CHAPTER 3

Language and politics

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we consider the connection between language and politics. We begin by defining politics, making clear its connection to both ideology and persuasion as discussed in Chapter 2. We then explore linguistic features that are deployed in order to persuade audiences. These techniques are common across all kinds of persuasive texts, but they are generally easy to find in arguments that are clearly political. The linguistic tools of repetition and parallelism, presupposition and metaphor are introduced by taking examples from writing that argues both for and against what is commonly known as 'fracking'. These tools will help us see how we can be persuaded to accept particular ideologies and points of view. To further understand how these tools work, we then consider the language of war using the concepts of euphemism and dysphemism. This allows us to consider the consequences of representational choices. We also consider children's toys to show how the ideologies are communicated.

We then move on to the politics of education, specifically, the way the language of commercial transactions is increasingly used in the field of higher education. Here, we return to the link between ideology and metaphor

discussed in Chapter 2. Because of powerful interests involved in education, it seems very difficult to challenge this ideology. However, we also consider a kind of politics, 'silly citizenship', that is more amenable to individual action.

3.2 WHAT IS 'POLITICS'?

In 2004, the Electoral Commission in the UK created and broadcast an advertising campaign to encourage people to vote and engage in politics. It was an animation, focussing on two male friends. When one friend, Tom, tries to discuss the European Parliament, his friend Mike says, 'I don't do politics'. The animation then follows the friends through a normal city on a normal day. Whenever Mike complains about something, whether it's graffiti or the cost of a drink, Tom waves his finger and remarks, 'But you don't do politics'. The advertisement finishes with 'Politics affects almost everything, so if you don't do politics there's not much you do do' (cited in Walker, 2014).

When people think of 'politics', they probably think of political parties, government and the way that nations and communities are governed. This kind of politics is obviously important and certainly linked with both language and power. Politics of the 'normal' kind, with governments, opposition parties and the debating and passing of policy and legislation, involves persuasion. In this chapter, politics is considered a little more broadly. We consider how language is used to persuade people in a variety of contexts. We will draw on some research that is closely connected to the politics of government and law-making, but it is important to see that these activities have consequences for how we view the world.

3.3 POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY

In the previous chapters, we described ideology as a way of thinking and examined how ideology has an effect on both thought and behaviour. When it comes to politics, ideologies are generally connected with beliefs about the proper organisation of society and how to achieve and maintain the goals that this entails. What is striking about this is that these beliefs are found to pattern among people in predictable ways. For example, Jost, Federico and Napier (1999: 310) explain that political positions we call 'conservative / right wing' and 'liberal / left wing' each have their own demonstrable and predictable belief systems:

> This formulation of the left-right distinction and many others contain two interrelated aspects, namely (a) advocating versus resisting social change (as opposed to tradition), and (b) rejecting versus accepting inequality.
> (Jost et al., 2009: 310)

Even a simple description like this, with only two factors, allows people to both explain and justify their political position. A person who thinks society

is unequal and that inequality is not desirable would advocate for social change. If a person believes that inequality is justified or simply the natural order of society, they'll be more likely to want to keep things as they are.

Activity 3.1

Regardless of your own opinion, write down the arguments you could use in support of

a retaining the social system you have
b changing the social system in a particular way

Note down the feature of society each would involve (this may relate to employment, education, family life, leisure time, the environment and gender roles), as well as arguments for the system generally.
Is this difficult?

When putting together arguments for social change or maintenance of the current system, the points in your argument generally have to be consistent. For example, if you want a system that promotes financial equality, this will have consequences for your ideas about wages and employment and gender roles. You probably found it quite hard to come up with arguments for the side you personally don't support. Our beliefs, our sense of what the 'right' social order is, has a profound effect on the arguments we find convincing.

Language also has an important role in this kind of discussion. Few people would advocate 'inequality' in simple terms. 'Inequality' has a negative value attached to it; we generally support what is 'equal' rather than 'unequal'. This is considered 'fair'. Notice, however, what happens when we talk about 'fairness' rather than 'equality'. This is a good example of a linguistic tool called lexical choice (see Section 2.6 on the paradigmatic axis). 'Equality' suggests a straightforward equivalence – that everyone be treated in exactly the same way. 'Fairness', however, potentially allows for other factors to come into the equation. Fairness enables us to consider things like individual qualities and abilities, whether people have worked hard, whether people 'deserve' something. If you want to argue for maintenance of an apparently unequal system, you're likely to explain this in terms of 'fairness' rather than 'inequality'. Notice that changing one word can change the whole structure of an argument and the points that are needed to defend it (see also Danet, 1980). Moreover, it has been found that negatively framed arguments attract more attention from an audience than those phrased in more positive terms. That is, 'people pay more immediate attention to speeches if they hear negative messages, or if they are exposed to rhetorical schemes. Positively framed speeches without rhetorical schemes attract the least immediate attention' (Lagerwerf, Boeynaems, van Egmond-Brussee and Burgers, 2015: 294).

There are other linguistic tools that can be used to persuade people

against 'fracking'. It's important to state at the outset that the linguistic features we'll see in the examples are common across all kinds of persuasive text. They are not of themselves problematic or manipulative; rather, they are typical of persuasive texts.

3.4 THREE PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES

According to Aristotle (1991), persuasion can take place in at least three ways. He makes a distinction between arguments that rely on **logos**, the words or the argument itself; **pathos**, the emotion conveyed or the emotional connection to an idea or issue; and finally, **ethos**, arguments from personality, that is, we trust the argument or ideas because we trust the speaker.

Identify some texts (of any modality) that use logos, pathos and ethos to argue for different positions. Are there patterns in the types of arguments that rely on certain strategies?

Political persuasion, like all forms of persuasion, relies on all three tactics. Employing these tactics is not of itself deceptive or unusual. Nor are these tactics mutually exclusive. For example, a cosmetics advertisement might use all three. It might point out the science behind the efficacy of the cosmetic (logos), it might employ a celebrity to deliver the message (ethos: a trustworthy speaker) and the advertisement may generally appeal to the desire to look 'better' (pathos).

