

# 9 LANGUAGE & REPRESENTATION

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## 1. Introduction

Language and representation, as the phrase suggests, concerns the ways that language represents the world. Perhaps even more interesting is the relationship between language and *thought*.

One of the key questions here is whether language simply reflects reality or whether it can influence or shape our perceptions of the world. For example, if (like the Mexican language Tarahumara) you have one word that refers to what English speakers would call the two colours *blue* and *green*, would this have an influence on your perception of these colours? To put it simply, if you only have one word, will you still be able to see two colours?

While this may seem like a rather abstract question, it's linked to the ways in which language encodes ideas about the world, the people and the groups of people around us. It is linked, too, to the labels applied to people. In 2011, for example, the comedian Ricky Gervais was criticised for his use of the word *mong*. His argument was that the word had lost its connection with the term *mongol* and so was not a demeaning reference to people with Down's Syndrome. He backed down after hearing the mother of a Down's Syndrome child talk about the hurt such words do cause. These debates move away from neutral academic study, often polarising opinion into opposing corners.

## 2. Why is this area worth studying?

If, as the title of Dwight Bolinger's book suggests, language is 'a loaded weapon' (1980), it's clearly important to be aware of the ways in which language can shape attitudes, an area of Language study known as **critical linguistics**, which treats language as a social phenomenon. The linguist Norman Fairclough says his aim is 'to increase consciousness of language and power, and particularly of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others' (2000). So, it is an openly evaluative branch of linguistics, rather than **descriptive**.

Studies have tended to focus on the representation of gender in the English language, noting:

- (a) ways in which reference to the female are disadvantaged, with the effect that
- (b) this bias in language negatively influences social attitudes.

The implied, if not explicit, conclusion is that:

- (c) such language use should be changed.

In that case, it would be moving towards a **prescriptive** approach to language – an area which was previously the preserve of grammar books advising on language 'étiquette', making judgements on which forms language users should, or shouldn't use.

Work on representations of gender has branched out into other areas where language seems to disadvantage already disadvantaged groups: race, disability, class, age, sexuality.

The most obvious point about bias in language concerns the naming of groups in society, so the focus of linguistic studies is often on the choice of individual words (lexis) and their meanings (semantics). Moving on from those studies, there is interesting work on the ways that structures of sentences (grammar) can influence perceptions, and then people have looked at the organisation and underlying ideology of whole texts (discourse).

Opposition to this approach has a high profile in the media. The rallying cry is: 'It's PC gone mad!' and it tends to be accepted as the common-sense point of view. It's worth trying to understand the rationale for such passionate opposition. Is it based on the belief that language is not, in fact, influential? Or on the fear that control of language is dangerously close to thought-control? Or is it a simple declaration of freedom of speech, including the freedom to break taboos?

But first it's important to note that the target – the term 'Political Correctness' – has no existence as a movement; it is only ever used by opponents, not supporters, of the drive to avoid derogatory naming of disadvantaged groups. According to Jenni Murray (BBC broadcaster) the phrase was coined by an advisor in George Bush senior's administration, to refer to the growing concerns about the negative impact of certain language use.

It's unlikely that anyone could seriously claim that language use has *no*

impact – that ‘words can never harm’ – but can language be a means of thought-control? George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* portrays a dystopian future for the world. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of this fictional world is the surreptitious methods of controlling the populace. The language was reformed so that certain concepts could not be named. In Newspeak, things were either *good* or *ungood*. Control of language, or so the theory went, leads to control of thoughts, so the concept of ‘bad’ no longer existed.

The novel has been very influential, so that the phrase *Big Brother is watching you* is invoked whenever there seems to be too much control over individual freedom: CCTV cameras; smoking restrictions; having to separate rubbish; banning men-only clubs; using the name *headteacher* so that females could apply for the job too. Freedom – whether of speech or action – is an emotive word, which sounds immediately desirable. But it becomes more complex when one person’s freedom is another’s oppression.

