

6.1 Ideology and Critical Discourse Analysis

In his treatise about political language, writer and essayist George Orwell (1945: 20) leaved this charge: '[it] is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind'. This may seem rather exaggerated, but many believe that political language is designed to manipulate and obscure truths. Language is perhaps one of the most important tools at a politician's disposal and it is through the skilful manipulation of language that politicians present their beliefs and goals to the electorate, aiming to influence people of the truth and legitimacy of their political stance.

There is a clear link between politics and ideology. Society is made up of two important apparatuses: government and administration, which establishes and maintains the rules and laws that people must adhere to, and ideology, a set of beliefs held by people within any given society. If people are to accept rules and laws, then they must accept and share in common ideologies. This may be done on both a conscious and subconscious level.

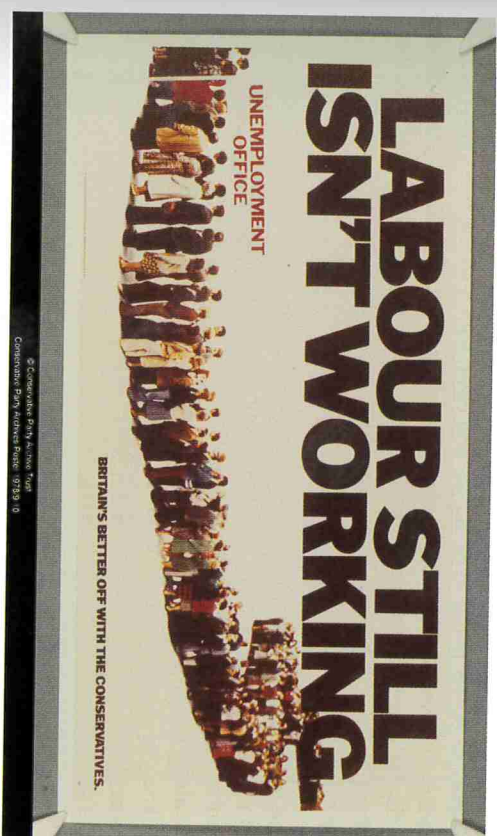
Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1970) stated that society is unequal and that this inequality is embedded into social structures through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Society is made up of many institutions such as education, family, religion and the media. Although these institutions are not part of state control, they are systems through which the values of the state are presented so that those values seem 'natural' and 'common sense'. Aligning ourselves with what is considered 'natural' means that we are more likely to accept mainstream ideologies, even if they conflict with what we might really think and believe.

6.1.1 CDA and presenting messages in political posters

Critical Discourse Analysis (see Chapter 2), is a useful way of exploring how political texts are shaped. Applying Fairclough's model can show how language features are used in texts to present particular messages and ideas. Texts can be taken at face value, but examining social and discourse practices helps readers recognise and engage with any underlying messages.

Take a look at the billboard poster in Text 6A, which was produced by one of the main political parties in the UK.

Text 6A



Conservative Party campaign poster, 1978

Although there is relatively minimal written language in this text, the words were carefully chosen to reflect a particular ideology.

'Labour isn't working'

- The word 'labour' can be interpreted in various ways:
 - as a common noun to denote 'work'
 - to denote a workforce
 - as a verb to imply physical effort and hard work
 - to refer to the Labour Party, a UK political party.
- The juxtaposition of 'labour' with 'working' forces the reader to question the relationship between the two words: a labour force usually works.
- The negative 'isn't' suggests that 'labour' is not functioning as it should, emphasised by the juxtaposition of 'labour' and 'work'.
- The image anchors the message: an exaggerated queue of people, typical of those waiting in line for the unemployment office.

'Britain's better off with the Conservatives'

- The use of the comparative 'better' is a positive term, suggesting an improved future.
- 'Better off' is a colloquial term, suggesting that the 'labour force' will be in a better financial position under a Conservative government.

- 'Britain' refers to the whole country's perceived gain under a Conservative government, creating a collective ideology.

A billboard poster needs to be simple and clear: with a strong message so that readers read and respond in the preferred way quickly. The poster was produced by the UK Conservative Party, which targeted its campaign directly against the Labour Party, foregrounding the opposition's inability to meet the needs of the electorate.

