

# Unit II: Key Concepts in Language and Media

# Media as Language Use

- There is no established discipline of language and media like Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics and Stylistics
- There are some commonly accepted notions of language and media
- We encounter language in many different conversational and public settings.

One of the common fields of language use is media. We use the term 'media language' to indicate language transmitted by means of different channels.

The term media is also used to indicate professional institutions of communication. The type or variety of language commonly used in media is media language.

- There are specific words, idioms, sentence structures and styles of language use. We collect data from different media, examine, analyze and find some features of media language. We see how persuasive effects are achieved and a sense of something true or real is established.

- We find data of language use about realism, bias, newsworthiness or offensiveness.
- Communication always relies on some infrastructure of technology or industry. Communication always involves a medium or different media. We have questions related to the differences in language used in different media .

Looking closely at media language data leads into several different ways of understanding language and media. We see how word choices are made and how words are combined. We can compare patterns of language use between media texts. Consistent patterns of choices make styles.

- The unified appearance of such choices refer to as genre. We identify different genres such as the horror movie, internet shopping confirmation email, chat show, news interview. Systems of choice give a kind of identity to texts. We might note that genres differ among different media and they differ between historical periods.

Broadcast media discourse, for example, has undergone a process of conversationalization. In the history of media language there have been interaction between written and spoken language. With the advent of writing, some discourse continued to be produced as speech. With press manuscript changed into book. With radio and television media became more closely associated with speech.



- The internet revolution has moved media language towards multimodal kinds of textual organization. In multimodal discourse, images, written text, music and sound combine and function together.

# Why investigating media language is interesting

Insights can follow from many different ways of looking at media discourse

Styles of language in media reflect capabilities and availability of media technologies as well as necessary skills and aptitude associated with them. Letter writing styles, for example, reflects different levels of literacy.

- Similarly telegrams, telephone, SMS, fax, email use give information about the society of the respective period in history.

# Register and Style

- We try to ensure that the form of language we adopt for a particular context is appropriate. We try to match how something is communicated to what is being communicated and to whom. We consider whether our discourse needs to be formal or informal for its function or purpose in a given situation.

Examples:

1. Yo... Listen up, dudes!
2. Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking...

The choice of language jars with context and the particular language users.

More examples:

Know wot I mean?

Does everyone understand this point?

- Register is a language variety. When we are faced with variation according to different situations and functions, the linguistic term is register. Register is a technical term used to describe a variety of language which is distinctive for a specific context. Register is created by a combination of choices: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and layout. The result of such choices is a particular style.

- Register creates or contributes to style.
- Genres are text types. Newspapers, magazines, adverts are examples of genre.
- Levels of variation: vocabulary, punctuation, layout, typeface, spelling style

# Received Pronunciation RP

- English language variety associated with army, public schools, universities and civil service.
- RP became an influential style of speaking when Lord Reith ( the first head of the BBC) adopted it in the early 1920s as his preferred broadcasting standard. Later it was known as BBC English.



# Stylistic differences between speech and writing

Three approaches to speech and writing:

- Opposition view
- Continuum view
- Cross over view

# Opposition view

## Writing

- Objective
- A monologue
- Scannable
- Planned
- Highly structured
- Highly structured
- Syntactically complex
- Concerned with the past and future

## Speech

- Interpersonal
- A dialogue
- Ephemeral
- Only linearly accessible
- Spontaneous
- Loosely structured
- Syntactically simple
- Concerned with the present

- Formal
- Expository
- Argument oriented
- Decontextualised
- Abstract

- Informal
- Narrative
- Event oriented
- Contextualised
- Concrete

# Continuum view of speech and writing

- The continuum approach looks at speech and writing in variable context of use. It locates examples at points on a continuum.

# Cross over view

- While a linguistic message may have been designed to be spoken or to be written, it may be experienced in a medium other than one in which it originated. Text can be planned in one medium and delivered in another. Examples: talking books, spoken lectures available in printed version and speeches prepared for formal functions.

# Convergence between mediums

- In media discourse, spoken and written styles are varied unexpectedly and sometimes combined together. For this reason, media discourse plays an important role in social style change. Every we can find new examples in newspaper headlines, advertising language and email inboxes.