3.5 FRACKING: INTRODUCING LINGUISTIC TOOLS

Fracking refers to hydraulic fracturing, which is a process to extract natural gas from the earth. Because of arguments that natural gas is a better alternative than other fossil fuels in terms of its environmental impact, new ways of extracting it are very valuable.[1] For hydraulic fracturing to take place, first, a well has to be drilled into the earth. Hydraulic fracturing refers to the injection of highly pressurised fluids in order to release the natural gas.[2] Fracturing is a controversial topic because of debate about the environmental impact of the process. Objections stem from concerns about the large amount of water required for the process, allegations of the fluids contami-

argue that it continues a reliance on fossil fuels instead of finding alternative fuel sources (BBC, 2015).

All the following examples are taken from texts relating to hydraulic fracturing in South Africa. While some are authored by politicians, others are not. A diversity of sources has been used for two reasons. First, all discussion, deliberation and action involved in daily life is political. Second, a range of texts are persuasive. In short, it is not the case that political persuasion is only concerned with what politicians do and say. As the discussion of Twitter (Section 3.8) will show, we all have at least some political agency.

3.5.1 Contrasts

In its simplest terms, a contrast involves comparing two things. The first example comes from a magazine article about fracking. At the end of the article, a geologist, Wlady Altermann, is quoted (Example 3.1).

> **Example 3.1**
> You don't need people with shovels and hammers. It's high technology stuff, skilled people will be flown in.
>
> (*Forbes*, 2016)

The contrast in Example 3.1 is between people 'with shovels and hammers' and high technology work. By highlighting the difference between manual work (with shovels and hammers) and high technology work, the speaker sets up a clear contrast. This contrast also presents an argument. The argument could be phrased as follows: don't think that fracking will bring jobs because the kinds of jobs created are those that the local labour force can't fill. Notice that the argument is not made explicitly, but it is easily inferred from the contrast. This argument also sets up a distinction between the local labour force (us) and other skilled workers who need to be flown in (them). The us/them distinction is perhaps one of the most pervasive in persuasive language (van Dijk, 2006).

3.5.2 Three-part lists and parallelism

Three-part lists (or triple structure) are very common in persuasive texts. They have a pleasing rhythm and as such are easy to remember. They are easy to identify, as they have the structure 'a, b and c' (Hutchby and Woffit, 2008: 183ff).

> **Example 3.2**
> However the Gas Utilisation Master Plan seeks to anticipate the infra-

Example 3.2 is from a 2014 Policy Budget Speech delivered by the Minister of Energy in South Africa, Ms Tina Joemat-Pettersson, MP. It may not be a particularly rousing topic, but the three-part list 'residential, commercial and industrial sectors' towards the end does important work. In this three-part list, the noun, 'sectors', which is modified by all three **adjectives**, comes last. This serves to draw all the sectors together – they are all *sectors*, and so they all have something in common. Thus, the speaker suggests that three groups of different stakeholders are unified and will benefit from the universal application of the Gas Utilisation Master Plan.

> **Example 3.3**
> South Africa is currently beset by a number of socio-economic challenges such as a lack of infrastructure, high levels of unemployment and a looming energy deficit.
>
> (Ash, 2013)

In Example 3.3, we find another three-part list. Notice that the structure of **noun phrases** is syntactically similar. The use of similar syntactic structure in this way is called **parallelism**. The parallel syntactic structure encourages a reader to consider the entities in the same place in the same way.

> **Example 3.4**
> In a nutshell the Bill, which includes an expropriation clause, is designed to speed up strategic infrastructure delivery by extending state powers for the expropriation of land and shortening the approval time for projects by government authorities.
>
> (Ash, 2013)

There is clear parallelism in the second part of the sentence. The parallel syntactic positions are

- speed up strategic infrastructure delivery *by* extending state power for the expropriation of land
- shortening the approval time for projects *by* government authorities

Notice that 'speed up' and 'shortening' are synonyms in this context and positive words. The structure and the lexical choices encourage the reader to view these changes positively regardless of the listener's position on the issue of expropriation (taking away) of land.

> Find a recent speech from a public figure. See if you can identify parallelism and three-part lists in their talk. What is the effect of these choices? What arguments do they help encode and communicate?

The most straightforward form of parallelism is **repetition**. We know from our own use of language that if we want to emphasise something we repeat it. The same holds true in political texts. Repetition across a long text or speech can also help structure it. Just like repetition in a song or poem, this provides a focal point for the reader and allows them to see the structure of the text. Repetition used in this way works as kind of punctuation and is most common in spoken language. Example 3.5 is from the president of the Clean Water America Alliance, Ben Grumbles.

Example 3.5
Hydraulic fracturing can be 'safe' when done in the right place, on the right scale, with the right safeguards.

(Yale Environment 360, 2011)

The repetition of 'right' in Example 3.5 draws our attention to, or **foregrounds**, the three-part list and the many variables that need to be considered for fracking to be safe. This repetition may also draw attention *away* from the use of 'can' as the main verb. To say that fracking 'can' be safe also suggests that it might not be. The use of such **modal verbs** in persuasive language are very important.

Activity 3.4

Considering the paradigmatic axis (Section 2.6), what other words could have been used in place of 'can' in Example 3.5. What would be the effect of these different choices?

Foregrounding is a useful analytic tool. It simply means that something is prominent in some way. Foregrounding may occur through any of the following:

- putting a word or phrase first
- repetition
- parallelism
- unusual word order (especially in binomials)

When something is foregrounded, usually other information will be de-emphasised or even omitted. We can see this in the following two examples (Examples 3.6 and 3.7).

Example 3.6
'Fracking' – or hydraulic fracturing – is the process in which oil and gas companies drill into the ground to extract natural gas from the shale rock that lays thousands of feet under the ground.

(Shale Stuff, 2014)

Example 3.7
'Fracking' – or hydraulic fracturing – is the process of drilling into the ground to extract natural gas from the shale rock that lays thousands of feet under the ground.

(rewritten version of Example 3.5)

If we compare Examples 3.6 and 3.7, we can see that the difference is one of omission. In Example 3.7, the activities of the 'oil and gas companies' are simply presented as happening without a real agent. This is done by using a **passive** structure. As we saw in Chapter 2, the passive voice allows for agent deletion, and that is exactly what has been done here. The focus is on the actions rather than the actors. By omitting the actor, an audience might think that the drilling is done by the government, for example, rather than by a company. For some texts, it can be a persuasive advantage to omit the actors in certain places.