The text reflects key dominant ideologies which are considered 'natural' and common sense. In Western cultures, economic security is key – everyone wants the opportunity to work towards a better future and be financially rewarded for this work. No one wants to be at the back of a seemingly never ending queue. This poster promises a successful future under a Conservative government. Without it, Britain will be left with a society failing to work and succeed.

ACTIVITY 6.1

Applying the CDA model to political campaign posters

Texts 6B and 6C are taken from British political campaigns. What dominant ideologies are presented in each one? Which linguistic strategies are used to present these views?

Text 6B



Ken Livingstone Mayoral campaign poster, 2012

Text 6C



Scotland in Union poster, 2015

Each of these texts shows how political parties can present their own stance through a process of delegitimation, whereby a positive self-image is constructed through the negative presentation of the opposition. According to linguists Paul Chilton and Christina Schäffner (1997), this is just one of the various functions of political discourse. They state that all political discourse is strategic and includes the use of:

- **Coercion:** if someone wields enough power, it can be used to control others. Forms of coercion are evident even if we are unaware of them through laws, regulations, or even commands. However, as Fairclough (2014) stated, it can be more effective to 'exercise power through the manufacture of consent ... or at least acquiescence towards it'.
- **Resistance, opposition and protest:** the enforcement of power is not always passively received and less powerful groups can contest coercive power through a variety of linguistic strategies and physical action such as anti-government literature and protest rallies. Social media now allows us to exercise and communicate aspects of resistance more readily than has been possible before.
- **Legitimation and delegitimation:** within a democracy, those in power rule by consent; power is not enforced but agreed upon. Those who hold power must be seen to be legitimate and this is often achieved through positive self-presentation – politicians work hard to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge, expertise and ability to effectively represent their constituents. However, alongside legitimation, delegitimation is common, seeking to discredit others through attack of moral character, blame, or even exclusion, and this is a common feature of election campaigns.

- **Representation and misrepresentation:** Paul Chilton (2004) states that control of information is crucial when considering who holds political power. But to what extent is information presented fully and factually? Avoidance strategies or **euphemisms** are frequently employed so that audiences are provided with an element of truth and information. British Prime Minister Theresa May struggled to answer a question when she was being interviewed on a local UK radio station. Asked, 'Do you know what a mugwump is?', she responded 'What I recognise is that what we need in this country is strong and stable leadership'. Rather than admit to ignorance, May avoided the question completely, resorting to an almost prepared response linking back to her party's slogan for 'strong and stable leadership'.

KEY TERM

Euphemisms: words or phrases that are substituted for more direct words or phrases in an attempt to make things easier to accept or less embarrassing

6.1.2 CDA and persuasive language in political manifestos

Political posters, slogans and sound-bites are all ways that political ideas can be communicated in a digested form. But this can lead to misrepresentation and the electorate needs more information to get a full sense of what a political party stands for. Election manifestos are the platform that political parties use to present a full picture of their policies, as well as to explain what these policies aim to achieve. Persuasive techniques are often used in manifestos to present the party's aims and policies as part of an assumed shared ideology and thus in the public's best interests.

Look at Text 6D, an extract from the 2016 election manifesto of Plaid Cymru, which describes itself as the Party of Wales.

Text 6D

'Over the past five years we have been listening to what you want.

Hundreds of thousands of you have told us about your concerns, your hopes, your frustrations and your dreams for your family, your community and for Wales.

WE HAVE HEARD AND WE HAVE LISTENED.

This is how we will respond if you choose a Plaid Cymru Welsh Government in May

Thank you for talking to us. Thank you for making your opinions count.'

YOU TOLD US that it's simply not right that if you're suspected of having cancer you have to wait so long to be tested

SO WE WILL make sure that everyone in Wales is tested and given a diagnosis or the all clear within 28 days

[...]

YOU TOLD US that you want to see our young people have the very best opportunities to thrive and to work here in Wales to boost our economy.

SO WE WILL fund our universities properly, cancel up to £18,000 of debt for those who work in Wales after graduating, and create 50,000 extra apprenticeships.

From Plaid Cymru Manifesto, 2016

Text 6D contains many persuasive linguistic strategies which are carefully shaped to suggest a shared ideology with the audience.