In a talk given in March 2012, the rapper Plan B objects to the word *chau*, which is ‘used to ridicule and label people who come from a less educated background.’ He says, ‘For me it’s no different from similar words used to be prejudiced towards race or sex.’

I agree with Plan B.

### 3. Survey of research ideas

The comparative linguistic studies by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf in the early twentieth century are the springboard for interest in language and representation. They suggested that the language we speak is a filter through which we perceive the world. Their research looked at Native American languages and compared the ways certain concepts (times, colours, etc.) were expressed, in comparison to European languages. Hopi Indian language, for example, has two words for *water*, distinguishing between a natural body of water, such as rivers, lakes, oceans, and water in a container, for example a bottle, jug or bucket. The relativist theory would suggest that people without this language distinction do not perceive water in the same way – as two different entities.

Although this ‘strong’ version of the theory has been challenged, more recent research studies have looked at a single language – English – to test out a ‘softer’ version of the theory: that people’s thoughts can be influenced by language.

The psychologist Elizabeth Loftus (1974) conducted experiments on eye-witness testimony. She wanted to test whether people’s perceptions of

an identical event were altered, depending on the language used in the questions. In one experiment, people watched a film of a car accident and were later asked questions about what they saw. She used a range of verbs to question different groups about the incident:

*How fast was the car going when it hit ...*

*How fast was the car going when it bumped ...*

*How fast was the car going when it collided ...*

*How fast was the car going when it smashed ...*

The results of this test showed that, with certain verbs, speed was assessed as faster and broken glass (which was not, in fact, present) was recalled.

For language study, this brings up the question of semantics – can a set of apparent synonyms really have the same meaning? Because of its use in different contexts – the collocations of a word – each word acquires subtly different shades of associated meanings: its connotations. An example often quoted from gender studies is the range of nouns to describe a promiscuous person, where the female terms (*nymphomaniac, tart, slag, etc.*) are more numerous and have more negative connotations than those used for males (*stud, Casanova*).

It is hardly surprising that use of loaded terms in the eye-witness experiment lead people to ‘remember’ the accident in different ways. The power of connotation to influence thought is employed not only in literary texts, but in the persuasive language of politics and advertising.

Both areas employ highly-paid copywriters to produce material that will present their brand in the best possible light. The name ‘spin doctor’ acknowledges that language can be twisted and spun to shape attitudes. Slogans and soundbites rarely offer any detail about the product or party, only a vague sense that it’s desirable. In this 2012 list of the most memorable advertising slogans, none of the examples – apart from the first – include any clue to the type of thing (trainers, varnish, shampoo, fizzy drink) being sold:

*Beanz Meanz Heinz*

*Just do it*

*Does exactly what it says on the tin*

*Because I’m worth it*

*It’s the real thing*

There's an underlying suggestion, in the connotations of lexis chosen, that these products – and therefore your life – are straightforward (*just*) and authentic (*real, exactly, worth*). But the grammar of the slogans has a less obvious impact. Three use stative verbs (*to be, to mean*) so the structure is like an equation:  $x = y$ . There's no question; this structure states a fact. The others use the dynamic verb (*to do*) which has a wide range of meanings: do the shopping, do your homework, do your hair. With this product, you can achieve ... well, anything.

Some famous political slogans also leave any details to the imagination of each individual:

*When we win, you win*

(Win what?)

*Yes we can*

(Can what?)

*Vision with purpose*

(To do what?)

*Vote for change/Change we can believe in*

(Change what?)

Again, it's not only the choice of lexis with positive connotations, but the grammatical structures that present the party as able to do anything you choose to hope for. In *New Labour, New Language* Norman Fairclough (2000) notes the influential power of avoiding verbs to keep your intentions vague. **Nominalisation** is the term used when you transform the verb to an abstract noun – *change* – so there is no longer a specified agent/subject, object or timeframe. No need to specify, for example, 'We will change the tax laws'.