# Semiotic register

- Register contrast is not only achieved linguistically. It can be created in other ways as well. in audiovisual and multimodal texts, design elements other than language play an increasingly important role in signalling such contrast. Examples: design elements, font, Photo tinting, overall layout.

# Mediated Communication

- Media utterances are communicative acts or events. They depend on some specific situational relationship between participants in a given setting. With media utterances, the relationship between participants is mediated by media technology that extends or transforms the properties and expectations of verbal communication.



# Canonical situation of utterance

- Media communication is a development from a default structure of face to face interaction. Such face to face interaction is commonly described as communication taking place in a canonical speech situation. In Ferdinand de Saussure's 'Course in General Linguistics' linguistic interaction is depicted as a diagram of two heads facing each other and exchanging messages.

- A's thoughts are converted into an utterance, conveyed along a channel to B. B decodes the message. Roles are reversed.

John Lyons (1977) has described this situation more exactly:

- Signaling in the phonic medium along the vocal auditory channel

- Participants are present in the situation
- Share non-vocal paralinguistic features
- Assume the role of sender and receiver in turn
- Face to face interaction provides a lot of clues to the interpretation of what is said

Utterances produced in non-canonical situation (written) may lead to ambiguity or indeterminacy.

This model of communication has been developed in many different directions. Among the main extensions Roman Jakobson's mapping of a principal function is associated with key aspect.

# Jakobson's Functions

	Context	
	Referential	
Addresser	Message	Addressee
Emotive	Poetic	Conative
	Contact	
	Phatic	
	Code	
	Metalingual	

# Harold D. Lasswell

For Lasswell, a convenient way of describing an act of communication is to answer the following questions:

Who? - control studies

Says what?- content analysis

In which channel?- media analysis

To whom?- audience analysis

With what effect?- effect analysis

.

# Media communicative events

Denis McQuil (1969) has distilled characteristics of mass communication into seven major features:

- Require complex formal organizations
- Are directed towards large audiences
- Public-content is open to all
- Audience diversity
- Establish contact simultaneously with many

- Relationships between communicator and audience are managed by media people
- Audience are loosely organized



# Present communication media vary on a range of dimensions

- Role reversibility
- Co-presence/distance
- Co-temporality
- Reification /fixation or relative permanence
- Spontaneity/rehearsed

# What makes media discourse distinctive?

Two features of media discourse stand out:

- **Reification:** turning a process or set of relationships into something fixed, a product or thing. It is also called fixation which transforms spoken communication into an object or kind of commodity. Speech can be converted into writing, printed text and recorded material.

**Interactivity:** it takes the form of reciprocity and turn taking. There is little feedback or control over the content. Media text user can co-create the discourse. Interactivity also involves interaction between users using emails, messaging, telephone and interaction in the virtual world.

## **Contemporary language and media environment**

Traditional distinctions between live and recorded, reciprocal and mass communication seem to be breaking down. Face to face interaction coexists with other modalities of more or less mediated or more or less interactive discourse.

## **Private and public communication**

There is a fundamental redrawing of lines between personal and public communication. An individual can contribute to public display of himself or herself. Language in media presentation appears to be intimate and informal.

# Mediated Participation

O'Keeffe (2006) describes the main difference between mass media talk and the underlying idea of two-person conversation

Every day conversation in public places are regularly overheard. This overhearing model is too narrow.

Radio and TV interviews are also overheard. The presenter and the interviewee are aware of their interaction being overheard. This requires inclusion and involvement of the audience.

# Goffman's participation framework

Analysis of media talk can go beyond a model of two people talking.

Goffman develops a model of communication based on multi party social gathering in which numerous people participate in different ways. Participants occupy varying roles. Each participant is sometimes addressed directly, but other times positioned as overhearing messages addressed to other people.

There may be some overhearers who are not anticipated but eavesdropping, they are not addressees nor ratified overhearing participants.



# Media discourse genres

Genre means a sort, or type of text: thriller, horror movie, musical, autobiography, tragedy. We can fit any given text into a class or category. The idea is not only applied to literary texts but also to the wide range of media texts: chat show, political interview, scripted soap, reality TV, email, text message. Genre is generalization or abstraction from specific textual properties.