- The discourse is shaped as a 'conversation'.
- A semantic field associated with communication is used: 'we have been listening'; 'we have heard'; 'thank you for talking to us'; 'you told us'.
- A 'problem-solution' discourse structure is presented in adjacency pairs – 'you told us... so we will' – the audience has identified the problems and Plaid Cymru will solve them.
- Pronouns are used to establish a relationship with the audience: **synthetic personalisation** is used throughout with the use of 'you', but reference to 'hundreds and thousands of you' who have 'told us' suggests that this relationship is not synthetic at all, but a genuine one.
- Plaid Cymru is continually referred to collectively as 'we', establishing a unified front.
- The plural determiner 'our' aligns Plaid Cymru with the audience: 'our young people'; 'our economy'.
- A semantic field of justice is used: 'it's simply not right', suggesting that this is the party that will address these injustices.
- Deontic modality is used throughout to suggest a determination to act: 'we will ... make sure'; 'we will fund'.

KEY TERM

Synthetic personalisation: making it seem as if text receivers are being addressed as individuals rather than as a mass

PRACTICE QUESTION**Persuasive techniques in political manifestos**

Read Text 6E, which is taken from the opening section of the American Democratic Party platform. Identify examples of persuasive strategies used in this text. How are they used to present a shared ideology between the Democratic Party and the American public? Consider:

- discourse structure
- lexis and semantic choices
- pronoun use
- patterns of verb choices
- listing
- use of comparisons.

Text 6E

In 2016, Democrats meet in Philadelphia with the same basic belief that animated the Continental Congress when they gathered here 240 years ago: Out of many, we are one.

Under President Obama's leadership, and thanks to the hard work and determination of the American people, we have come a long way from the Great Recession and the Republican policies that triggered it. American businesses have now added 14.8 million jobs since private-sector job growth turned positive in early 2010. Twenty million people have gained health insurance coverage. The American auto industry just had its best year ever. And we are getting more of our energy from the sun and wind, and importing less oil from overseas.

But too many Americans have been left out and left behind. They are working longer hours with less security. Wages have barely budged and the racial wealth gap remains wide, while the cost of everything from childcare to a college education has continued to rise. And for too many families, the dream of home ownership is out of reach. As working people struggle, the top one percent accrues more wealth and more power.

Republicans in Congress have chosen gridlock and dysfunction over trying to find solutions to the real challenges we face. It's no wonder that so many feel like the system is rigged against them.

Democrats believe that cooperation is better than conflict, unity is better than division, empowerment is better than resentment, and bridges are better than walls.

It's a simple but powerful idea: we are stronger together.

Democrats believe we are stronger when we have an economy that works for everyone—an economy that grows incomes for working people, creates good-paying jobs, and puts a middle-class life within reach for more Americans. Democrats believe we can spur more sustainable economic growth, which will create good-paying jobs and raise wages. And we can have more economic fairness, so the rewards are shared broadly, not just with those at the top. We need an economy that prioritizes long-term investment over short-term profit-seeking, rewards the common interest over self-interest, and promotes innovation and entrepreneurship.

We believe that today's extreme level of income and wealth inequality—where the majority of the economic gains go to the top one percent and the richest 20 people in our country own more wealth than the bottom 150 million—makes our economy weaker, our communities poorer, and our politics poisonous.

And we know that our nation's long struggle with race is far from over. More than half a century after Rosa Parks sat and Dr. King marched and John Lewis bled, more than half a century after César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and Larry Itliong organized, race still plays a significant role in determining who gets ahead in America and who gets left behind. We must face that reality and we must fix it.

Extract from American Democratic Party Platform, 2016

6.2 Political rhetoric in speeches, interviews and debates

There are many forms of public speaking and, in the field of politics, making speeches and engaging in debate are perhaps two of the most demanding, requiring sustained focus on a particular topic or issue in a way that will engage and inspire audiences. Whilst we would like to believe that political speeches are a means and opportunity for speakers to express their true beliefs and values, the more cynical might argue that politicians employ linguistic devices in an attempt to manipulate an audience into supporting the speaker's views.

6.2.1 Means of persuasion: ethos, pathos, logos

There has been a long standing interest in the power of **rhetoric**, and classical rhetoric was primarily developed as an 'art' to persuade people in a political assembly. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) identified three means of persuasion that an effective orator must rely on:

- **ethos**: the personal character of the speaker
- **pathos**: arousing the emotions of the audience
- **logos**: patterns of reasoning provided by the words of the speech itself.

