Corinthians 13.13 (King James Version, 1611) The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born. George W. Bush, Inaugural Address, 2001

If you are a daring designer, a budding botanist or simply green-fingered, we want to hear from, you lists of three are not so common in unprepared speaking, but you should look out for them in any language data you have to study.

Repetition

A useful rhetorical device is to repeat a key idea or phrase - this may seem crude, but it may lodge in the minds of the audience. We see it in a speech made by Harold Wilson, during the 1974 UK General Election campaign: "This election is not about the miners; not about the militants; not about the power of the unions..."

Parallelism

Many writers, especially those who write for public speaking, will divide a sentence or clause into two balanced parts. This was the basic principle of poetry in much of the ancient world. There are almost limitless examples in the pages of the King James Bible, which was translated to be a version for public reading. Sometimes the second half echoes or develops the first half - this is synonymous parallelism. Sometimes the two halves are opposed or contradictory, and this is antithetic parallelism or simply antithesis.

Synonymous parallelism

We see this in some lines from George W. Bush's Inaugural Address, where he refers to US history as: "...the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, | to defend but not to conquer." In this example the thought of "to protect but not possess", is carried further by "to defend but not to conquer". In speaking these lines, there will be a pause after "possess". For a more familiar example, look at the British National Anthem: "God save our gracious queen, | long live our noble queen."

Antithetic parallelism or antithesis

The first example comes from a speech of Winston Churchill, in which he challenges the Luftwaffe (the German air force): "You do your worst - and we will do our best". A celebrated example comes from Kennedy's Inaugural Address (quoted above): "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not, what your country can do for you. | Ask what you can do for your country." And we can see antithesis in George W. Bush's images of America's "faith in freedom and democracy", first as a rock, then, by contrast, as a seed: "Through much of the last century, America's faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea. | Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations."

Puzzled or redundant questions

If you wish to make a statement, it may be a good idea to ask a question or series of questions to introduce it. This is a common technique in information leaflets, which often pose the question from the reader's viewpoint - "How can I protect my baby from common infections?" and so on. It can also be powerful in political rhetoric - "How can a Labour government raise standards in education?" leading to an exposition of the party's policy. For example, Welcome to the Labour Party, a booklet which gives information to new members, contains pages where statements are introduced by questions, each set out as a section heading, such as:

* "How can I get involved?",
* "What happens at local policy forums?",
* "Do I have to go along to a local policy forum to have my say?" and
* "What is the future?"

Alliteration

Using the same initial consonant is a common ploy of poets and advertisers. It can be irritating if it's overdone, but makes lines quotable or memorable. In George W. Bush's inaugural speech we note "faith in freedom" and "rock in a raging sea". Winston Churchill, in his speech about the Luftwaffe addresses the Nazi leaders and refers to the Nazi party as "the grisly gang who work your wicked will".

Wordplay: You can create some good effects by using similar words but with slight differences of form and meaning. Andy Bodle in a listings article for the film Rancid Aluminium does this by describing the film as "part arthouse, part shithouse". Here are a couple of examples. The first comes from Dorothy L. Sayers' Introduction to her translation of Dante's great narrative poem, Purgatory:

"Between the bishops who assure us that the family is the one and only seedbed of all the virtues, and the psychiatrists who warn us that it is a hotbed of all the vices, we hardly know how to advise any child to enter upon the hazard of existence." The second comes from Vladimir Nabokov's essay "On a book Entitled Lolita". This is an appendix to his novel of the same name. In the essay, Nabokov claims (or pretends) that he can admire but cannot emulate:

"...the accuracy of judgment of those who pose the fair young mammals photographed in magazines where the general neckline is just low enough to provoke a past master's chuckle and just high enough not to make a post-master frown."

Influential power - advertising

Broadly speaking, advertisers persuade their audience to adopt attitudes to lifestyle, products and services. It is rare to find advertising that seeks to influence explicitly or directly. Less rare are advertisements in which the link to a product or service is implicit or ambiguous. Consider a TV advertisement (May 2000) which depicts Aimee Mullins a model (who is also a paralympic athlete, sprinter, and double below-the-knee amputee) preparing for the finale of a fashion show for Alexander McQueen - the advertisement was made for an Internet service provider, FreeServe, but did no more directly to advertise FreeServe than show the company name and logo. There is an oblique link to the name of the company in the idea of the model's freedom to run with the wild animals depicted in the fashion show. At the same time the advertiser skilfully links a possibly un-sexy technical service with ideas of beauty, fashion and positive discrimination.