# Classifying genres

Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss and Mills (2006):

1. Classification on the basis of formal arrangement: structure is the main property that distinguishes one genre from another. Sonnets are composed of fourteen lines, poetry follows the conventions of sound patterning.

2. classification on the basis of theme or topic :  
biography, drama

3. Classification on the basis of mode of address: genre is identified by how the text addresses its audience, news reporting, sport commentary, chat shows, interviews, phone ins

4. Classification on the basis of attitude or anticipated response: It involves how the audience's response is elicited. War poetry, for example, arouses a sense of patriotism or heroism.

# Film Genres: Expectation and Verisimilitude

Genres are importantly about expectations that people bring with them when they go to see a particular type of film. Genre helps audiences to make sense of character and plot.

Todorov (1981) identifies two types of verisimilitude: generic and social or cultural.

Generic verisimilitudes embodies rules, norms and laws that make the genre intelligible.

Cultural verisimilitude requires conventional notions of realism to create an appearance of truth. In films about a war, realism can be achieved by a combination of drawing of facts from history, media sources and first hand accounts. These sources create a level of authenticity , acceptability and satisfy audience expectation.

# Media Rhetorics

Truth is expressed by using made up story or imagined situation and events as a vehicle. The persuasive techniques used in discourse are grouped together and called rhetoric.



Information is always in competition for people's attention with other information. For this reason it is always designed in such a way that it appears relevant, urgent, sensational. Text producers may use dramatic language, selective presentation and exaggeration and sensational detail in order to attract attention. This is the style of rhetoric.

The term 'rhetoric' is traditionally used to describe analysis of and training in how to persuade. The term 'rhetoric' comes from Greek 'Rhetorike' which means art of speech. Cockcroft and Cockcroft (2005) widen this sense of rhetoric to the art of persuasive discourse. They point out that the term can refer to both written and spoken communication.

According to Aristotle, there are three ways that an audience can be persuaded:

- **Ethos** : audiences are persuaded because they believe the speaker to be fair and honest.
- **Pathos**: audiences are persuaded on the basis of emotion aroused by what is said.
- **Logos**: audiences are persuaded by the reasoning contained in an argument conveyed by the speech.

The devices skilled orators use can be categorized into three main areas:

- Lexical choices
- Tropes or figurative language
- Sound patterning

On 20 March 2003, Tony Blair, the British prime minister addressed the nation justifying the war in Iraq:

So our choice is clear: back down and leave Saddam hugely strengthened; or proceed to disarm him by force. Retreat might give us a moment of respite but years of repentance at our weakness would, I believe, follow.

Ethos: his status as prime minister

Logos: his argument against Saddam remaining  
in power

# Rhetoric in political speeches

Political speeches perform a number of rhetorical functions: inform, persuade, manipulate, influence and control. Language is carefully chosen to encourage the public to vote, to persuade them to vote a particular way or to celebrate political victory.

# President Barack Obama's acceptance Speech

## 5 November, 2008

1. Figurative language: metaphor, metonymy
2. Sound patterning : repetition, list of three, alliteration
3. Lexis: pronouns : we, I, you



Rhetorics in adverts

Choose Cheshire

Relocation

Relocation

Relocation

List of three

Onomatopoeia

Alliteration

# Media story telling

Storytelling is usually held to be a universal activity. Stories pervade our day to day lives in the form of anecdote, literary and non literary narratives and media representations. The most recognized way of presenting stories is through use of narrative structure. It is also common as a rhetorical vehicle for news, documentary and advertising.

# Some claims about stories

1. Stories seem suited to function as reports on reality poured into recognizable model.
2. Narrative seems to be either one genre or a cluster of genres. These are established formulae or templates for relaying complicated events and their significance.

3. When you enjoy a story, you are experiencing an echo, a particular realization of other stories you already know.

4. There are a hundred great stories in the world. They are told and retold many times in many different forms (Romeo and Juliet, Homer's Odyssey)

5. Stories provide a way of making abstract information graspable, if it is made sufficiently concrete and personalized or ways of propagating point in favour of an organization. In its branding and public relations, an organization may feel that or a certain theme it has a good story to tell.