KEY TERM

Rhetoric: the art of persuasion or the means by which language is manipulated in order to persuade an audience

ACTIVITY 6.2

Analysing political speeches

Former US President Obama's skill as an orator is widely acknowledged and has led to a renewed interest in the study of rhetoric. Text 6F is an extract from a speech in which he outlined his concerns about the lack of gun control measures in the United States.

What strategies does Obama use to:

- establish his own sense of character? (ethos)
- arouse the emotions of the audience? (pathos)
- provide a logically reasoned argument? (logos)

Text 6F

The United States of America is not the only country on Earth with violent or dangerous people. We are not inherently more prone to violence. But we are the only advanced country on Earth that sees this kind of violence erupt with this kind of frequency. It doesn't happen in other advanced countries. It's not even close. And as I've said before, somehow we've become numb to it and we start thinking that this is normal.

And instead of thinking about how to solve the problem, this has become one of our most polarized, partisan debates – despite the fact that there's

a general consensus in America about what needs to be done. That's part of the reason why, on Thursday, I'm going to hold a town hall meeting in Virginia on gun violence. Because my goal here is to bring good people on both sides of this issue together for an open discussion.

I'm not on the ballot again. I'm not looking to score some points. I think we can disagree without impugning other people's motives or without being disagreeable. We don't need to be talking past one another. But we do have to feel a sense of urgency about it. In Dr. King's words, we need to feel the 'fierce urgency of now.' Because people are dying. And the constant excuses for inaction no longer do, no longer suffice.

That's why we're here today. Not to debate the last mass shooting, but to do something to try to prevent the next one. To prove that the vast majority of Americans, even if our voices aren't always the loudest or most extreme, care enough about a little boy like Daniel to come together and take common-sense steps to save lives and protect more of our children.

Now, I want to be absolutely clear at the start – and I've said this over and over again, this also becomes routine, there is a ritual about this whole thing that I have to do – I believe in the Second Amendment. It's there written on the paper. It guarantees a right to bear arms. No matter how many times people try to twist my words around – I taught constitutional law. I know a little about this – I get it. But I also believe that we can find ways to reduce gun violence consistent with the Second Amendment.

I mean, think about it. We all believe in the First Amendment, the guarantee of free speech, but we accept that you can't yell 'fire' in a theater. We understand there are some constraints on our freedom in order to protect innocent people. We cherish our right to privacy, but we accept that you have to go through metal detectors before being allowed to board a plane. It's not because people like doing that, but we understand that that's part of the price of living in a civilized society.

Extract from Barack Obama 'gun control' speech, 2016

6.2.2 Common features of rhetoric

Rhetorical features can be powerful when used within speeches, and it is worth exploring some of these in more detail.

Pronouns

Pronouns can be used in a variety of ways. They can be used to provide the speaker with a clear personal identity or can establish the speaker as part of a social group with the use of plural pronouns; for example, 'how do we begin to change these inequalities in our cultures?' (Michelle Obama, 2016). However, pronouns can also be used to reinforce the wide gulf between different social

groups. For instance, Frederick Douglass, when addressing the state of American slaves in the nineteenth century, stressed social and cultural differences through the use of pronouns to create a clear sense of separation between 'I', 'you' and 'us': 'I say it with a sad sense of disparity between us ... Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us.'

Metaphors

Metaphors are a means by which we understand one concept in terms of another, and they are often used when exploring an abstract concept – they help us to understand something intangible using more familiar, concrete references. Metaphors are deliberately used in political discourse as they can allow for an abstract fear or threat to become a perceived reality. When former US president George W. Bush referred to a 'war on terror' he made the intangible 'terror' real by aligning it with war, something that we could physically fight. This is a powerful strategy, playing on the public's fears, and thus helping to encourage a collective action against this shared fear and very real 'terror'.

ACTIVITY 6.3

Metaphor in political speeches

Identify the metaphors in Texts 6G–6I, extracts from different political speeches. Comment on the effects created by using these metaphors.

Text 6G

Oh! Had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would today pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.

Frederick Douglass

Text 6H

The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it – and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

From US President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, 20 January 1961

Text 6I

In the end, the American dream is not a sprint, or even a marathon, but a relay. Our families don't always cross the finish line in the span of one generation.

From San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro's keynote address at the 2012 Democratic National Convention

Cohesion

Repeated words, ideas and themes are a useful cohesive strategy that can help to reinforce the message of a political speech, as in Text 6J.

Text 6J

Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another.

