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# LANGUAGE: THE ULTIMATE TOOL OF SOCIAL CONTROL

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## Introduction

Language is a great force of socialisation, integrated component of culture, symbol of social and cultural identity, a mode of communication and representation. Languages have a deep connection to the thought and culture of the people who speak them and every language divides up the world differently. The present work is an attempt to argue and question these traditional notions of communication and representation of language and the linguistic system of signs which is not an unbiased reflection of the world but a product of ideologies of culture. The concept of variation is not as Saussure thought a product of individual choice but a product of social differentiation. As Saussure said everyone has equal excess to *langue*, and the homogeneities of *langue* are achieved not innate. Language as a sign system is not simply an arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, but an ideologically motivated system of signs which controls and shapes all the social realities. As a matter of fact, language can be used to control the way people think. At the individual level, it is very common for a person who wishes to assert his/her authority and superiority to use longer words to impress, to intimidate or perhaps to mystify and confuse his/her audience. Malinowski has rightly described language as a "mode of action" rather than a "counter-sign to thought." This paper raises some issues regarding how language as a powerful tool is used to shape and re-shape realities, beliefs, and world views and how it acts as a complete tool of social control, and is conditioned by "other" non linguistic parts of society. In order to substantiate the argument, different discourses (both linguistic and non-linguistic) have been taken into consideration and an attempt has been made to show how language controls all arenas of life both overtly and covertly. It is a challenging intellectual task to question such ideologies of culture and people, because the people who question the dominant ideology often appear not to make sense; what they say will not sound logical to anyone who holds that ideology. In extreme cases, people who ask such questions may even appear mad. The most general premise of this paper is that there exist some ideologically driven forces in our society that promote specific types of language use for social control.

### The dominance factor

According to Ruiz (1984, 1990), language(s) can be seen in three ways:

(a) language as a problem, (b) language as a right, and (c) language as a resource. The present study aims to expose the core issues that underpin views of language as a problem and how they, in turn, result in the formation of policies that represent social communication patterns. The important question which one can raise is about the logical and structural dominance of one language over the other, standard over the non-standard or one variety over the other. Well, what we call appropriate and correct is not a property of linguistic structures but their relationship with contexts. It is not the structure of the word which carries the meanings but settings in which they are used are also important. There is a systematic co-variance between linguistic structures and social structures, a kind of mapping speech against various social facts. We usually exploit the affective aspect of language, when we have many utterances in mind to convey the same massage but 'selecting one as appropriate' and not another is showing ourselves to be sensitive to power and social relationships between us and the individuals or groups we are addressing. Question arises why a particular linguistic form attracts affirmative adjectives like *good, correct, pure, proper, educated, articulate and intelligent.* Is the notion of standard logically and structurally superior or a mere construction? Is there any relation between notion of standard and ordered world? Why is standard associated with authority, discipline, social and moral order, its speakers perceived as educated, having respect for societies' standards and norms? It would not be illegitimate to argue that because they support power therefore "inclusion" is that they are part of socially powerful group and why the standard invalidates the "other" (home) dialects. Bloomfield (1927) described "illiterate speech as no more haphazard than any other variety, its users had learned no less but had learned something different." Labov rejected ungrammaticality of everyday speech as myth. Similarly, the cognitive superiority of Standard English was unproven. Linguistically, dialect forms are no more haphazard or unstable and no easier to learn. For example, to learn "I seen" and "I saw" are equally affordable and tough to learn. Prestigious is not always aesthetic and authentic. How come the double negation (I didn't say nothing) was acceptable in 17th century (to mean I didn't say anything) and unacceptable in present English? Purists tried to prove it by applying mathematical rules and argued that two negatives make a positive therefore the double negation *I didn't say nothing* is not acceptable in English language. But the question is can mathematical rules be applied to language. Can truth and false value of language be checked by applying mathematical rules? Of course not, language and the meaning it conveys is context bound, and its truth values unlike mathematical rules can be directly judged from the real world experiences. There are no "primitive" languages. All languages have a system of sounds, words, and sentences that can adequately communicate the content of culture. The languages of the so-called "primitive" people are often very complex in their grammatical structures. There seems to be no correlation between a language's grammatical complexity and the technological level of a society or other aspects of culture.