If the abstract noun *purpose* is rephrased as 'We intend to ...' it would need detail to make the structure complete. Where verbs are used, they are either auxiliary verbs (*can*) lacking a specific main verb, or an intransitive verb (*win*) that requires no object. These aspects of grammar, plus the use of passive voice, are influential in presenting a partial perspective on the world.

In these overtly promotional texts, the listener is probably aware of being manipulated. In other areas, the influence is more subtle. There's an industry in popular psychology books promoting 'winning' ways with language: neuro-linguistic programming, assertiveness training, even classroom management.

One suggestion is to avoid negative phrasing, if you want to affect other people's (or your own) behaviour. While attempting a physical activity, say: *I can, I can ...* rather than *I hope, I hope ...*

Embed the desired behaviour in your words: *Thank you for your patience* rather than *Please don't get annoyed*.

And this technique of using positive, rather than negative, phrasing, may be familiar to students: *I'm glad to see most people are getting on with their work so well* instead of *Don't mess about and waste time*.

War propaganda is a clear example of the ways language use can manipulate the way we see events – from the perspective of Us versus Them. Depending which side you are on, non-uniformed fighters are *terrorists, guerrillas, resistance* or *freedom fighters*. 'We' do not 'invade' a country, but 'liberate' the people. The US president George W. Bush said (2002):

I just want you to know that, when we talk about war, we're really talking about peace.

The strange claim that the antonyms *war/peace* are not opposites recalls the words of Humpty Dumpty (in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*): 'When I use a word, it means just what I want it to mean ... The question is ... which is to be master'. If you have enough power, can you change what words mean?

#### 4. Gender and power studies

In 1980, Dale Spender (*Man Made Language*) argued that the English language is biased towards the male. She makes many points to support her thesis.

There is the fact that the term *man* or *mankind* has been used to encompass all of humankind, even where the results are farcical: *Man, being a mammal, breastfeeds his young*.

This bias is still evident today. If you use the online British National Corpus (a collection of 100 million words of spoken and written English) and search for the word *man*, you will find it is used more frequently – in all genres of texts – than *woman*.

The concordance tool will also allow you to compare the collocations (words used in context) of *girl* and *boy*. *Girl*, although strictly the term for a female child, is three times more likely to refer to an adult female, whereas *boy* generally refers to a child. The imbalance is incontrovertible; the implications are still debated: is the suggestion of youth flattering or demeaning? It used to be common for a black man to be addressed as 'boy'. No longer. They were demeaned in society and the language use reflected this.

In the pronoun system, there is no gender-neutral singular form for referring to a person. It used to be acceptable to use *he* to refer to anyone, male or female: *If anyone wishes to apply for the post, he should obtain a form from the secretary.*

The term *erasure* refers to the way that this language use makes potential female applicants invisible.

The debate continues every day about whether this is 'ludicrous political correctness'. As I write, there is an article in the *Daily Mail* (16<sup>th</sup> March 2012) using this phrase. A company sent a flyer to a London Jobcentre. It was looking for applicants for a *Handyman Apprentice Bootcamp*. They were asked to replace the word *handyman* with a more inclusive term, so that both females and males felt they could apply. The directors were 'astonished' by this request. In their opinion, it was obvious that *handyman* included female applicants.

Moving to the use of *he or she* still places the male in first position, as does almost every pairing of female and male terms: *boys and girls; lads and lasses; brother and sister; nephews and nieces.*

Female names are often derived from the original, male name: *Geraldine* is a little (the meaning of the suffix *-ine*) version of *Gerald*, for example. Your surname – literally your *sire's name* – is your father's. It makes it difficult to trace your family back except through the male line. And there are many examples of the form: *Thompson, Hickson, etc. No Hickdaughter!*

Spender notes many examples of binary pairs, where the terms are not simply male as opposed to female, but have acquired further meanings, always to the detriment of the female term.

