

Language and Power

- What is power?
 - ability to control one's environment, influence events.
- Power and Authority
- Power, Hegemony and Discourse
 - Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)
 - Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

Language and Power

So far, we've been studying language as if it were a neutral system that just gets taken off the shelf and used, then put back unchanged.

But language is a social practice, and every use carries the potential for change.

Language and Power

So far, we've been studying language as a neutral system whose locutions have the same illocutionary and perlocutionary effect no matter who utters them.

But the same utterances may be interpreted quite differently depending on who makes them - and what variety they make them in.

Do these maxims work the same in every circumstance?

Grice's Conversational Maxims

- ▶ Maxim of **Quantity**:
Make your contribution to the conversation as informative as necessary, but not more informative.
- ▶ Maxim of **Quality**:
Do not say what you believe to be false or inadequately justified.
- ▶ Maxim of Relevance (**Relation**): Be relevant!
- ▶ Maxim of **Manner**:
Avoid obscurity of expression. Be unambiguous, brief, and orderly.

Speech Acts

A speech act is an act that a speaker performs when making an utterance, including the following:

- ▶ A general act (**illocutionary act**) that a speaker performs, analyzable as including:

locutionary acts: the uttering of words,

propositional acts: making reference and predicating, and

illocutionary force: a particular intention in making the utterance.

- ▶ **perlocutionary act:** The production of a particular **effect** in the addressee.

Speech Acts

A speech act – an act a speaker performs when making an utterance, e.g.

A **statement (assertion)**: an illocutionary act that has the assertive illocutionary point of claiming that some proposition is true.

A **query**: an illocutionary act that has a directive illocutionary point of attempting to get the addressee to supply information.

A **command**: an illocutionary act that has the directive illocutionary point of getting another to do or not to do something.

power and perlocutionary force

- Why are you stirring counter-clockwise?
 - Chemistry student to teacher
 - Chemistry teacher to student

Indirect speech acts

Performing one speech act with the intention of performing another.

- Can/Could you pass the salt?
- Would you remove your hat?
- It would be nice if you were quieter.
- It sure is cold in here.

- Can I have this by 3:00?
 - Boss to secretary
 - 1 secretary to another
 - Secretary to boss

Language and Power

So far, we've been studying language as if it simply encoded predetermined meanings.

But linguistic practice is the means by which we create new meanings.

Power, implicature, and pejoration

Common historical patterns by which terms for women are pejorated.

- Asymmetric pairs: *master* - *mistress*
- Words that used to simply refer to a female: *wench*, *bitch*, Spanish *puta*
- Words that originally applied to women and men: *harlot* ('riff-raff')
- Words that were once neutral: *hussy* ('housewife') *prude* ('virtuous')

Dialect humor – another kind of pejoration

<http://www.blogthings.com/hillbillynamegenerator/>

<http://gangstaname.com/>

<http://joel.net/EBONICS/translator.asp>

<http://www.writtenhumor.com/ebonics.html>

[http://www.billism.com/eng to ebon trans.html](http://www.billism.com/eng_to_ebon_trans.html)