3.5.3 Pronouns

Pronouns are very important when it comes to persuasive writing. If an argument is being made on the basis of ethos (see Section 3.4), for example, the author is likely to use lots of first person pronouns ('I' and 'me'), as this will remind the audience of who is making the argument. Other pronouns can be useful in setting up a contrast. Third person pronouns ('she', 'he' and 'they') can be used to immediately construct another who is neither 'I' nor 'you'. When arguments rely on creating an us/them contrast, third person pronouns are invaluable.

Perhaps the most commonly analysed pronouns in persuasive speech, however, are the plural pronouns in the first person ('we') and the second person ('you' plural) respectively. In English, 'we' does not specify who 'we' are in that it may include the audience (inclusive we) or exclude the audience (exclusive we). 'You' is also useful, because in English, 'you' does not distinguish between the singular and plural second person. Both pronouns allow the author to use these pronouns strategically. Possessive pronouns (for example 'our') perform a similar function.

Example 3.8
These developments herald a new era in the exploitation of this resource for our country, and the private sector is well advised to prepare for their contribution in this regard.

(Joemat-Pettersson, 2014)

In this sentence, 'our country' suggests that all citizens in South Africa have a stake in this issue. Whether or not they agree with the developments and the exploitation of a new energy source, they are brought into the terms of the argument simply through the use of 'our'. However, just because one instance of 'our' or 'we' appears to include the audience, it doesn't follow that all uses of the pronoun will include the audience. For example, shortly after the line in Example 3.8 we find the following:

Example 3.9
We will soon release the outcomes of a Gas feasibility study that is being completed with collaboration by Transnet, PetroSA, Eskom and government.

Clearly here 'we' cannot include the audience unless they too are involved in preparing the study. Nevertheless, the use of 'we' provides a stronger position than other alternatives (for example 'I').

3.5.4 Presupposition

There is another feature in Example 3.9 here that is useful to consider. Even if the audience doesn't know what a 'Gas feasibility study' is, they know that it exists and that it has 'outcomes'. Notice that the sentence doesn't specifically tell the reader that these things exist before discussing them, it simply discusses them. **New information** in a text can be presented as though it is **given information**. New information is something that has not been mentioned in the text before. In the case of nouns, this means they usually take the indefinite article. 'A kettle' signals that this is new information. 'The kettle', because of the use of the definite article, tells the audience it is given information. Therefore, the **semantic presupposition** in the example is that there are outcomes from a feasibility study. A semantic presupposition is information embedded in the sentence that is taken for granted in the composition and meaning of the text. Notice how 'the' is used for 'outcomes' and that this precedes 'a Gas feasibility study'.

In order to find presuppositions, there are number of linguistic structures you can look for, such as possessive pronouns, subordinate clauses, question structures and adjectives (especially comparative adjectives). The easiest way to test for a semantic presupposition is to negate the sentence and then identify what claims are still true.

Example 3.10
We will NOT soon release the outcomes of a Gas feasibility study that is being completed with collaboration by Transnet, PetroSA, Eskom and government.

Notice how in Example 3.10 (a negation of Example 3.9), it is still true that

presupposition, and one of the reasons they can be so effective in persuasive texts, is that when information is treated as given, we tend not to pay much attention to it.

> The sentence below is affirmative. Try to negate it. What are the semantic presuppositions here?
>
> The debates around fracking, its merits and dangers have filled hundreds of column inches.
>
> (de Vos, 2014)

In the negated version, 'the debates around fracking, its merits and dangers have NOT filled hundreds of column inches . . .', the existence of 'its merits and dangers' is retained. This property allows us to distinguish semantic presuppositions from other information that may only be implied. For example, if someone says 'John found a veterinarian for his cat' this presupposes that someone called John exists and that he has a cat. It *implies* that the cat is somehow ill, but there is nothing in the sentence itself that says anything about the cat's health. You might assume that the cat is ill and that this is why the speaker is discussing John's search for a veterinarian, but this relies on your actual experience of the world, what you know about cats and veterinarians. It is background knowledge. It is not a property of the statement itself. This type of knowledge can be referred to as **pragmatic presupposition**. In this book, we use the term presupposition for *semantic presupposition* while referring to *pragmatic presupposition* as something implied by the text (see Simon-Vandenbergen, White and Aijmer, 1999).

Because of the way semantic presuppositions function, they can be used to efficiently incorporate a 'truth' into a text. This can have powerful persuasive effects. As Simon-Vandenbergen et al. remark, 'The reason why presuppositions are exploitable is that they are harder to challenge' exactly because they are embedded in the text (1999: 49). Semantic and pragmatic presupposition, however, are a natural feature of language and aren't always used to exploit or persuade.

3.5.5 Metaphor and intertextuality

Metaphors create and assert an equivalence between two things. Metaphors state that 'x *is* y'; by contrast, a **simile** simply draws a comparison, saying that x is *like* y. Because they assert and create an equivalence, metaphors don't need a verb; a **noun phrase** can express the metaphor all by

Example 3.11
South Africa is in the midst of a heated energy debate.
(Schellhase, 2012)

The **metaphor** in Example 3.11 is contained in the noun phrase 'heated energy debate'. This idea of a 'heated debate' is a familiar one, a routine metaphor to describe a debate in which there is a great deal of conflict. In this example, however, we are more likely to interpret 'heat' as something that is actually hot precisely because of the use of 'energy'. Therefore, the author has taken a conventional metaphor ('heated debate') and given it additional vigour and a new twist by inserting 'energy' into the noun phrase. The use of 'energy' in this phrase is particularly astute.

There is one more textual feature worth commenting on.

Example 3.12
In May, Energy Minister Dipuo Peters, according to local media reports, called the gas beneath the Karoo a 'blessing that God gives us', adding, 'and we need to exploit it for the benefit of the people'.
(Schellhase, 2012)

The statement from the minister can be understood as exploiting a number of persuasive techniques. He focuses on the benefit to people of the gas and also refers to these natural deposits as a 'blessing' from God. He therefore alludes to religion and a particular view of the natural world. Such allusions can be described in terms of **intertextuality**. In referring to God, the minister is invoking another text: religious texts. One might even argue that he is alluding to a specific part of a specific religious text. In the book of Genesis, God gives man dominion over the earth. For people who know the Bible, the minister's words might well be understood as referencing these verses.