	Master	Mistress
Denotation	male person in charge	female person in charge
Connotation		+ illicit sexual

Table 1

The collocations (how each is used in context) of the two terms contribute to the shades of meaning. I used to work for a company called *Masterclasses*. I couldn't find an equivalent *Mistressclasses* and I knew it would sound hypersensitive to mention it. In the photocopying world, it's important to keep hold of the *master copy* – the top, or original copy. The most common use/collocation for *mistress* is in relation to *wife*, the legal sexual

partner. A *master* is not the equivalent term for the man a married woman is having an affair with. Probing further into the grammatical structures, the word *mistress* tends to occur with the determiner *his mistress*, and rarely as *I am/she is a mistress*. Similar shifts towards a sexualised meaning have occurred in these pairs: *Sir/Madam; courtier/courtesan*.

Language change seems to involve a gradual shift towards inferior, if not sexualised, meanings (semantic derogation) for many of the pairs: *lord/lady* (now an everyday reference for females) and *governor/governess* (a poorly paid private tutor).

There are also gaps in the binary system of titles: *Mr/Mrs* and *\_/Miss*. (No term to distinguish an unmarried man.)

The term *Ms* was introduced so that women did not have to advertise their marital status, whenever asked for their name. This has not turned out to be neutral term, but the subject of suspicion or mockery. (Is she a feminist or a lesbian?) One objection is that the spelling makes it difficult to know how to pronounce it – overlooking the same problem with *Mr* (Murr?) and *Mrs* (Murrz?).

A good place to start analysis of language and representation is with the system of naming, noticing whether there is any imbalance and what is implied by this. Note the terms of address in this extract from an article (*Guardian* 12<sup>th</sup> March 2012), for example. It is about William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*:

Its first in-house reader, a *Miss Perkins*, famously dismissed it as an 'absurd and uninteresting fantasy ... Rubbish and dull. Pointless.' However, a newly recruited young Faber editor, *Charles Monteith*, disagreed. He ... fought for the book, and then, having persuaded Golding to cut and rewrite, steered it through to publication.

Try making the naming of the female and male equal – first name + surname: *The first reader, Jennifer Perkins, dismissed it, but the second, Charles Monteith disagreed.*

Or refer to both by title + surname: *A Miss Perkins was the first reader. A Master Monteith read it next.*

Then comment on the differences in meanings implied by choice of naming strategies. I would suggest that although 'Jennifer Perkins' still made an error of judgement, she is no longer also seen as young and foolish. It's also worth noting the extra modifiers used for the female and male: *newly recruited young ... editor* suggests his youth as a valuable quality.

Generally though, we don't notice imbalance in terms of reference. The phrase *man and wife* probably doesn't seem odd in any way (*husband and wife*, or *man and woman*). Nor does any news report referring to *the neighbour's wife* (a woman who lives next door is a neighbour, surely).

The fact that the female terms in the binary pairs often have a suffix affects the associative meanings. Rather like the Newspeak system of *good – ungood*; some linguists (e.g., Geoffrey Leech 2008) have analysed the structure of antonyms using the concepts: plus male vs minus male. Certainly the male term is **unmarked**; the female term is **marked** with a suffix. There are many examples, using the suffix *-ess*, and, less commonly, *-enne* (*comediienne*) and *-trix* (*dominatrix*):

*waiter/waitress*

*actor/actress*

*poet/poetess*

Where there is no female suffix, people sometimes find it necessary to add a qualification, such as: *doctor/lady doctor*

This naming system suggests that, on the one hand we have poets – real poets – and, with the marked term, we have the female version of the real thing. Because many people are convinced by this argument – that the form of the words embeds gender inequality – there are changes in the naming system of English. It is unlikely that you will find the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy described as a *poetess*. On aircrafts, there are no longer *stewards* and *stewardesses*, but *flight attendants*.

Is this 'PC gone mad' or a healthy respect for the power of language, and a desire to equal things out in a world that can be biased against the underdogs? Perhaps the world has improved enough since the casually racist and sexist days of my childhood. But there remains fear of the 'other', whether it's other races, classes, or the young!

