

**Review of *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction*
(6th ed.) by Annabelle Mooney and Betsy Evans, ISBN:
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Book Review

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The 6th edition of *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction* examines how language contributes to our understanding and expression of the world, as well as who determines what language is appropriate to use. With updates and new international examples provided, it becomes clear that this work has no intention of enlightening researchers who already work in the field. Furthermore, it serves as a course textbook that provides students with an overview of the field of linguistics and the importance of language in contemporary society. In this book, a wide variety of topics is addressed, including details regarding the integration of linguistics into politics, media, gender, ethnicity, and society. Consequently, the book is highly interdisciplinary and relevant to students of linguistics and other fields such as media, communication, cultural studies, and sociology. Using an engaging and accessible writing style, each chapter contains a core introduction followed by details and examples, as well as activities incorporated into the chapters that encourage students to reflect on their own ideas about language. In addition, readers can explore each topic across separate sections, thereby gradually acquiring knowledge of the field.

“Why Study Language and What Is Language?”, the first chapter of the book, is an introductory chapter intended to serve as a starting point for some of the questions and ideas that should be considered throughout the book. It brings together a wide range of examples showing the links between them and explaining fundamental theories about connections between language, ideology, and power. This chapter, for example, refers to Kress and Hodge’s (1993, p. 6) definition of ideology, which is defined as “a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view”. It is emphasized in this chapter that understanding language as a system, which has an inherently understood structure and that we can use this understanding to look at the kinds of variation that we see in language. In addition, it also pinpoints the two attitudes that those who wish to establish rules on proper language use are describing what people do with language (description), whereas those wishing to determine if a certain use is correct or incorrect are prescribing proper language usage (prescription). It was stressed by the authors at the end that studying language can enable individuals to understand how language is used to exercise power and, in turn, how they can resist this exercise, as well as help them appreciate how complex the relationship between language and power is. As shown in this chapter, “political correctness” is one such example (p. 18).

Chapter 2 introduces the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose ideas contributed to the development of linguistics and semiology. The author, as recalled in Chapter 1, explains, in detail, that “language is a system of representation” (p. 23) and that systems have rules which are used to structure language. It is noteworthy that the authors concur with Saussure’s statement that “a sign needs other signs in order to have meaning” (p. 27). In addition to discussing the synchronic and diachronic characteristics of language, the authors point out the diversity of linguistic systems. Moreover, the authors introduced the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which has two forms: language determines thought or language influences thinking. To gain an understanding of how language is chosen and the factors that influence people’s use of language, the authors offer an analytical tool, transitivity analysis, that is used to investigate lexical choices. However, the authors assert that every language choice, whether intentionally or unconsciously made, exhibits an ideological orientation.

Chapter 3 includes updated events, such as the 2020 US presidential election, along with state-of-the-art examples of “Language and Politics”. Additionally, the authors highlight the fact that “politics

affect everything” (p. 47) and that language plays an essential role in understanding these social activities. This includes the use of language in political speeches, debates, and propaganda, as well as the regulation of language in institutions and policies. The authors discuss “Western politics” in the book, emphasizing that “equality/fairness” is at the core of Western politics. A brief discussion of eight linguistic tools is provided through the example of buying biscuits. As a means of constructing an argument, the authors differentiate presuppositions into semantic and pragmatic presuppositions, but stress semantic presupposition as being the most important. The edition removes the content of the chapter “Words and Weapons: The Politics of War” and replaces it with “Climate Change and Political Discourse”. It also illustrates the importance of the use of pronouns in this area by citing Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg as an example. Further, the authors introduce the concept of metaphor and agree with Horner’s (2011) interpretation of metaphor, that is, metaphors serve as a means of linking political discourse with ideology by providing models for making sense of the world around us. At the end of this chapter, the authors lead to the fourth chapter and discuss research on political communication on Twitter and point out that the increasing prominence of Twitter in the public sphere for political discourse has raised many new questions regarding how political communication can be studied.

Chapter 4, “Language and Media”, thus provides a detailed description of how developing mass media are enhancing the ability of citizens to discuss public topics on social network sites in the contemporary media landscape. In these complicated and evolving ways, mass media give rise to social and linguistic practices that are impacting how we relate to each other, how we manage and present ourselves as individuals, and how we interact with communities. This author also agrees with Noam Chomsky’s and Edward Herman’s (1988) views regarding media filtering as a factual matter. In this regard, the author explains that a public’s agreement with both the information and the ideologies that structure it is not a “real” agreement but rather a “manufactured consent” because the information is altered by these filters. By doing so, the authors expand ongoing debates around fake news; he focuses primarily on the implications for marketing and consumers of social media misinformation, as well as the implications of fake news for political communication.