From South African President Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech, 1994

Parallelism

The repetition of a repeated grammatical structure also creates shape and cohesion, as used in Text 6K. The underlined words illustrate the main focus of Kennedy's speech, that not only allies but also adversaries must work together to ensure global peace. This is reinforced with a repeated semantic field based on togetherness and unity.

Text 6K

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us. Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms--and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations. Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths and encourage the arts and commerce. Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah--to 'undo the heavy burdens . . . (and) let the oppressed go free.'

From John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, 20 January 1961

Three-part lists

These present information in three stages. A key idea or argument is introduced at stage 1; stage 2 emphasises the importance and relevance of this point; and stage 3 reinforces the first two points, while also signalling that the argument has been concluded. Three-part structures provide a resonance for the audience, making them more memorable, as seen in these examples:

- 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen', Julius Caesar
- 'Blood, sweat and tears', Winston Churchill
- 'Stay strong, work hard, and keep pushing forward', Michelle Obama.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Rhetoric

Many political speeches are famous for their skilful use of rhetoric. Find a good example – many are available online in their spoken form and some will have an accompanying transcript. You may wish to focus on a key political figure from the past or present, such as Winston Churchill or Nelson Mandela, or you may wish to focus on speeches delivered to the United Nations by famous people, such as Emma Watson's speech on gender equality or Malala Yousafzai's speech calling on education for all.

What linguistic features does the speaker use to influence and persuade the audience?

You may wish to extend your study of political speeches further by examining different speeches from different times. For example, different inaugural speeches may reflect different social concerns based on the era they were delivered. Or, topics such as gender roles, education, domestic or foreign affairs may reflect changing social attitudes.

6.2.3 The political interview

Politicians do not just speak in isolation with no danger of interruption, and a key type of political discourse is the political interview. Media interviews, in which a television or radio interviewer will put the seasoned politician under the spotlight, make use of a very specific political discourse.

The media interview fulfils a vital purpose and function. In this situation the interviewer has the power to set the agenda, lead the discussion and address the questions and issues that they feel the audience has a right to know. The roles

that the interviewer and interviewee play create an almost theatrical performance: the politician is often made to appear as the villain of the piece, fighting for survival against the righteous attack of the interviewer, who is determined to arrive at the 'truth' behind political decisions and policies. The interviewer must probe and interrogate the politician using a variety of questioning techniques whilst the politician will strive to present a positive image of themselves and their political party. The interviewer aims to address the public's political concerns, or issues raised in the media. They must also be aware of the medium: if the interview is to be aired on television or radio, then it must be entertaining. Thus, some linguistic choices designed to provoke and antagonise will have been deliberately structured to produce a verbal sparring match – there would be little entertainment if the interview was a smooth running cooperative discourse.

Question techniques

The formation of questions is not a straightforward matter. Simple use of an interrogative will not always elicit a straightforward, direct response, particularly in the political arena where those in power exercise power over knowledge. A number of different question techniques are frequently used in political interviews, as shown in Tables 6.1 and 6.2.

Table 6.1: Direct questioning techniques

Question type	Purpose	Example
Open questions	Can elicit any response	How will you be able to improve employment opportunities for those who are under 25 years old?
Polar questions	Will elicit either a yes or no response	Are you going to help those who genuinely need help?
Optional questions	Will elicit a response based around a limited number of options	Will you follow the old rules? Or will you vote for a new way?

Table 6.2: Indirect questioning techniques

Question type	Purpose	Example
Declarative with rising intonation	The declarative allows for an assertion of 'facts'; the rising intonation questions the validity of those 'facts'	You state that, under your government, crime statistics have fallen?

Question type	Purpose	Example
Declarative with tag question	The tag question narrows the range of responses that may be allowable	You told us that the economy would improve, didn't you? But it hasn't, has it?

Polar and optional questions tend to be favoured during political interviews as these can direct and control the agenda and structure of the interview. Open questions can lead to digression, with a politician perhaps opting to steer the topic to an agenda more suited to their own purposes.

Whilst the interviewer uses questions to control an interview, this does not mean that the interviewee remains powerless. A number of different strategies may be employed to avoid responding directly:

- A question may be completely ignored.
- The legitimacy of a question can be questioned.
- A prepared response may be offered which does not address the question that was actually asked.
- A response to a question can become completely mired in an overly lengthy statement, thus making the actual answer to the question unclear.