Deconstruction theory (Derrida, Foucault et al), looking at binary opposites, suggests that the language system reflects Western bias. The first term in each pair is unmarked as the norm – or the 'overdog' – with its opposite having negative associations:

*day/night*

*light/dark*

*white/black*

Benjamin Zephaniah's poem 'White Comedy' makes the underlying assumptions obvious, by reversing lots of common – and negative – collocations for the term *black*: *blackmail, blacklist, black magic*. His last line: 'I shall be writing to the Black House' is no longer a fanciful idea, as there is now a black president in the White House. Times have changed for the better, but the bias may have shifted its attention slightly onto other groups in society. The way that Barack Obama's opponents try to damage his image now is by the suggestion that he is Muslim.

## 5. What people are proposing now

A concordance tool can be used with a corpus of data (such as the British National Corpus<sup>1</sup>) to analyse the collocations of words. A comparison between the terms Christian and Muslim – in the English language – will show a preponderance of threatening terms occurring with Muslim: *extremist, fundamentalist*. Christian, on the other hand, tends to be collocated with benign, if foolish, terms: *happy-clappy, New Age, born again*.

Not only in wartime will language be used from the perspective of the user, creating a sense of Us versus Them. No one could apply the term *stranger* to themselves. A *stranger* is other people, different from ourselves and to be feared. Other terms relative to the point of view of the speaker are *alien, foreigner*. Although it's possible to say *I feel like a foreigner*, it makes little sense to say *I am a foreigner*. The term *immigrant* is clearly from the point of view of the people already living in the country and tends to have negative connotations. *Emigrant*, however, can refer to the same person, but seen from a different angle – their own, as they leave their home country to settle in another. An extreme example of perspective is in the origins of the word *barbarian*. Greeks coined the word from the way other languages sounded to their ears: *bar bar* sounds. So the meaning of *barbarian* has shifted from 'other languages sound odd to our ears', to 'foreigners are an uncivilised, dangerous mob'.

Words to refer to lower classes in society have undergone a similar semantic derogation. If you research the origins of the words *vulgar* and *villain*, you will find the adjective originally meant 'ordinary/common people'. (And *common* has also acquired some negative connotations!) The noun originally meant *a villager*.

Certain ways of referring to other countries and cultures are used so often and comfortably that it takes someone to point out the bias in the perspective. The novelist Chinua Achebe objects to the assumptions in the title of Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, recalling other phrases such

as *darkest Africa*. It's not long since it was common to refer to the people as *savages* and the culture as *primitive*. There's more awareness of such assumptions of superiority nowadays, so terms such as *third world* and *undeveloped* are being replaced by less value-laden terms, such as *developing countries*. Though some may argue that this retains a patronising Western perspective – they still need to develop to catch up with 'us'?

From history books, we may have learnt the 'fact' that in 1492 Christopher Columbus 'discovered' America. It was a new and exciting discovery to him, but the familiar home to Native Americans. It was acceptable to talk about *cowboys and Indians*, even though the only connection with people from India was a darker skin tone.

Naming is significant. It's annoying, at least, if other people call you by a name you have not chosen or agreed to, particularly if that name has demeaning associations: *half-caste* (not the full deal) *cripple* or *queer*. Attempts to reclaim derogatory terms and use them in positive ways have mixed success – it's clearly not simple to control language. Moving in the opposite direction, the term *gay* is acquiring negative connotations from its recent use in contexts, such as *That's so gay* as a critical comment.

Another aspect of semantic analysis is to look closely at metaphors. George Lakoff (*Metaphors We Live By* 1981) suggests that metaphors can reveal a society's underlying values and assumptions. We may say that *money doesn't grow on trees*, yet money is often associated with natural growth: *Watch your savings grow*. Investments can *yield* profits; you put aside a *nest egg*. The metaphor chosen can affect attitudes. The use of human organs for transplanting, for example, has been described in a headline as: *They stripped the organs from every dead child they touched* or the more benign headline *harvesting organs*.