Advertising has a lexicon, which may change over time, but is fairly stable - new, improved, proven and other qualifiers are seen as reliable. David Ogilvy in Confessions of an Advertising Man (quoted by Shirley Russell; Grammar, Structure and Style, Oxford, 1994, p. 177) identifies a basic lexicon of qualifiers such as: new, good, crisp, better, fresh, natural, fine, free, and of verbs such as: buy, give, taste, go, look, feel and use. Special registers (technical, scientific or pseudo-scientific) may be used for appropriate products. Torque, BHP, valve, ABS for cars or keramides, pro-B, hypoallergenic in personal hygiene products. Look out for special lexical uses according to product, image and target market. "Pot Noodle - everything else is just pants". Pants is (or was in 2000) fashionable as a mild term of disapproval among young people (especially young men) who may be supposed to want food which is inexpensive, quick to make, and needs no special preparation or utensils.

Advertising borrows and adapts structures and forms from texts of all kinds. Many broadcast advertisements are dramatic, with a narrative conducted through dialogue. Others may show a narrative by images alone, to the accompaniment of music and/or a voiceover. Can you think of examples? Puns, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme and other kinds of comic or poetic wordplay are common in advertising. Ambiguity, irony and allusion (reference) are also powerful techniques.

Influential power - politics

The features of political language vary, as do its purposes. Where politicians interact with society generally, their purposes may be, to persuade voters with a party loyalty to turn out to vote; to move a floating voter's party allegiance, or to make us adopt general political or social attitudes, so we support a given policy. Politicians may also use particular language forms when answering journalists' questions. Where politicians engage in language interactions with other politicians, they may use other particular forms - either loosely or under the rule of an arbiter, such as the Speakers in the UK House of Commons and the US House of Representatives. And finally, a contemporary feature of political language use is what is known as "spin" - providing information to the media in such a way as to favour a desired interpretation, not explicitly stated.

Language and Power (1989; now in a revised second edition 2001) explored the imbrications [1] between language and social institutional practices and of "wider" political and social structures. In the book Fairclough developed the concept of synthetic personalization to account for the linguistic effects providing an appearance of direct concern and contact with the individual listener in mass-crafted discourse phenomena, such as advertising, marketing, and political or media discourse.[4][5] This is seen as part of a larger-scale process of technologisation of discourse, which englobes the increasingly subtle technical developments in the field of communication that aim to bring under scientifically regulated practice semiotic fields that were formerly considered suprasegmental, such as patterns of intonation, the graphic layout of text in the page or proxemic data.

Since Norman Fairclough's Language and Power in 1989, CDA has been deployed as a method of analysis throughout the humanities and social sciences. It is neither a homogeneous nor necessarily united approach. Nor does it confine itself only to method. The single shared assumption uniting CDA practitioners is that language and power are entirely linked.

Media messaging is the primary way contemporary society receives their information, but increasingly the interests behind the messaging are impacting the content produced. With the convergence of media in both form and content, increased complexity in the hybridization of discourse has created a web that traditional forms of analysis can't always adequately untangle. In 'Critical Analysis of Media Discourse', Norman Fairclough, one of the fore bearers of critical discourse analysis, explains his motivations and methods. Discourse analysis is employed to make sense of the ways in which media convey meaning and how construct differing versions of reality, while critical discourse analysis is concerned with power relations in discourse. Language and discourse are closely aligned, though language is a component of discourse, it can also include almost any form of communicative action.

As always, when "power" is spoken of, the first association is that of the power of man over man, of power as suppression of the free will by "commands" and "obedience". Power can easily appear in this connection as the root of all evil in human societies and as the opposite of freedom as such. Yet the problem of power is in truth more complex. And especially in the case of the "power of language", the problem is multi-layered. The "power of language" not only means language in the service of power; language can also undermine power. And above all, as language, it possesses itself power of a very special kind. The relation of language and power is ambivalent.

We have spoken in the first place of the "power of language" as the "language of power". What is here meant in general is that all power must finally use language, be conveyed through it and manifested in it, to command, that is, to speak, where others must only hear and obey. In a more narrow sense, this understanding of the "power of language" is a matter of the instrumentalisation of language for the purpose of exercising power. The command of language itself becomes a means of power: as political rhetoric and demagogy, as ideology and bedazzlement, as seduction through words, as "persuasion". This power of language extends from large political contexts, from the manner of speaking and thus also of thinking that dictatorships and totalitarian orders force upon dominated people, to the small scenes of everyday life, to the arts of seduction of advertising, the sales tricks of telephone marketing, or the menacing undertones at the workplace or in the family.p

This first interpretation of the "power of language" already shows two things. On the one hand, that language and speaking must be distinguished in the exercise of power. The possibilities of language from the way in which language is actually used in spoken words. On the other hand, the interpretation also gives a presentiment that the power which is exercised through language always already bears within itself the germ of its counter-power. For the language of political demagogues and tyrants can be seen through as language. And by means of language itself. So that language conveys the power of violence or domination and at the same time undermines it.