However, cultures that have more complex, diverse economies and advanced technologies have larger vocabularies. Santa Ana's (2002) analysis of metaphorical rhetoric used in the *Los Angeles Times* during the 1990s is an excellent example of how the media are used to influence the formation of public policy. A striking metaphor offered by Santa Ana is *Language as a prison*: "They consider *English fluency the key* to unlock the *handcuffs of poverty*, a key they themselves will probably never possess" (Santa Ana, 2002;

Johnson, 2003, 2005). The above metaphor entails that languages other than English are bad: they keep speakers in poverty, and they inhibit progress and those who speak them are limited and unfortunate. On the opposite side of the spectrum, it implies that English is good: it is a tool to escape, and it is freedom and those who speak English are liberated from oppression. It is about the use of power and influences to control broader social patterns of language use.

## Hegemonic and Ideological manipulation

The topic of language ideology is a much needed bridge between linguistic and social theory, because it relates the micro culture of communicative action to political economic considerations of power and social inequality, confronting macro social constraints on language behavior (P Kroskrity, Personal Communication). A number of public problems centre on language ideology for example the questions of free speech and harassment; the meaning of multiculturalism in schools and texts, etc.

Research on topics such as pronouns, politeness, and purism has begun the difficult program of considering whose interests are served by linguistic ideology taking the form that it does, relating notions of linguistic ideology as rooted in linguistic structure and cognitive limitations to understandings of ideology as rooted in social practices and interests. It is the attempt to link these two aspects of ideology, and to tie social and linguistic forms together through ideology, that is both most provocative and most challenging. It may not be an exaggeration to consider language as a system by which powerful participants control non powerful participants. The question of "who" is allowed to say "what" to "whom" is related with power and social status, to demonstrate power through language. Would it had not been so or would language had been so simply a way of communication, Emmett Till an African-American teenager from Chicago in 1995 would not had been was murdered by two white men because he didn't address them as "sir". Till had unknowingly broken the social code that required African-Americans to defer to Anglo-Americans. Language use or miss-use can lead to war and peace. Language controls all forms of life and power whether it is derived from age, strength, wealth or rank; it implies the possibility of control. For instance, in almost all cultures children are not allowed to ask the name of elders (as a mark of respect or not to insult) while elders can do the same. We are not always aware that our world views are being manipulated or directed by language which makes it conceptually impossible to question certain values. Once accepted it becomes *"commonsense"* or truth and therefore unchallenged. As George Orwell rightly pointed out that "in our age there is no keeping out of politics. All issues are political issues". Politics is concerned with power, the power to make decision, to control resources, to control other people's behaviour and often to control their values. Worry is that this hidden ideologically motivated power is seen as neutral, normal, and invisible therefore remains unchallenged and unquestioned.

One more curricular debate about language ideology is regarding the language planning and policies and school circular using standard language (as there is no standard language, it is simply preferred status for social reasons alone and is hence closer to speech of some children than to that of others). "As ideological constructs," asserts McCarty (2004), "language policies both reflect and (re)produce the distribution of power within the larger society". By describing policy and ideology as social constructs,