Language and representation analysis can move from lexis and semantics to grammar. Certain grammatical structures have an inbuilt biased perspective. A common belief about the *passive voice* is that it is a marker of formal, detached, academic style. But the passive voice can be used to avoid mentioning the subject, even if it is known. The passive does not require the speaker/writer to mention the agent of the verb:

*Slaves were brought to America.*

*The railway was built.*

*Six blacks were shot in Soweto.*

It could be added, of course, but this might be an uncomfortable fact best omitted: *Six blacks were shot by police.*

The morphology of words can also reflect a partial perspective. The *-able/-ible* ending on verbs turns them into adjectives. A relatively new coining is *punchable*, which reveals more about the speaker ('I could punch him') than an objective view of the qualities of that person. Similarly, *unlikeable*, *undesirable* may be understood as 'No one could like that person', disguising the subjective element: *I'm not able to like that person*. *Undesirables* can also be used as a noun, again suggesting an objective fact, and masking the subjective prejudice.

The terms 'loaded question' and 'weasel words' refer to the ways language can have embedded assumptions.

*Do you admit that you made a complaint?*

If you answer yes, you have agreed not only that you made a complaint, but that it was wrong to do so. The verb *admit* has connotations of guilt.

An advert for a language course has as its headline:

*Are you ashamed of your mistakes in English?*

There are several assumptions embedded in this loaded question: that there are uses of English that are plain wrong (not simply colloquial or dialect varieties); that mistakes are something to be ashamed of, not a natural part of life and learning.

A skilfully placed adverb can slant the force of a statement towards the speaker's point of view: *She knows perfectly well ...* (even though she's denying the truth). Or the addition of a verb with negative connotations: *He didn't bother to look for it ...*

Studies into transitive and intransitive verbs have revealed interesting implied meanings. Rather like nominalisation, intransitive verbs float free in terms of specifying precise details: *Weak teachers will go* rather than *We will sack weak teachers*.

Transitive verbs		Intransitive verbs	
subject	+ verb +	subject	+ verb
	direct object		(no object)
We	will sack weak teachers	Weak teachers	will go

Table 2

Walter Nash (*The Language of Popular Fiction* 1990) uses the distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs to analyse differences in the ways female and male characters are represented in popular romantic fiction. He found that the male characters were more often the subject of transitive verbs, and that the object of the action was frequently the female character. Female characters, on the other hand, tended to be the subject of intransitive verbs. For example:

Transitive			Intransitive
He	took	her	She gazed (at him).
He	caressed	her hair.	She sighed.

Table 3

This point is taken up by Sara Mills (*Feminist Stylistics* 1995), suggesting that:

choices made on a syntactic level are part of the representation of character. The extent to which a character is the passive 'victim' of circumstance, or is actively in control of the environment, making decisions and taking action, is one of the concerns of feminist stylistics.

She adds the point that the female character may be the subject of transitive verbs, but that the object is often herself, rather than acting upon the male: *She raised her head and She held out her hand.* Where the object is the male, the subject is often a part of her body acting: *Her arms encircled him.*

The verb *to be* (and other stative verbs, such as *seem*) expresses a relational process, Mills suggests, and is more passive in meaning: *Emma was suffused.*

Questions of transitivity can be used to analyse the representation of any person or character, not only females. The narrator in James Joyce's short story 'Araby', for example, is an adolescent boy. In these extracts, the verbs are in bold, the subjects are italicised.

*I stood by the railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side. ... her name was like a summons to all my blood. ... My eyes were often full of tears ... and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom ... But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.*

Apart from the first sentence, the boy is not the subject/agent, nor is the girl herself. There is sense that he is not in control of his emotions; his body, eyes, heart have taken over. The girl is perceived by him as fragments: dress, hair, name, gestures.