Face, politeness and cooperation

Political discourse can also be explored using some of the concepts you looked at in Chapter 2: Erving Goffman's face theory (1967), and Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's politeness principle (1987).

Face theory is a particularly useful way of examining political discourse. Positive face is the desire to be approved of, and this is certainly relevant for politicians, who need to demonstrate that they are deserving of their electorate's support. Not only does the politician need to present their own positive face, but also ensure that they present the positive face of the political party they represent. Of course, face-threatening behaviour may occur, where approval may not be shown and direct challenge of positive face is a common interview strategy. For example: 'When it comes to making the big decisions, do you have what it takes to act in the best interests of the people? You won't be able to dodge that. You have to stay firm. Can you do that?' Here, face threat is presented through the implication that the interviewee does not have what it takes to make 'the big decisions'.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) proposed that speakers will make use of strategies to avoid or mitigate face-threatening acts by using positive politeness or negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies seek

to minimise the threat to positive face by seeking to claim common ground and making the hearer feel a sense of closeness. Some strategies of positive politeness include statements of solidarity and friendship, compliments and avoidance of disagreement. Negative politeness strategies seek to minimise imposition on the hearer by using hedging, or being indirect, pessimistic or apologetic. It can certainly be interesting to see how an interviewer will align themselves with a politician during a political interview: will they strike a cooperative frame which recognises and values the roles of each participant? Or are politeness strategies avoided, so that positive face is threatened?

Paul Grice's conversational maxims (1975) suggest that speakers cooperate to achieve mutual conversational ends by following four conversational maxims:

- **Maxim of quantity:** give the most helpful amount of information
- **Maxim of quality:** do not say what you believe to be false
- **Maxim of relation:** make contributions relevant
- **Maxim of manner:** communicate in a clear and orderly way

Conversational maxims are frequently violated or flouted. If we violate a maxim we do so surreptitiously so that other people don't know. If we flout a maxim, we do so overtly so that it is obvious that the maxim has been broken. Flouting a maxim is often done through **implicature** – the hearer is expected to infer some extra meaning from what is actually stated.

KEY TERM

Implicature: an implied meaning that has to be inferred by a speaker as a result of one of the maxims being broken

ACTIVITY 6.4

Analysing a political interview

Text 6L is taken from a televised interview between the interviewer Krishnan Guru-Murthy (KG-M) from the UK's Channel 4 news and David Davis (DD), Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (EU). They are discussing Britain's departure from the EU.

What questioning techniques does KG-M use to control the agenda of the interview? What strategies does DD use to present a positive face image? Are any face-threatening strategies used? Do KG-M and DD abide by politeness and cooperative maxims?

- KG-M: were you at work on Monday (.) or were you out campaigning
- DD: Monday (.) I was out campaigning (.) I was in Erdington I think initially (.) er then I did er some broadcasts then I came back
- KG-M: because on Monday the EU issued its two big documents on the negotiation (.) position (.) and you'd have thought that you as the Brexit secretary (.) were sitting down to have a look at them and read them
- DD: it's the wonders of modern technology er (.) Mr Guru-Murthy (.) that you can actually er read things on ipads on the train
- KG-M: but the point is
- DD: I don't need to read them in the studio like Mr Corbyn (.) I do read them on the train (.) and that's what I did that day
- KG-M: this election
- DD: I know the point you're trying to make but you're failing to make
- KG-M: has been a huge distraction (.) hasn't it
- DD: sorry
- KG-M: this election has been a huge distraction (.) to your job (.) not preparing for the Brexit (.) for the negotiations beginning eleven days after the election
- DD: one of the points one of the points (.) would you like the answer (.) one of the points to this election (.) is to reinforce Theresa May's hand (.) so eleven days after this election is over (.) when she goes if she's elected Prime Minister and you've made some points about about surveys today (.) but if she's elected and she's our representative (.) she'll be there fully prepared (.) with ten months of preparation behind her (.) and she'll have a mandate (.) and that's a very important point (.) a mandate to carry out the negotiation in the way she has described (.) a free trade area (.) customs agreement (.) a continuing agreement on security (.) all the things we've laid out in two white papers (.) er in a major letter to the commission (.) that's what we're doing (.) that's why she's the person to lead this country
- KG-M: in March you admitted that you hadn't costed the economic impact (1) of no deal (.) even though you keep saying no deal is better than a bad deal (.) have you done one yet
- DD: what you're (.) you're summarising something let me tell you what it is (1) if you're going to do a costing of something like