Intertextuality is not always obvious, and sometimes it is too obvious to seem relevant. That is, in this example, we could also discuss the reference to God and blessings as using a religious argument as authority. Nevertheless, intertextuality refers to the strategy of drawing on historical and cultural knowledge, without necessarily spelling out the full meaning and significance of that reference. To fully appreciate the choice made here, readers need to know something about this history. Intertextuality also reminds us that texts, and language, have a relation to previous texts and utterances.

Activity 3.5

Try to identify other examples of the features described here (parallelism, presupposition, intertextuality, metaphor) in an article about fracking or an environmental issue in your locality. What other features do you notice? Looking for repetition of particular words, phrases or syntax is a good place to start. What is the text trying to persuade the audience of?

3.6 WORDS AND WEAPONS: THE POLITICS OF WAR

War is a domain where we see the political and ideological effects of language. In the following, we explore some examples of how word choices can both reflect ideology and have persuasive effects. We consider the language used to refer to nuclear weapons drawing on our discussion in Chapter 2 about the connections between language and thought. 'Nukespeak', or the language used to talk about nuclear weapons, has long been of interest to linguists (Chilton, 1982; Cohn, 1987; Woods, 2007). One of the reasons for this is that nuclear weapons and the production of nuclear power are fields where **euphemisms** are common. A euphemism is a word used to make something which might otherwise be unpleasant or disagreeable more benign. Euphemisms are also common in the domains of war. 'Collateral damage', for example, is a convenient way of backgrounding large numbers of civilian deaths, especially during times of war. We tend to use euphemisms in taboo fields, especially in relation to biological processes that we'd rather not think about. Dysphemism, by contrast, makes something more disagreeable or unpleasant than it might otherwise be. If you call a 'hamburger' a 'cowburger', you might find yourself less hungry than you thought you were.

Carol Cohn (1987) studied the language of nuclear weapons, spending a year with defence professionals in the US in 1984. Seeking to understand how defence policy is formulated, she argues that at least part of it is driven by the way these professionals talk about nuclear weapons. Further, having been exposed to this language for such a long period, she found her own thinking starting to change. Cohn notes that defence policy is a field full of 'abstraction and euphemism, which allows infinite talk about nuclear holocaust without ever forcing the speaker or enabling the listened to touch the reality behind those words' (Cohn, 1987: 17). Table 3.1 provides examples of some of these abstractions and euphemisms.

Table 3.1 Examples of euphemisms in defence policy making (Cohn, 1987: 17)

Euphemism	*Gloss*
clean bombs	'weapons which are largely fusion rather than fission and which therefore release a higher quantity of energy not as radiation but as blast' (Cohn, 1987: 17)
countervalue attacks	'incinerating cities' (Cohn, 1987: 17)
Christmas tree farm	'where missiles are lined up in their silos ready for launching' (Cohn, 1987: 20)
footprint	'the pattern in which bombs fall' (Cohn, 1987: 20)
cookie cutter	'a particular model of nuclear attack' (Cohn, 1987: 20)

Cohn also describes her acquisition of this new language related to nuclear weapons and warfare. She reported that knowing how to speak this language gave her a sense of power, in terms of not being so afraid of nuclear war, but also when speaking to those working in the industry. She also

discovered that if she did not use this new language, the experts would consider her 'ignorant or simpleminded, or both' (1987: 22).

The use of euphemism is not just about making a single object seem more agreeable or about making a single action more acceptable. As with the choice of 'equality' and 'fair', it can structure a whole set of arguments such that some topics are to be spoken about in great detail. The choice of a word has consequences.

Woods (2007) explores another way language and nuclear weapons are discussed. He points out the normalisation of the **discourse** of nuclear weapons but also that there is a competing, strongly anti-nuclear discourse. This alternative discourse emphasises the notion of 'proliferation', the idea that 'the spread of nuclear arms is inevitable, unstoppable and dangerous' (Woods, 2007: 94). The word 'proliferation' manages to convey an entire argument and an ongoing process which can't be stopped. Paradoxically, perhaps, Woods suggests that this discourse of 'proliferation' has actually stopped the spread of nuclear weapons because of the form of the word itself.

Discourse in this context means two things. First, discourse refers to texts or language longer than a sentence or utterance. In this sense, nuclear discourse is extended talk or a text about nuclear weapons. Second, discourse describes the ideology underlying and structuring this talk. In the case Woods describes, 'proliferation' and the arguments that this term refers to can be described as a particular discourse about nuclear weapons. That is, the proliferation discourse relies on a set of beliefs and values that are ideological. More broadly, discourse used in relation to ideology is common across a number of fields and topics as we will see in later chapters.

The morphology of 'proliferation' tells us that this is a noun. While it is derived from the verb 'proliferate', if we use it in a sentence, we can see it is clearly a noun. The change of non-noun word to a noun is known as **nominalisation**. The reason is it so powerful is related to how we think about nouns. In simple terms, a noun is a naming word; it names a thing. Things have a physical reality, they tend to be stable and to have some kind of concrete existence. This is not to claim that all nouns refer to concrete things. Rather, the idea is that when we encounter a noun, we tend to orient to the idea that it is a thing. This means that when a verb (or something else) is turned into a noun, we are more likely to think of it as something solid, with a real concrete existence in the world. Once people start talking about 'proliferation', we are in a world of things rather than processes.

Woods argues that we need to understand the discursive formation of 'proliferation' and understand its effects in the contemporary world. He argues that it has serious and far-reaching consequences and is a 'cause of global inequality and double-standards' (2007: 116). It can have these effects because it is such a commonsense idea; the belief that 'proliferation' of nuclear weapons is a bad thing is completely normalised in many places around the world. It is part of a dominant ideology in the context of international affairs

Nuclear power and nuclear weapons are the topic of much discussion. See if you can find examples of euphemism, dysphemism and nominalisation in articles about the events in Fukushima, Japan, or the tension between North Korea and the US.

3.6.1 Toys and politics

The language of warfare and nuclear weapons is linked to the normalisation of particular ideologies. As we saw, identifying who 'we' refers to is important in understanding persuasive texts. Who 'we' are can also depend very much on who 'they' are. When it comes to war and violence, who is 'us' and who is 'them' is a matter of life and death.