For everyone can take possession of the power of language and in this way see through and unmark the power exercised through language. Seen clearly, the "power of language" is thus not the fraternisation of language with command and obedience; this uses language for goals other than those which are inherent in it. The genuine, inner power of language is rather to undermine this other kind of power. Since ursurpatious and violent rule as well as legitimate rule must ultimately rely on the power of language in order to be exercised, to command and to assert itself, precisely language is the vulnerable spot of the commanding power. For the concealed intentions of a command can be seen through. The command can be obeyed, but it can also be refused; above all, it can be understood and so interpreted or re-interpreted quite as those might like who are supposed to obey it, but who for their part possess the infinitely divisible and epidemically disseminating power of language.

This mechanism can be generalised beyond the political sphere. Without a doubt, the power of language consists in the fact that it can be used for rhetorical persuasion. But its own authentic power consists at least equally in the fact that every "putting into language" already harbours within itself the kernel of doubt. Every attempt to persuade others with and through language is always also an effort to make oneself understood. And regardless of how rhetorically skilled the speaker may be, in the end he inevitably places his words, as language,under discussion.

Whoever speaks, depends on language. And even the most skilful speaker cannot monopolise the power of language. For ultimately the "power of language" lies not with the speaker, but with language itself. The power of language belongs to language itself. And so this power belongs to everyone who possesses language. Whoever has a command of language has part in its power!

Language is not merely a instrument in the hands of power, but also always a counter-power which cannot be restricted and repressed. Power can rest on many factors; for instance, on the possession of weapons or money. These are in short supply;

some possess them and others do not. This scarcity establishes the power of man over man. And it shows the ubiquitous social connection of power and inequality.

This connection, however, does not obtain for the power of language. As with knowledge generally, so with language and the power that proceeds from it: it is illimitably divisible and multiple. Whoever shares knowledge loses nothing of his own share or possession. Everyone can gain knowledge without taking it away from anyone else. Similarly, everyone can attain the power of language without disputing anyone else's right to it.

At exactly this point begins the empowerment through language that marks the work of the Goethe Institute. It is an empowerment through the genuine power of language, not through a specific content or body of knowledge which is conveyed through language. And it is within this frame that the decentralised, world-wide projects of the Goethe Institute are to be understood.

The power of language shows itself not only, and not primarily, in the language of power, of overpowering and repression, but also in its emancipatory potential, in the opening of other and new possibilities of speaking, and so also of thinking and acting. All speech ineluctably refers to a possible contradiction, every "yes" to a possible "no", every assertion to a possible doubt.

A comparable dialectic may also be found where language serves not repression and compulsion, but rather founds, illuminates and corroborates comprehensive and cosmological meaning in aesthetically pleasing, well thought-out forms. This is done above all by mythic or ritualised speech, by means of which man envisages and satisfies himself of the existence of a transcendent and sacred order. Even when in this way a certain social or ruling order is sacralised, mythic and ritualised speech is not another, possibly especially massive, instance of overpowering through language. Man needs the foothold provided by order and social institutions which are established and sustained mainly by linguistic symbolisation.

But precisely here the rendering into language has always opened the possibility of the variation and change of given interpretations, and to the extent that mythic grounds are themselves interrogated about their grounds. Sooner or later, the language of myth presses beyond itself to logos: that is, to word and reason, the language of reason, reasonable and accountable speech.After a long and eventful history, the rule of logos, the reason seeking, reason and counter-reason weighing Reason, reaches it fulfilment in modern science. This science now speaks with the highest, universally binding authority, world-wide and about everything in the world. Its language is the real lingua franca of the developing world society. Its authority is fundamentally egalitarian and democratic; for it and with respect to it, nothing counts but "the non-violent force of the better argument" (Jürgen Habermas).

In fact, however, the language of the sciences is, at least to a good degree, comprehensible and accessible only to the relevant experts. For the bulk of people, on other hand, it is a secret language – also when it is not expressed mathematically but in a very reduced English.

In this certainly lies considerable possibilities for the abuse of power, of which many representatives of science, often together with those who hold political or economic power, avail themselves. But the deeper problem consists in the fact that scientific language, as helpful and indispensable as it is for rationally revealing and taking hold of the world, tends at the same time to an enormous narrowing of man's perception of reality. Not only recently but as long as there has been science, people have observed and criticised the extent to which our experience of the world and of ourselves is stunted when it is restricted to Ludwig Wittgenstein, to whom precisely this restriction seemed imperative, later set against it the insight into language as a "form of life". A very similar insight, if a different philosophical goal, has its source in Martin Heidegger's speaking of language as the "House of Being", where the language here meant is the historically developed, living language in its great and wondrous particularity and variety in general, and the language of poetry, which draws on, extends and goes beyond the historical language, in particular. "Man dwells poetically" says, or better hopes, Friedrich Holder in, and this sentence brings the power of language to expression in its most important and deepest, at any rate in its most beautiful and freest, sense.

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