this you've got to cost everything (.) you've got to cost what the changes in exports are (.) both to the EU (.) and to the world at large (.) it's very plain that after we leave the EU we'll be able to enhance our ability to export to the rest of the world (.) that will be a benefit (.) what we're aiming to do is to maintain the most frictionless free trade to Europe with no tariffs and minimal customs restrictions (.) that should preserve our market there (.) so I can't see where there should be a cost to it (.) but that's a point (.) you've got to work those things out first (.) forecasts without doing that first are just guesswork (.) and I don't do guesswork

KG-M: okay (.) so we haven't got one yet

Krishnan Guru-Murthy interviews David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, Channel 4 News, 31 May 2017

6.2.4 Parliamentary debate

Political discourse functions in a particularly distinctive way during parliamentary or congressional proceedings. On the surface, the interaction between participants can appear to be controlled, cooperative discourse. However, closer examination reveals exchanges which are rooted in tradition and ritual, with clearly defined 'rules' for agenda setting, turn-taking and interaction, where even direct address and challenging statements need to be carefully couched so as not to break with convention.

Take a look at Text 6M, an extract from a parliamentary debate in the UK House of Commons. The Under-Secretary for State for Welfare Delivery, Caroline Nokes, was asked to address Government plans to remove automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18–21-year-olds. (C stands for the Conservative Party; L for the Labour Party.)

Text 6M

- Justin Tomlinson (C): What are the Government doing to ensure that this policy supports young people who are in work?
- Caroline Nokes (C): My honourable friend is right to mention young people who are in work. Anybody who is working 16 hours a week or more at the national minimum wage equivalent will be exempt.
- Edward Miliband (L): I think we should call this what it is: a nasty, vindictive policy that will make injustice worse, from a Government who said that they would tackle burning injustice. Will the Minister now

answer the question that my right honourable friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) asked? No impact assessment has been published for the measure—inexplicably, in my view. Will she tell the House what advice she has received from her officials about the impact on homelessness of this proposal?

Caroline Nokes (C):
The Department has, of course, met all its requirements under the public sector equality duty. Equality assessment information has been received and shared with the Social Security Advisory Committee, which chose not to consult on this.

Desmond Swayne (C):
Young people in their first jobs cannot afford their own accommodation, so they share with other young people or they stay at home. Why should it be different for people who are out of work?

Caroline Nokes (C):
My right honourable friend makes exactly the point that underpins this policy. We want young people in work and young people out of work to be making the same choices about where they are going to live.

Luciana Berger (L):
I think that anyone listening to this urgent question would, frankly, be appalled by the responses that we have had thus far from the Minister. She has not answered any of the questions that were rightly asked by my right honourable friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). Will she tell us why the equality impact assessment has not been published and when she will bring it forward, so that we can all see exactly the rationale behind this ridiculous policy?

Caroline Nokes (C):
I think I have answered that. The Department has engaged extensively at ministerial and official level with stakeholders. We announced this measure in the summer Budget. There is no duty on us to share the impact assessment with the House, but we did share it with the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Lucy Allan (C):
Will the Minister confirm that care leavers will not be affected by these changes?

Caroline Nokes (C):
My honourable friend makes a really important point about care leavers. Absolutely, they are exempt from this policy.

Clive Betts (L):
One of the exemptions in the regulations where housing benefit can still be paid is if 'in the opinion of the Secretary of State it is inappropriate for the renter to live with each of their parents'. Does the Secretary of State assume that this exemption will automatically apply where the parents refuse to have their child living with them?

Caroline Nokes (C):
Absolutely. That is a point. A very important exemption is included, so where that is inappropriate—where a parent cannot or will not accommodate their child—such people will be exempt from the policy.

You will have noticed from the text the extremely ordered nature of the exchange.

- Turn-taking progresses in a very structured way, with each speaker allowed a turn. Development or rebuttal only takes place once the speaker has concluded their remarks.
- Forms of address are carefully applied. The opening question here does not directly address the Under-Secretary; instead, it is directed at 'the government'. When the speaker makes a statement, she prefaces her statement with 'The Department', thus acting as the spokesperson of the whole department or government rather than as an individual.