It's worth considering where these ideas come from; how do you find out who 'we' are? As this is a central question for any society, it's hardly surprising that who 'we' are is captured by dominant ideologies. What is a bit surprising is where these ideologies can be found. Linguistic features are not the only evidence of ideology. As we claimed at the start of the chapter, politics is everywhere. A place where you might not expect to find political ideologies is in children's toys. We take this example to show that language is not distinct from other forms of social practice.

David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen observe that toys related to war, such as toy soldiers, guns and other 'play' weapons have 'prepared children for specific kinds of warfare, fought in particular ways fused with specific political ideologies about the meaning of war and society itself . . .' (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2009: 52). If we look closely at toys and how they are used, we can find out something about who 'we' are.

Playing with toys may well involve language, but it also requires physical activity. Ideology is not just expressed in language; it is found in every aspect of our lives, including the way children interact with toys. Many plastic toy guns have lights and sounds, including voices shouting at the 'enemy'. The inclusion of 'technology' and the use of sounds makes the toys not only representative of contemporary war but also interactive and so 'allow the child to become physically, actively, involved in the representation' (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2009: 57). Machin and van Leeuwen found that the way children hold guns demonstrates a familiarity with the physical handling of weaponry. Moreover, the children can explain what the guns are for, who the soldiers are and what they do. The children in their study demonstrated fully developed discourses of war, such as saying that the special forces soldiers are the 'cleverest and best trained' and engage in the 'daring missions'. By interacting in this way with these toys, children learn to identify with these soldiers and their weapons, seeing them as representations of their own

nation and society. This helps to build a picture for them of the difference between 'us' and 'them'. Who, in particular, 'them', or the 'enemy', represent in this play is left rather undefined (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2009: 58, 59). The children identify an 'enemy' but only refer to the enemy in a generic way, e.g., 'bad people' (2009: 59). For the perpetuation of ideology, this is convenient, as it allows for any number of actors, groups or nations to be inserted into this role.

Machin and van Leeuwen argue that particular views of war become part of the children's 'mental furniture' (2009: 59). The 'mental furniture' they refer to is akin to the concept of habits of thinking and ideology that we discussed in Section 2.4. That children might have particular views of war has consequences over and above the identification of us and them. For example, the toys emphasise the cultural importance of a particular kind of masculinity, the concept of the daring hero expert soldier and the practice of war as a way of resolving conflict (2009: 59).

Activity 3.8

Think of examples of toys made for and marketed to young girls. What do they communicate? (see also Boyle, 2013)

3.7 LANGUAGE, IDEOLOGY AND METAPHOR

In Section 3.5.5, we saw that metaphor can be used to create an image in the mind by comparing one thing with something else. This can be done overtly as in 'love is a battlefield' but metaphors are often implicit. As such they can form the base of an ideology.

Activity 3.9

Consider the following examples of people talking about time:

He wasted so much time yesterday.
I've invested a lot of time in you.
She can't spare you any time.
This technique will save you so much time.

How is time being described here? What else is described in these terms?

These phrases suggest that time can be wasted, saved and spent. In order

level) that time is valuable. In fact, the metaphor 'time is money' expresses that overtly.

As an ideology is a set of beliefs, the question to ask is 'what beliefs need to be in place for a particular statement to be true?' That is, what kinds of things do we need to believe, or accept as true, for particular pieces of language to make sense. If we believe that time is valuable this will have consequences for the way we behave in the world. For example, we may expect to be compensated when our time is wasted. This might take the form of money (for example of refund or discount) or a favour or gift to recognise that the person has taken something from you – your time. Thus, our beliefs have an effect on our thinking about people, events and actions in the world. They also have an effect on the language that we use and therefore on persuasion. Once we have identified the beliefs (ideologies) from which language draws, we can examine different ideologies to see what their consequences might be.

Metaphors rely on beliefs which in turn are composed of sets of beliefs that form a world view. Horner remarks, 'Metaphors evoke scenarios; scenarios suggest causal relationships and invite evaluation' (2011: 33). We've already seen that linguistic choices people make, the language that is used, can have consequences for how the world is understood. 'Metaphors link ideology with political discourse by providing models for making sense of [the world]' (Horner, 2011: 32). In this section, we consider the consequences of metaphors that are related to money, finance and the market (see also Portero, 2011).

It is common to use metaphors when there is a gap in the language. The creation of new metaphors is also common when complex political or financial news is being communicated to the public (Horner, 2011).

Consider the following terms and decide which action people would be more likely to accept. Why? In answering this question, think about how you might use these words in a sentence.

rescue plan
bailout
intervention

While 'intervention' seems reasonably neutral, it still suggests an undesirable situation. We know this because of how the word is used. People talk about 'interventions' in the context of disputes and problems. You don't 'intervene' in a friendly conversation; you 'intervene' in an argument. A 'rescue plan' is clearly a positive thing, as it involves saving someone or some-

makes the term double edged. Finally, what you understand by 'bailout' may well be influenced by the way it was used in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. In the US, government action, the 'Emergency Stabilisation Act', to support the financial markets and banks was referred to using these terms. Most widely, it was referred to as a 'bailout'. As Horner notes, this 'evokes images of disaster: sailors bailing water of sinking boats, pilots ejecting from crashing planes' (Horner, 2011: 30). Far from having some of the positive associations of 'rescue plan', Horner argues that some saw the bailout plan 'as a means of rescuing the guilty from the consequences of their actions' (2011: 31).

Underlying the language used to describe the financial crisis and subsequent intervention, Horner uncovered a series of metaphors that informed thought, language and action. The economy was conceived as a 'system' frequently described with plumbing metaphors. For example, the economic system was 'clogged' and needed to be cleared. The image of clogging was also found in relation to another metaphor: the economy is a human body. 'The circulatory system appeared in several instances of bailout talk to project the danger of a larger system failure should the symptoms remain untreated' (Horner, 2011: 35).