Chapter 5, “Linguistic Landscapes”, briefly summarizes the rapidly growing field of linguistic landscapes (LL), which not only explores the use of language in everyday semiotic environments, but also distinguishes between online landscapes and physical landscapes by considering the virtual landscape. Additionally, the linguistic landscape influences the impact of spaces on individuals and groups, as language and signs can influence how they choose language and interact with them. However, a large array of factors can have a determining effect on the choices people make when it comes to their expression. Chapters 6 to 8 of this book examine how occurrences of variants of a “linguistic variable” are systematically related to a number of contextual factors, including gender, ethnicity, and age, which effectively correlate with each other. However, it is important to note that some of the content in Chapter 6 is entirely new, for example discussing how Twitter campaigns to echo the government encouraged people to stay at home during the Pandemic of early 2021 in the UK. There were some images shown on Twitter to encourage Propaganda supporters to stay at home. This image has the obvious feature that all the work is being done by the women, whereas the only male is shown sitting down and relaxing on a sofa (p. 130). According to Sunderland (2004), gender is not the

only factor that has an impact on linguistic practices or other social activities, but other intrinsic factors such as ethnicity can be considered.

Thus, Chapter 7 examines how ethnicity and language are interconnected, as well as how minorities come under the label of being ethnically different caused by language differences. This chapter also explores the ways in which media representation can perpetuate racist ideologies and stereotypes. Moreover, the authors discuss how the internet can be used to propagate racist ideologies and amplify racist messages. In a similar vein, a discussion is given in Chapter 8 of the way people of different life stages communicate with one another and of the way we talk to them, revealing that societal expectations of what certain life stages entail create specific stresses on those individuals. These pressures may manifest themselves in the particular use of language by individuals towards the groups, which often reflects our own perception of their linguistic abilities, rather than their incapacity to communicate.

Chapter 9 discusses social class and symbolic capital. There is a significant role that social class plays in determining language usage and acquisition, and different social classes often have their own unique language style, vocabulary, and grammar usage. The use of language and changes in it can also be directly related to social order and class inequalities. These inequalities can impact quality education and resources, further compounding the disparities in language proficiency. In the context of social class and language, symbolic capital can include the use of prestigious vocabulary, proper grammar, and fluent communication skills. Individuals with more symbolic capital are able to project an image of authority, credibility, and belonging, which can further reinforce social divisions and inequalities.

Chapter 10 focuses on Global English; with English becoming a global lingua franca, native English speakers far outnumber non-native English speakers as non-native speakers have spread throughout the globe. In this regard, the authors cite two modes of learning English: the lingua franca model and the other a world Englishes model (p. 229). In the former, other English varieties are rejected and standard English is emphasized, whereas in the latter, learners are encouraged to learn according to their self-development by focusing on multiculturalism rather than imitating native-like English. In addition, the authors discuss how the hegemonic nature of English led to linguistic imperialism, which is a process through which a dominant language imposes its norms and standards on other languages and cultures, marginalizing and suppressing them. This can result in the erosion of local languages, cultural homogenization, and the marginalization of certain communities within the global linguistic landscape. Chapter 11 provides some examples of research projects to inspire readers to conduct their own research. By presenting these projects, the authors hope to demonstrate to readers that the language used in everyday life is as relevant as it is valuable.

In conclusion, there is a discussion of language use in politics and the media in the course *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction* (6th edition) in addition to differences in language use according to gender, ethnicity, age, and class as well as global Englishes in the book. Throughout the book, readers learn to explore how language is portrayed, how identity is constructed, and how language can be used creatively in media, politics, or everyday conversation. Also, it provokes the reader to reflect on to what extent are attitudes towards language use and notions of correctness important; and how language affects and constructs our linguistic experiences.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Chen Luyu completed a master's program in Global Journalism and Public Relations at Coventry University in the UK and is currently pursuing her PhD research in Gender Studies and Discourse Analysis at the University of Szeged, Hungary. Her research interests include critical discourse analysis discourse, language, ideology and power, and feminist media studies.