Moving analysis on from the level of grammar, we come to discourse. The term is used in several, related ways, but it is always understood to refer to texts beyond the level of sentence structures – whole texts, genres or text types, and the underlying ideology.

If you consider the genres of fairy stories and nursery rhymes – potentially influential in constructing a world view for children – there are recurring patterns. For young women in fairy stories, the goal is typically to marry the prince. They are often powerless creatures, in extreme examples asleep for years till rescued by a kiss. Powerful female characters are either non-human (fairies or witches) or evil (stepmothers). Paul Baker's (2008) analysis of nursery rhymes shows that female characters are often characterised by how they look, the male characters by how they behave.

It used to be common for a toddler's ABC to have *D for doctor* (picture of a male) and *N for nurse* (picture of a female); for early readers to portray only white, middle-class families. Enid Blyton stories have fallen out of favour with schools and libraries, because of her limiting depictions of, for example, gender roles. Is it 'PC gone mad' to take care with representations in contemporary children's books? It depends on whether you believe that such discourses affect children's aspirations.

### 6. Looking to the future

In *Sexed Texts* (2008) Paul Baker explores gender representation beyond the male/female binary distinction. He gives many examples of an assumed heterosexual discourse in texts, including this example from a girls' magazine:

#### Girl Gossip

WILLAMINA BALLERINA

We've heard it all now – the singing sensation that is Will Young has revealed he's a bit of an Angelina Ballerina on the quiet! The Willster reportedly goes to ballet classes several times a week to keep toned and taut! Well, we can't argue with the results, can we?!

Girl (May 2006 no 98, page 4)

two words balanced in meaning or has there been 'semantic derogation' (e.g. Knight v Dame)?

- Critical discourse analysis. Certain structures can alter the representation of events. Look out for examples in persuasive texts of the use of: passive voice; nominalisation, intransitive verbs, and 'loaded' questions.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Tarahumara study, Berlin and Kay, 1969 British National Corpus <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>.

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### Language – Key Topics and Theories

Although the article does not refer explicitly to the pop singer's sexuality, it can be inferred from the connotations of *ballet*, the fictional (female mouse!) character *Angelina Ballerina*, and the phrase *on the quiet*.

The same methods of critical discourse analysis can be used to analyse the representation of any group. In the recent (2011) *Chavs – the Demonisation of the Working Classes*, Owen Jones notes disturbing ways in which working-class communities are portrayed by the media and politicians. Like Plan B, he claims that the derogatory word *chav* is used casually in contexts that would cause outrage, if the reference was to Jews or black people. A holiday company advertised *Chav-Free Activity Holidays*. The company 'Gymbox' advertised a class of *Chav Fighting*, responding to objections with the usual claim of extreme sensitivity: 'A few of the PC brigade were offended.'

Even apparently positive references to the working class display an underlying prejudice. Jones quotes an example from a report from the Centre for Social Justice. They state that social housing tenants should be *rewarded for decent behaviour*. The collocations of *rewarded... behaviour*, he suggests, are generally found in the context of prison inmates, children and pets.

Adapting the words of Pastor Martin Niemöller: 'First they came for the women, then they came for the working class. Now they are coming for you', the rapper Plan B suggests that, in the media today, there is a demonisation of the youth throughout the media'. It's worth being acutely aware of the power of language.

### 7. Key ideas to consider

- Does language simply reflect reality or can it shape the way we see the world? Think about the influence of brand names: would a 'Strawberry' sell as well as a 'Blackberry' smartphone?
- In the case of names for people, rather than products, is language use a cause for concern and control? Think about labels for less powerful groups in our society: the young, working class, black, female, disabled, etc.
- Do you agree with Dale Spender that the English language is biased towards the male?
- Binary opposition. Consider pairs of words that refer to the female and male, e.g., woman and man. Does it sound natural to put the female term first? Is one word 'marked' – formed by adding a suffix (or prefix) to the 'unmarked' term? Are the

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