- Second-person pronoun *you* is avoided, as are personal address terms. Instead, speakers are addressed according to their role: 'My honourable friend', 'the Minister'. This establishes an air of extreme formality, which is maintained even if the speaker's comments are challenged.

- Questions are carefully shaped, according to the political party representative who poses the question. For instance, compare:

1 'Will the Minister confirm that care leavers will not be affected by these changes?'

2 'Will she tell us why the equality impact assessment has not been published and when she will bring it forward, so that we can all see exactly the rationale behind this ridiculous policy?'

The first question simply asks the speaker to 'confirm' which opens the floor for development of an issue that is perhaps already understood by those involved in this exchange. The second question is more challenging, asking

the minister to 'explain' and justify key aspects of the policy in more detail. It is perhaps evident which of these two questions is presented by someone from the same political party and which is from the opposition.

- The questions asked by Edward Miliband are particularly interesting: he prefaces his questions with a personal response to the government policy under discussion, thus making his position about the issue clear. He then goes on to ask not one, but two questions. He actually responds to his own opening question: 'Will the Minister now answer the question...?' with his assessment of the issue: 'No impact assessment has been published for the measure'. This is a common discourse strategy – to ask a question which is then immediately answered in a negative or affirmative manner depending on which stance the speaker holds. This denies the main speaker, here Caroline Nokes, the opportunity to respond and defend her position. His subsequent question: 'Will she tell the House what advice she has received from her officials...?' refocuses the main point of the debate, and reminds all those present that Caroline Nokes is merely a spokesperson for her party, not the person actually making decisions herself. This seeks to undermine her position and role here.

- Caroline Nokes uses a largely positive semantic field when addressing questions from those within the Conservative party: 'My right honourable friend makes exactly the point that underpins this policy'; 'absolutely'; 'My honourable friend is right to mention', showing a level of consensus and solidarity between party members.

- Her responses to questions from other political parties are perhaps less positive. Her response to Luciana Berger: 'I think I have answered that' serves as a reprimand, suggesting that not enough attention has been paid to her earlier comments. Her response to Edward Miliband: 'The Department has, of course, met all its requirements' adopts a distanced approach, deflecting attention away from herself and onto the department as a whole instead.

- The language used by Caroline Nokes' party colleagues is fairly supportive, with questions which seek to further the discussion of the topic. This contrasts with the language of those in opposing political parties: 'I think that anyone listening to this urgent question would, frankly, be appalled by the responses we have had thus far from the Minister'; 'I think we should call this what it is: a nasty, vindictive policy that will make injustice worse'. These contributions make use of highly emotive language, laden with negative connotations, reflecting not only their own responses to the issue at hand, but also assuming a wider negative response: 'anyone listening... would be appalled'. It is notable that Nokes herself is not criticised or overtly targeted, merely the policies that she is presenting and supporting.

This is a short example of how parliamentary debates are organised and reveals the intricacies of language use in an environment where what one says and how one says it is carefully monitored and controlled, with only very particular contributions being allowable within the context. For instance, first names are

not permitted, no matter how close the relationship between the speakers. These parliamentary debates may appear to be a rather intricate and labourious way of discussing political issues and policies, but this system does allow all to air their views without fear of interruption. Even challenges are couched in a formulaic, almost ritualistic way, allowing conflict to be resolved within a professional arena without fear of reprisal.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Political discourse

You have examined many forms of political discourse, focusing on how established political figures and parties use language in different contexts. However, everyone is involved with politics in most aspects of everyday life, and political protestors, pressure groups or demonstrators all make use of similar linguistic strategies to those examined above.

Examine some of the political literature that is available in your local area. This may be campaign material to save local resources such as libraries, speeches presented at local council meetings about changes to the local environment, or adverts of local party political broadcasts. Focusing closely on your chosen political text, consider how political discourse is structured and framed to influence and persuade the local audience.

Wider reading

You can read more about power and political language in the following books:

- Beard, A. (2000) *The Language of Politics*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2014) *Analysing Political Speeches: Rhetoric, Discourse and Metaphor*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chilton, P. (2004) *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Simpson, P. and Mayr, A. (2010) *Language and Power: A Resource Book for Students*. Abingdon, Routledge.
- Thomas, L. and Wareing, S. (2012) *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction*. London, Routledge.
- Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (2016) *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Third edition). London: Sage.