Once the economy is portrayed as a human body, a whole range of other metaphors become available. A body has arteries, which, if clogged, may lead to a heart attack. If the economy is a body, it also has a heart, which has to be protected (Horner, 2011: 35). When people understand that they are part of this body, views of the economy become more personal and more corporeal. No one wants to be sick – literally or metaphorically. Portraying the economy as a body, and by implication a person, is part of a broader set of discourses and representations. Choosing to represent the economy as a body makes discussion of the financial crisis both comprehensible and somewhat personal. As we all have bodies, we all understand how they work. As we are all part of the national body, we are necessarily part of this economic body too. Constructing the economy as a body also means it may be imagined as a person. The economy, then, can be said to have undergone **personification**.

Mautner has argued that the market, another name for the economy, has been personified. 'There is ample linguistic evidence that, in general usage, "the market" is reified (i.e., made into a "thing") and at the same time anthropomorphised (i.e., treated as it if it were a human being)' (Mautner, 2010: 14). The market has a 'will of its own'; it has moods that can be altered by some kind of external action; it can be 'encouraged', 'surprised' and 'misled' (Mautner, 2010: 14–15). Once the market is personified, important consequences arise from this. Just as a person in danger should be rescued and a person who is ill should be cured so too with the market and the economy. Moreover, as Mautner shows (2010) the market has become the most important person in the world. This is not simply a discourse; it is an idea that has outcomes for real people, for their employment, housing and every aspect of their lives. The construction of the market as a person is a

Even personified, however, 'the market' is rather abstract. Unless a person works directly in financial industries, it might be difficult to see the consequences of this metaphorical personification. Mautner's argument that the market is the most important person, however, can be seen in a domain which may be more familiar: universities.

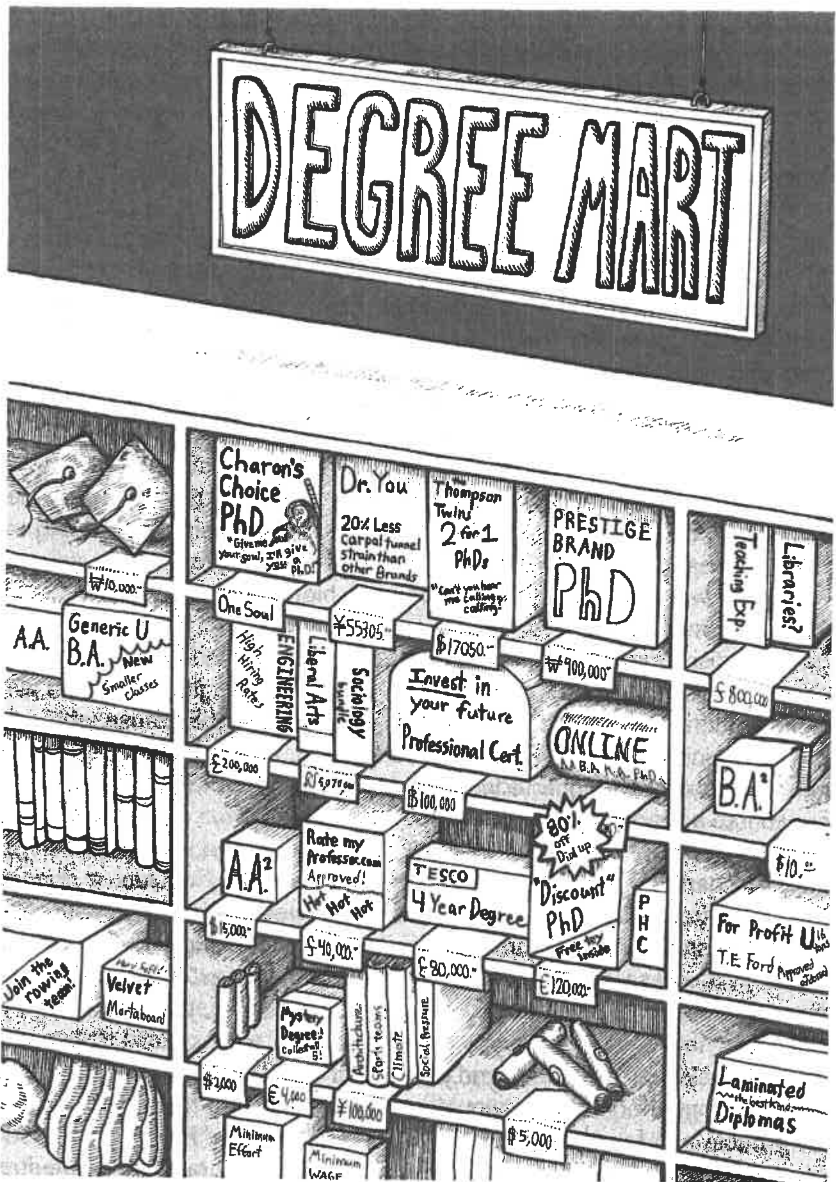
3.7.1 Student as customer

While in some parts of the world, it has long been the norm for university students to pay for their education, this practice has now spread to countries where for many years higher education did not cost a great deal of money. In Australia, for example, higher education required no fees between 1974 and 1989, and they were unknown in the UK until 1998. Having to pay fees to the university is only one of the costs associated with higher education and only one of the many things that should be considered when thinking about access to university. Perhaps deciding to levy fees changes the way we think, behave and talk about higher education. Here we explore some discourses of higher education where fees have been introduced.

One discourse involves students being described as 'customers'. Journalist Sean Coughlan writes, 'The market economy in higher education will mean students have to be treated as valued customers. Because, after all, they're paying the bill' (2011). Note the semantic presupposition here, 'the market economy in higher education'. Higher education is now fully integrated into a 'market economy'.

When money changes hands, a set of ideas about the relationships between parties comes into focus (see Section 2.4). Consider a normal consumer transaction, for example, buying something like a computer. If you pay a small amount of money for it, does this change your expectations? In the case of something tangible and functional like a computer, expectations and responsibilities are reasonably clear. Especially if you pay a lot of money for something, you expect it to work, you expect it to do what the seller told you it would do and you expect that if something goes wrong with the computer that you would be able to get this fixed. This seems reasonable and fair. We buy things all the time, and we have a great deal of experience in doing this. While it makes sense to draw on knowledge we already have about consumer transactions, is paying tuition fees for a university education the same as buying a computer? Does the student as customer metaphor fully describe the relationship between universities and students?