### Media Discourses: Shaping and constructing the realities

The powerful role and the effect of media language discourse in shaping, reshaping and constructing of our world views and beliefs cannot be ignored. Media discourse is designed for mass audiences and sometimes producers do not know who the audiences which is not the case, in case of face-to-face conversation. All discourses are produced with some interpreters in mind, media discourses are produced for an ideal subject. The actual listeners have to build a relationship with the ideal subject to interpret it. There is one-sidedness of media language discourses. In face to face communication, participants can be both producers and interpreters of the text but in media discourses they are only consumers. In face to face communication there is a possibility of convergence or divergence, agreement or disagreement. We shape our speech style according to our audience and even change it according to the feedback. But in media discourses it is not always possible. Much has been said about the language of advertising, but as a matter of fact it also reshapes our thinking and beliefs. For example, the advertisement used for a cream "Fair and Lovely" in which a young girl is being showing confused because no one looks at her since she is not fair, but after applying the particular cream she becomes fair and all, the people get attracted towards her. It unconsciously gives legitimacy to the fact that only being fair is very important and acceptable and not being fair is unacceptable. Similarly, the advertisement of a car on an Indian television channel screening and propagating and showing a well dressed man and his family saying "life so complete now" after getting the particular car. Such kind of advertisements consciously or unconsciously shows and tries to legitimize the fact that without such type of cars life is incomplete and those people who do not own such type of cars do not hold a complete life. It is interesting note that how media plays with the vocabularies, and it is always interesting to see how audience is to make belief. Who has said what is sometimes not clear. For example in discussions and news items the use of utterances like "it is thought" and "it is said" are used to make it true that the third and fourth hand information is absolute fact. In this way, the news item regarding the current hot political debate on Indo-US nuclear deal was discussed by the various news papers in the following manner.

Experts are saying:

*New Delhi* should not sign the deal.

*India* should not sign the deal

*Our country* should not sign the deal

*We* should not sign the deal.

It is not just a news item with different lexical items meaning the same thing, but there is a deliberate and conscious use and preference of different words for the same news item by the people of different ideologies, who directly or indirectly want to convey that what they said is the only correct thing, and try to prove they speak on behalf of the whole nation by using lexical items *we* and *our country*. In other words, they use linguistic items in such a conscious way as if they know and represent the voice of the whole nation, hence what they speak is common-sense and therefore unchallenged, unquestioned and the only

right way of doing things. It answers the question that how the notion of common sense contributes to the domination of some people by others. How common sense assumptions can be ideologically shaped by relations of power. In the same Indo-US nuclear deal hot debate, the terminology used is ideologically motivated and loaded in such a way that it appears neutral, and beneficial, normal and less scary. These labels are deliberately used in order to eliminate the danger or deaths which can be caused by nuclear threat and makes it difficult to talk about the nuclear industry in anything other than positive terms. The question is how can learning of such a language have powerful effect? It stops us to use the language to express our concerns make it conceptually impossible. This language does not allow certain questions to be asked certain values to be expressed. We are not always aware that our world views are being manipulated. The fact is that language can be used to control the way people think. In political speeches the rhetorical use of pronouns *we, our, I* is mostly used for the safer positions and to avoid controversies. The first person mysterious pronoun *we* is used to avoid controversial statements as US president used "we have won the war against the terror" when Afghanistan was attacked after 9/11. Similarly, the first person *I* is used for safer grounds and responsibility and claiming help as was used by the president Bush: "I have sent food packets and clothes to the children who have suffered in the collateral damage in Afghanistan" (CNN, June 22, *2002).*

## Conclusion

Language as a social fact reflects and regulates all types of social relationships consciously or unconsciously. This sort of study of critical language discourses helps us in understanding the role of language in making and unmaking of beliefs and world views. As a matter of fact, arbitrariness of meaning system is hidden and meaning also varies ideologically. There is a difference between meaning of words in dictionary and meaning of words in discourse. For the interpretation of meaning we should know the meaning of constituent parts, connection between sequential parts of the text and connection between the text and the world. We should understand the significance of language in production maintenance and change of social relations of power. It should increase our consciousness of how language contributes to the dominance of some people by others. Had language been simply a way of communication there would not have been scheduled and non-scheduled languages, standard and non-standard languages, national and regional languages, language dialect differences, etc. Also political, religious, social and cultural characteristics would not have been associated with language. So, it substantiates and legitimates the argument that language is a form of social practice which makes and shapes and controls all social realities rather than being simply a mode of communication and representation and an abstract relation between sign and signifier.

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