6. Stories sometimes function as a vehicle for stereotypes and are used for that purpose in propaganda and other ways of manipulating public opinion.

# What makes a good story narrative and plot?

A good plot is fundamental to any story. Plot is the skeleton of the story. It is the most essential element of the story. Plot involves the dynamic sequential element in narrative literature.

# Three for minimum plot structure

Temporality: time ordered sequence of elements, beginning, middle and final state, linked by conjunctions like first, then finally

Causation: events are connected by causal links.

Human interest: relevant for human, concerned with human



# King Queen story

The king died. The queen died.

The king died and then the queen died.

The king died and the queen died of grief.

# Words and Images

Language : words, phrases and sentences

Media Language: words, images and sounds

Visual dimension of contemporary media  
present a challenge in investigating language  
and media. The visual element in contemporary  
media discourse has been so pervasive.

Historically there have been a range of forms of combination between pictures and words.

- Illustrated books
- Titles and captions added to painting and other publicly displayed images
- Photographic news images in printed stories and articles

- Headlines and taglines used in advertising posters
- Audio visual discourse of television and film
- Text and image combinations in multimedia presentation of power point slides

# Analysing pictures and captions

Recent discussion of images and textual materials in linguistics and semiotics is based on the essays by the French semiotician Roland Barthes (1977 b). He took the press photograph (usually in news and advertizing) as his case study.

# Boundaries of Media Discourse

Media language varies from medium to medium, country to country, and period to period and is subject to restriction and exclusion. Such taboo media language includes kinds of swearing, insults and racial epithets, defamatory statements, verbal utterances that might incite crime or hatred, use of restricted trademark or copyright material or internet hate speech.

# Kinds of trouble

Media discourse is seen as socially beneficial because it informs and entertains the public. Sometimes, however, media discourse gets into trouble. Media discourse has both power and risk. The notion of tolerance is found in almost every society. Sometimes it is freely extended towards different people.

Sometimes it is not and sometimes to a limited degree. The degree of restriction depends on the degree of tolerance. Some framework for deciding whether to tolerate or not is always needed. That framework is a mixture of legal and moral rules, social norms and self imposed restrictions on behavior.



# Limits to media language

Durant and Lambrou page 46-47

# Media Language and Acceptability

Sociolinguistic research investigates under the heading of bad language judgements: 'sort of' phrases, poor grammar, over use of 'like' allegedly outlandish accent, obscene and derogatory epithets (descriptions and name calling) slur and invective. Such a bad language can cause grave offense.

- According to Andersson and Trudgil (1992), swear words refer to some topic that is taboo, or stigmatized in the particular culture. Such words may be classified into three major groups on the basis of their semantic fields.

1. Dirty words to do with sex and excrement:  
bugger, fuck, shit
2. Words to do with religion: Christ, Jesus, God's  
sake, bloody
3. Calling a person by the name of an animal:  
bitch, cow

# A swearing top ten

- The force of particular swear words, and also swear word categories change over time. Media institutions accordingly need to keep track of changes in the public climate of acceptability.

Because many complaints broadcasting regulators are about bad language, surveys of the relative offensiveness of different swear words are periodically undertaken. In the UK such surveys are undertaken by authorities such as Ofcom ( the Office of Communications) and many more.

Durant and Lambrou page 172-3

# Future of Media language

Media are rapidly changing. People can see massive change in communication technologies even in a short span of time. We can make predictions about what will happen in the future. People engage in imaginative speculation in novels and films about what future societies will be like.

In most discussion of language and media futures, several different levels of prediction are involved:

1. Changes are anticipated at level of invention of new technology
2. Other changes relate to policy directions that surround media inventions



3. Other changes involve cultural shifts that reflect a combination of technical capabilities with changing policy frameworks, institutions and prevailing public opinion

Durant and Lambrou page 49-50

We can explore the main line of development in communication by looking at histories of media. Some recent developments in media and language technologies:

Durant and Lambrou page 51