To answer these questions, we need to carefully examine the propositions that are connected to the 'student as customer' metaphor. This allows us to evaluate these points individually. Only after we have considered all the ideas connected to this metaphor can we assess the ideologies associated with the arguments and, hence, the metaphor itself. Specifically, the student



© Russell Hugo

Image 3.1 Degree Mart

Example 3.13

a the relationship between student and university is transactional
b the customer is always 'right'
c the customer should get good value for money (good return on investment)

Consider the statements in Example 3.13. Do you think they apply in a university context? Can you think of other propositions connected to the metaphor?

Consider Example 3.13. a.), the idea that the relationship between the student and university is transactional. A commercial transaction consists of giving money in exchange for goods or services. The student as customer metaphor might suggest that a student exchanges money for a degree. In fact, degrees are only granted when the student has successfully completed certain requirements. So, if we were to try to compare the university 'transaction' to a commercial transaction, it is more like buying gym membership than buying a computer. People join gyms to get fit and lose weight. The act of purchasing the gym membership itself does not guarantee any of these outcomes. Joining a gym is purchasing an opportunity to engage in beneficial behaviour, but the customer has to undertake these activities. A university education is similarly interactional. A student must undertake the activities provided by and, in fact, required by the university in order to receive the degree as evidence of their activity.

The example of 'student as customer' shows how metaphors can work in extended and powerful ways. While it may seem completely inconsequential to describe university students as university customers, this model is linked to a range of political and administrative decisions as well as to the economic features of the society we live in. The metaphor is connected to propositions that are ideological and difficult to challenge. That is not to say that there aren't other metaphors for the relationship between students and universities or that these models pass uncontested.

3.8 TWITTER AND POLITICAL AGENCY

In Chapters 4, 5 and 8, we will discuss social media and online communication. But in the context of politics, and especially in relation to some of the tools discussed earlier, we provide some discussion of Twitter,[3] as this platform shows that we all potentially have some form of political agency. Twitter allows users to communicate with a potentially global audience. As such, it is a powerful tool for politicians and anyone who wants to persuade us of something. Because Twitter users read, respond to and share other Twitter

highlight a specific topic in their tweet by adding a hash sign (#) to a word or phrase (the word/phrase and its hash sign are called a 'hashtag'). For example, '#Brexit' signals that the topic of the tweet is related to the UK vote to leave the European Union in 2016 called 'Brexit'. Using a phrase with a hashtag can serve as commentary about particular issues such as '#Stop-BrexitNow'. Davis (2013) describes the changes that Twitter has made to politics and uses the term 'Hashtag politics'. He draws particular attention to the **intertextuality** and polyphony (the presence of many voices) that Twitter allows. Because hashtags link to other discussions, users and internet material, Twitter is highly intertextual. That is, it is similar to the type of intertextuality that we described earlier in that it can allude to and reference other texts, but it also is a clickable link that directs users to similar hashtags.

The ability for people to comment on and retweet tweets also has the potential to change the political conversation. Discussions that may have been had in private before, or among friends, can now be had in front a worldwide audience, thus allowing for campaigning of all kinds and enabling rapid circulation of what many people think about current events and topics. This is an important form of political **agency**. Agency refers to an individual's ability to act, advocate or speak for themselves.

Activity 3.12

Find a hashtag for a political campaign. This might be for an upcoming election or for an issue that people have strong views about (like fracking). How do people use language in their tweets? Is there a unity or diversity of opinion around the hashtag?

In order to explore the different kinds of politics that can be found on Twitter, we now provide a few examples. The first links to environmental debates, while the second is linked to university policies.

Each year, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) runs a global campaign concerned with environmental protection. It encourages people around the world to turn off all electronic appliances for one hour, calling it 'Earth Hour', in order to draw our attention to our reliance on electricity and to make us think about the resources required to use it. The hashtag #EarthHour is used year-round to refer to the event and create conversation among the public about the effect of natural resources on the environment. In August 2017, the WWF initiated another 'conversation' with Twitter users by inviting them to tweet 'five words to describe #climate change' in order to ascertain what Twitter users' concerns are and to inform new environmental campaigns. Users thus have at least some political agency in that they have been

Social activism campaigns can also be more local. In South Africa in 2015, the hashtag #FeesMustFall was used to highlight rising fees and decreasing government investment in higher education. The campaign was student led, starting at Wits University with protests and other action in October 2015. The #FeesMustFall hashtag helped them to mobilise the campaign at a national level. The Twitter activity also helped students to challenge representations in the mainstream media of the protests. For example, 'On Twitter, participants sought to debunk various news reports that reported that the protests had turned violent, reckless and dangerous' (Peterson, Radebe and Mohanty, 2016: 7). As such, Twitter was a valuable tool for exercising political agency.

3.9 SILLY CITIZENSHIP

Discussions of ideology and war, nuclear weapons and the cost of education may suggest that we are politically powerless. The dominance of particular ideologies and the productive power of the language and metaphors connected to them can make us feel powerless. But as the example of Twitter shows, it is possible to have political agency even in a world full of many voices. In this final section of the chapter, we consider another kind of talk and action which is clearly political but that offers more scope for individual action, for change and for enjoyment.

In Chapter 4 we consider Twitter and YouTube and the way they are changing our consumption of media. Here, we will examine how they are also changing the political landscape. Social media and people's access to technology allows them to communicate in new media and new forms. One popular genre is 'news satire'. However, the tradition of critiquing power through humour is not new. Hartley points out that this practice can be found everywhere – 'from Aristophanes to Shakespeare'. He continues, 'Comedy is the go-to source for civic understanding' (Hartley, 2010: 241).

Hartley has coined the phrase 'silly citizenship' to describe certain kinds of 'media citizenship', that is, the playful and humorous ways people produce, consume and engage with the media. Hartley discusses a number of examples, such as spoof election ads in Australia and spoofs on political debates in the US (Hartley, 2010: 241). 'This kind of silly citizenship has become part of the mediated political landscape, with both professional and amateur creativity expended in the cause of political agency' (Hartley, 2010: 241). And while this may seem to have little to do with 'real' politics, it is important to remember that persuasive discourse takes a variety of forms.

