

Language and its implications in society: With reference to language and Power Part 2

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Continued

Powerful or dominant people have access to a wide range of discourse, styles, content, and genres, and control the formal discourse in the meetings with subordinates, issue orders, commands, write reports, and various other media discourses. In verbal discourse, dominant people take the initiative, set the style of talk, and decide on the topics and recipients of their discourse.

Importantly, power is not only demonstrated in and through the discourse, but it is also a relevant social force behind discourse. More than the manifestation of the power of the class, status, position, and group of their members, there is a close relationship between power and discourse (Bernstein, 1971-1975; Mueller, 1973; Schatzman & Strauss, 1972).

Power is exercised and expressed through unequal access to styles of discourse, contents, and different genres. Control over discourse is exercised in the terms of production of discourse i.e. material production, distribution, articulation, and influence. In media organizations, financial and technical aspects in the production of discourse are controlled by the owners of newspapers,

printing business, television, technology, and telecommunication industries (Becker, Hedebrø, & Paldán, 1986; Mattelart, 1979; Schiller, 1973). Through budget control, selective investment, recruitment, and instructions which can influence the content. And indirect control over privately operated media is exercised by the corporate companies that help them in advertising and even by the newsagents that regularly give them information.

Especially in the mass media, researchers say "symbolic elites" i.e. small groups of members such as writers, journalists, artists, and academics, exercise exclusive control over the production of discourse (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). They have relative power and freedom in deciding the genre, topics, and style of discourse within their domain. They influence the relevance of the topic, set agenda for public discourse, and manage the type of information to influence who is being portrayed in what way. They create norms, values, morals, beliefs, ideologies, and manufacture public knowledge.

However, they operate under constraints by those who manage the organization and often articulate the voice of their masters. Their interests, opinions, and ideologies are not much different from those who pay them. Therefore, small groups also exercise exclusive control overproduction of discourse (Altheide, 1985; Boyd-Barrett & Braham, 1987; Davis & Walton, 1983; Downing, 1980; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Golding & Murdock, 1979; Hall, Hobson, Lowe, & Willis, 1980).

Control of reproduction of discourse and communication specifically affects properties of discourse such as style, topics, and conversational turn-taking. Speakers and social inequality introduce differences in power or control over dialogue discourse. These differences can be

noticed in a conversation between men and women, educated and less educated, adults, and children.

Power differences are more apparent in the case of parents and children discourse in many ways and most of the cultures. Parent control is expressed in parent-child talk. In stratified societies, the low status of children stops them from initiating or discussing certain subjects and also from interrupting the conversation with their parents (Ervin-Tripp & Strage, 1985, p. 68).

Authors show that parents directly control the behavior of children through threatening, scolding, or directing children in talk. Parents enact indirect control through requests, advice, or promises. These differences in parent-child talk are related to the power of class (Cook-Gumperz, 1973). Similarly, social demonstrations of power are depicted through various forms of discursive deference (Ervin-Tripp, O'Connor, & Rosenberg, 1984).

In men's and women's conversation, differences in control over dialogue discourse may be subtle and depend on the situation (Leet-Pellegrini, 1980). When it comes to social position, women work more by showing interest, give topical support, or by withdrawing in conflicting situations. Several studies state that men often interrupt women and dominate not only in private conversations at home but also in public conversations such as talk shows on television (Tromel-Plotz, 1984). Men tend to talk more using long and complicated sentences than women who don't get to talk much. Differences displayed in such conversations in social situations are termed as powerless and powerful speech (Bradac & Street, 1986).

In the racist talk, what is said about women in talk also holds good for discourse about a minority group in many countries (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk, 1987). Dominant people exercise power through verbal abuse and denigration of minority group members (Allport, 1954). In the

last decade though there is a decline of verbal racism because of the changing laws and norms, still racist talk exists even today. Different styles of speech that leads to stereotyping and misinterpretation may also manifest racial conflict in the society (Kochman, 1981). Several recent studies on racism show that racist talk and opinions have become more subtle and indirect but there is not much change to basic racist attitudes (Barker, 1981; Essed, 1984).

Often racist opinions and stories are legitimized by the news media, for instance in reporting minority crime. Choice of words and use of pronouns to identify people such as “them” “those” demonstrate social disparity.

Conversations or dialogues within institutions or with organizations are forms of interaction, and they exercise express, or legitimate different power relations (Pettigrew, 1973). Often in such interactions, members will follow norms and rules depending on the context and apparent differences in controlling different positions such as hierarchy, status, or expertise. Another difference commonly shown in daily informal dialogue is that members are generally professionals, experts at their work. Other subgenres of institutional dialogue are Job interview discourse, organizational discourse, and courtroom discourse.

In Job interview discourse, differences in control over dialogue discourse are displayed as metatalk, digressions, or side sequences (Ragan 1983). Interviewers often control the pace and progress of conversation, metatalk, and digressions through alternative strategies. On the other hand, Job applicants often engage in explaining or justifying their behavior through qualifiers, accounts, and unnecessary words. A study on the effects of language in job interviews shows that identical applicants are victimized or discriminated against because of language accent

(Kalin & Rayko, 1980). Studies on women's language style, tag questions, and hesitations are characterized as powerless style. Similar results are found in courtroom discourse.

Power or control exercised in court is thoroughly governed by procedures and rules of verbal interaction between participants in the courtroom such as the judge, the defendant, and the prosecution (Atkinson & Drew, 1979). Often the use of highly technical terminology style of language may be well adjusted among the courtroom professionals but such style of language makes the defendant more subordinate. Power exercised by the prosecution, courtroom control, and judgment may show dominance toward the suspect, the defense counsel, and the witnesses.

The stylistic power of highly technical jargon shared by the participating legal representatives may be internally balanced among these professionals, but ultimately further subordinates the defendant. The combined powers of indictment by the prosecution, judicial courtroom control, and final judgment may be expected to show in what court officials say and imply dominance toward the defendant, toward witnesses, and even toward the defense counsel. On the other hand, it adds a burden on the subordinates such as defendants on their discourse irrespective of the charges leveled against them. Mostly, in courtroom dialogue interaction, defendants have the compulsion to talk when requested to do so, and sometimes they have to answer certain questions with yes and or no (Walker, 1982) . The defendant cannot refuse to answer or talk because it would be treated as disrespect to the court. According to Harris (1984), often questions are used to control the accused or witnesses, and importantly, question syntax is found to help determine appropriate responses. Control over information is enacted by questioning instead of lengthy accounts, which also show control exercised by the questioner.

Conclusion

Hence, questioning procedures and legal power both control the choice of limited speech acts. Methods of discursive control differ according to the procedure used for examination. Moreover, in addition to information control, speech acts, sequencing, and turn-taking, style is an important feature of presentation for defendants (Walker, 1986). Several authors have studied the influence of powerless and powerful styles on strategies of interaction in court and found that powerless style is marked by the use of hesitation, qualifiers, intensifiers, and question tags and whereas powerful style is characterized by the less use of such features.

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