

## **Language and its implications in society: With reference to language and Power Part 1**

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### **Introduction**

According to Paul Simpson and Andrea Mayr(2010), researchers working in Linguistics and its related field of study have become more interested in how power can influence the way language is used and how power is exercised to control over access to language. Scholars have described language "*as rule-governed, a container, a transmitter, a symbolic system and a social leveler*" based on the way language functions. Power exists in different modalities and may be exercised to deprive people of access to social resources such as life, jobs, status, wealth, education, and knowledge. Wrong (1979) defines powers as "*Power is the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others.*" He further states language is intentionally used to influence authority, manipulation, persuasion, and force except for physical force. According to researchers, it is helpful to make the distinction that power is exercised in two ways i.e. Power through dominance and power by consent.

Research on power is falling into two traditions, the 'mainstream' and the 'second stream'. The mainstream tradition which originates from Weber's study ([1914] 1978) emphasizes on

corrective power of the state and its organizations. It is important to understand that in the mainstream tradition power resides not only within the state but also in other supreme organizations. On the other hand, the second stream tradition which was developed from Gramsci's (1971) study is primarily concerned with the significance of its persuasive influence. Gramsci (1971) also in his concept of 'hegemony' which operates largely through language describes how the dominant groups use mechanisms such as constructing a ruling class/group through creating and maintaining political coalitions, generating consensus among the population and use of coercion through institutions such as legal system, courts, police and military order to stay dominant and persuade the sub-ordinate groups to accept their political and cultural values, morals and institutions. Gramsci argues that sub-ordinate people accept the formations of power because it is efficiently presented by the state as being beneficial and natural or common sense.

Critical discourse analysis is a type of research that studies power abuse and forms of dominance result in social inequality, which is created, maintained, and resisted by the discourse in the social and political context. In the social context, dominant groups abuse power by controlling the actions of others, which is against the interest of those who are controlled and such control is in the interest of those who exercise power. And if communication actions are involved, which is discourse; control over discourse is one of the ways power is related to discourse. In such a case, people do not speak or write with freedom as they are partly or fully controlled by the dominant or powerful groups such as state, military, mass media, or business organization. Suppressing the freedom of text and talk by control is pervasive in society violating specific social or human rights of the people. Though people are free to talk and write what, when, where, and to whom

they want, there are limitations in law for social appropriateness. In this context, discourse under control is not suppression but seems to be the rule.

Power in the present modern-day is persuasive and manipulative rather than coercive force such as orders, commands, and threats. Therefore, discourse can play an important role in the generation of the consent of others. Power abuse may include the use of coercive force such as police aggression against people and which may limit their freedom of action and more importantly may affect the minds of such people. Control over discourse and mind does not apply as a social practice but it is indirect and intended as a result of discourse. People, who control discourse, control the minds of people indirectly since actions are controlled by mind I.e. their values, opinions, ideologies, and social or personal representations. Control of mind means indirect control of actions.

People in power use powerful discourse to indirectly influence other discourse to their interest. For instance, in a communicative event, powerful groups control discourse by deciding who should participate, where, and with what goals. In doing so, powerful groups are regulating access to discourse. Unequally distributed access to a social resource to discourse and communication is one of the major elements responsible for the formation/creation/ reproduction of power abuse and dominance. In the other words, the dominant group with privilege access and control over discourse and communication may easily influence the discourse in such a way that the ideology, values, knowledge, and attitudes of people are affected in their interest. And a measure of access to discourse may be the key indicator of power in dominant groups. For example, everyone does not have equal access to scholarly, legal, or political text, media, or medical discourse. Patterns of unequal access to text and talk may exist in all social domains, genres, and situations.

In general, it is clear that powerful groups constituents groups from state and its institutions, the mass media, the military, the police, and big business corporations, and also other professionals such as teachers or doctors or social roles such as parents. Here it is not the power of the person, but the social position as being part of the power of the organization. For example, in education, it is difficult to identify the difference between learning what is useful and indoctrination of ideologies of powerful groups in society or preventing them from growing their critical potential. In such a case it is difficult to identify the problem because the form of influence is complex, systematic, more diffuse, and cannot be easily noticed by the people involved.

Discourse analysts believe that discursive means of reproduction of social power goes beyond the macro-level analysis of the social and political economy. Analysts say that macro-level structures are related to the production of public discourse. In mass media, powerful groups to gain support and to influence the minds of people at large, control the detailed information, timing, a business report, and interviews with journalists.

Generally, a common misunderstanding is that power is inherently bad and negative but power can be used for positive results as when the news media informs the people, the police protect people, politicians govern the country, and parents teaching the children. Moreover, the legitimate exercise of power helps the society to function smoothly, to maintain law and order, control, and maintain checks and balances in society.

Power abuse by the dominated or ruling group or politicians results in inequality and injustice. For instance, professors and professionals misuse their knowledge to harass students and citizens instead of educating them. Similarly, the Media abuse power by misinforming rather than reporting us. Misinformation, manipulation, and indoctrination are different forms of discursive

domination in discourse. Examples of non-discursive domination that we can notice in our daily life are news reports, stories on women subjected to sexual harassment by men, harassment by police, political corruption, and violence by terrorism.

Discursive domination is not only framed by discourse structures that are more or less accountable and controlled but also in terms of mental consequences. For instance, politicians make repeated stress and focus on criminal characteristics (minorities) to create and form social division and racist attitudes in society. Politicians accused of prejudice or racist talk often defend themselves by saying that they do not control how people understand and interpret their speeches. Dominant or ruling groups fully aware of the mental consequences of their discourse or information and their advertising can have on the minds of the public, engage in discursive malpractice instead of public communication.

Power over discourse is exercised because of the control of access to discourse and production of discourse<sup>11</sup>. People with less power have less access to various types of discourse and eventually, powerless people do not say anything and should remain silent when dominant or powerful people are speaking as in the example of prisoners, suspects, children, and women. Generally, most people who are active speakers have access only to conversations with colleagues at work, friends, and family members. Rarely, informal discussions people as passive speakers have access to conversation with their superiors at the workplace and other organizational representatives. People are expected to speak only when they are asked to do so and similarly give information only when ordered as in the case of the police station, government institutions, and in the courtroom. Less powerful people become only recipients in most of the formal public and printed discourse.

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