3.9.1 'Terrorism alert desk'

Our example of silly citizenship comes from a daily television show which is broadcast in the US and available on YouTube. *Last Week Tonight*, by John

in the media. Oliver has covered news stories about vaccines, televangelism and, in the example we consider here, media ownership. The segment described here, appearing early in 2017, deals with the Sinclair Broadcast group, a media corporation that owns a number of media outlets and was poised to buy even more. The segment discusses how the Sinclair group requires that the television stations they own run selected video segments. Known as 'must runs' these segments include editorial comment on current events. One 'must run' segment that Oliver also discusses includes a daily 'terrorism alert'. Example 3.14 provides a transcript of part of the segment (italics indicates emphasis, bold signals strong emphasis, full stops mean a falling intonation and commas indicate a short pause).

Example 3.14

[13:56]

John Oliver (JO): . . . but perhaps the most troubling thing of all is that Sinclair has a **daily** *must run segment* called the *terrorism alert desk* that is right, they report on terrorism *every single day* whether there is something major to report on or not which means that sometimes, the updates contain things like this.

[Video Tape 1: Terrorism Daily Alert on screen, presenter standing to the right mid shot] The company in charge of security for the Wimbledon *ten*nis tournament says the *ring* leader of the London Bridge attack *did* apply for a job. Now he was not *interviewed* and *no* interview was *scheduled* he just filled out an online application.

[Video Tape 2: footage of a flag in the distance – zooming in] an Isis flag was found *hanging* in a neighbourhood in New *Hamp*shire, it was taken *down* and police are looking into who put it there. [Terrorism Daily Alert on screen, presenter standing to the right mid shot] From the terrorism alert desk, in Washington, I'm Lindsey Mastis.

JO: In other alerts my grandma heard a loud noise, a man with a beard asked me when the next bus is coming, and Iran still exists [audience laughter]. From the terrorism alert desk in Washington *I* am just about *done* with this shit [audience laughter]. And look, look, there is no doubt that the terror alert desk has also featured some truly *terrifying* stories

[Video Tape 3: Terrorism Daily Alert on screen, presenter standing to the right mid shot] Isis has carried out a *gruesome* public execution in Iraq. They sliced *nine teens* in half with a chainsaw.

JO: Now *that* caught our attention, because it *feels* like the sort of thing we'd have seen reported elsewhere. So we tried to track down that story, and it originated with an anonymously sourced report, on something called *Iraqi News*. We weren't able to find *any outlet* that independently verified it and even when it was picked up by British tabloids and Breitbart, they were careful to distance themselves with language like 'it has been claimed' and 'reportedly' and *I did not know* it was *possible* to dip *beneath* the journalistic standards of at a *carnival food cart* [audience laughter] [image of food truck left of screen showing a man shouting at a woman] 'Look your fried ham is unimaginative and bland and we cannot have that. We're Uncle Stickys Discount Ham Wagon' [image pans out to show food truck with name] [audience laughter] But but they *reported* it like it was a *fact* and what was perhaps even *weirder* about that chainsaw segment, was the story that closed it out

[VT4; footage of Isis flag then cuts to images of women in burkinis at a beach] And mayors in 22 French towns are ig*noring* a high court's ruling that says banning *burkinis*, is illegal. More than 30 towns initially outlawed the swim- swimwear worn mostly by Muslim women. From the terrorism alert desk, I'm Michelle Marsh.

JO: **what the f***!** [audience laughter] That is *not* about terrorism it's *just about Muslims*. [audience laughter] By that definition, terrorism is *anything* a Muslim does! 'Tonight, Mahershala Ali[4] on the cover of GQ, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar[5] sneezed in an airport, and happy birthday to Fareed Zakaria.[6] This has been your *terrorism alert desk*.' [audience laughter and applause] [16:34]

What point is Oliver trying to make in this segment? What linguistic tools is Oliver using to make his argument?

Oliver juxtaposes the story in the Terrorism Alert with his own comical exaggeration of their claims using both commentary and images. But the humorous constructions, which rely on the real content (**intertextuality**), also make powerful arguments about what we should expect from news outlets, public discussion of terrorism and the representation of Muslims. Silly citizenship can be very entertaining, but it can also be extremely serious. As Hartley puts it, 'the stage for citizenship is literally that. It is as much dramatic and performative as it is deliberative' (Hartley, 2010: 241). This genre of entertainment has become an important resource for consumers to engage with politics and encourage political agency. We will return to its place as an important part of the media landscape in Chapter 4.

3.10 SUMMARY

As the Electoral Commission advertisement we discussed in the introduc-

toys, financial systems and humorous talk shows. If we pay attention to language used in these domains, we can uncover the ideologies that underpin the persuasive arguments made. Whether we're looking at repetition and contrasts or presuppositions and metaphor, examining the linguistic choices made gives us a way of understanding the arguments being made and how they are constructed. It then becomes possible to assess these arguments one by one to explore how we can be persuaded by ideologies that aren't consistent with our beliefs.

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NOTES

1 It is not clear whether this is always true (see Zhang et al. (2014).
2 While fracking is often used to refer to the drilling and the use of fluids, in fact, only the injection of fluid is hydraulic fracturing (BBC, 2015).
3 For those not familiar with Twitter, it is a micro-blogging application, allowing individuals to author and disseminate messages of 140 characters called 'tweets' via a smartphone or computer.
4 US actor and rapper.
5 Retired American basketball player.
6 American journalist.

CHAPTER 4

Language and the media

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we consider language used in the media. If we consider 'mass media' to be information communicated 'from one sender to a large audience' (Jucker, 2003: 132), it is a very broad field. We will touch on aspects of social media and news media, as these resources have become a vital source of input for many members of society. Exploration of these areas provides us with a range of linguistic data as well as opportunities to use a variety of methods to analyse them. Consideration of these media sources also allows us to think about how particular ideologies are communicated and maintained, the linguistic choices that help do this and what counts as news, as well as changes over time in mass media news reporting. An important issue to consider when reading this chapter is how we interpret the information we find in the media. We refer to the skills audiences need to read and fully understand the texts they find in the mass media as media **'literacy'**. Our typical media consumption practices may not include noticing news values, ideological filters and the tools that platforms use to attract our attention. However, reading media texts critically and understanding how the mass media delivers content to us, including what they present and how, is a

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