

Language, Power, and Intergroup Relations

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Language is a communication medium for turning a power base into influence. But more than that, the creation of power and its maintenance or change can also occur in and through language. In the present article, we discuss some of the dynamic links between language and power to underscore their relevance to the study of intergroup relations. In particular we address the means by which low-power groups might achieve power, and how those who are in high-power positions might retain and subvert acts of power. In doing this, we counterpose our discussion with research that addresses these same issues from a static and individualistic approach to power. Our central argument is that the latter work lacks theoretical facility for describing and understanding the aforementioned dynamic processes of power, and moreover, that its application may unwittingly serve to reify and cement existing control relationships.

Although language is not unique to humans, humans are well equipped genetically and culturally to use words for accomplishing a variety of social acts. This performative view of language, with its emphasis on language use rather than language comprehension or the symbolic aspects of language, was most clearly articulated in Austin's (1962) speech act theory, Halliday's (1976) functional model of language use, and Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) conversation analysis. All three sources, with the possible exception of Sacks et al., stemmed from disciplines outside the traditional domain of social psychology. But owing to its relevance to the study of social behaviour, language use has been assimilated,

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and continues to be assimilated in various guises, into social psychology and is now wedded to a broad range of topics (see, for example, reviews by Clark, 1985; Krauss & Chiu, 1998). The particular topic that concerns us here is the confluence of language, power, and intergroup relations.

Although social power has been (e.g., Cartwright, 1959) and continues to be (e.g., Ng, 1996) a neglected area of study in social psychology, research that has been done is highly applicable to real-world circumstances. The most notable example here is French and Raven's (1959) classic work on the bases of social power, and its recent extension (e.g., Raven, 1993). This work has been applied to hospital infection control, patient compliance with physicians' recommendations, and political confrontations (see Raven, 1993). To take an example of this approach, an armed robber might say, "Look, I have a loaded gun here, give me your money or I'll shoot." In terms of French and Raven's (1959) typology, the loaded gun provides the basis or resource of coercive power, the wielder of which is trying to turn it into social influence by uttering a threat. Another way of putting this is that the speaker is using language to reveal his or her coercive power base and to communicate his or her intention. Language, however, is not simply a medium for turning a power resource into influence. In the example above, depending on how the threat is worded and the tone of voice in which it is delivered, the influence attempt can have varying degrees of success (Raven, Schwarzwald, & Koslowsky, 1998). For this reason, language should not be seen solely as a passive conduit of power but as an active coplayer in the exercise of power.

Our discussion is built on two related premises. Firstly, the relationships between language and power are dynamic and multifaceted. In contrast, a common if not dominant research preoccupation in the social psychology of language is to map out the static/descriptive features of language style that characterize power, or indeed more often, powerlessness. Although this is generally a useful means of understanding, for example, persuasion and social influence processes as a reflection of a speaker's power, this approach becomes problematic when applied to intergroup relations. When we examine language in social context,¹ it becomes clear that power is not always given; on the contrary, it is the basis for argument, is created, re-created, subverted, and hidden using language. Theory and empirical research that retains a focus on language style, or more generally an adherence to a static view of power, does not provide us with theoretical facility for describing power change, a clearly dynamic process particularly relevant to intergroup relations and applications thereof.

Secondly, research on social issues most often represents the application of empirical findings or widely accepted theory to some form of desirable social

¹The term *social context* is used in this article to refer to a distinction between intragroup and intergroup bases of self-perception. It is not intended to refer to social situational variables in general.

change. However, in applying empirical findings, or theoretical knowledge in particular, there is a tendency for application to precede metatheoretical analysis. On the one hand, this is surprising given Lewin's emphasis on metatheory in his early research (e.g., Lewin, 1935, 1936), and on the other, it is of concern because the well-intentioned but misguided application of social psychology may produce undesirable results. Given the increasing application of social psychology, we need to be vigilant of the social implications that our research might have.

We thus pose our second premise as a question: Does empirical research and theory effectively function to justify the status quo, or might it contribute to social change? This question may appear particularly basic, but we will demonstrate that even research that purports to enable social change may unwittingly restate and function to cement control relationships. We argue that this situation arises from the application of individualistic and static views of power to intergroup relations. To redress this situation, we review research that illustrates the processes of power creation, change, and maintenance in intergroup power relations, and highlight the pivotal role of language.

We discuss the relationships of language to power under four headings. Firstly, language *reflects* power. This can be seen when the prestige of a language rises or falls with the power of its users. At the micro level of social interactions, a speaker's power or powerlessness is reflected in the content or style of language, and the style of language reflects upon group membership. As we have intimated, research on language style has focused attention upon features of language that characterize and describe low- but not high-power forms, and has done so without due recourse to the intergroup relationships that underpin style differences in the first instance. In doing so this work prioritizes the low- over the high-power form, thus obscuring processes that might enable the powerless to become powerful.

Secondly, language *creates* power: Control over the direction and outcome of conversation is determined by the ability to win conversational turns, and the ability to gain turns is a function of both the interactive nature of conversation, and the social context in which conversation takes place. By adopting a dynamic approach, and making use of interactive conversational groups, it becomes possible to explicate the constituents of high-power language.

Thirdly, language *depoliticizes* power: Attempts at gaining influence and power are often covered up and/or justified through the strategic use of social categorizations, or stereotypes. This aspect of power is particularly insidious, because concealing acts of power enables the powerful to maintain control, often at the expense of others. On the other hand, these very same processes may be used by those in subordinate positions to challenge the status quo. The uncovering of these processes is therefore of practical importance for both those wishing to wield power, and those subjected to power.

Fourthly, language *routinizes* power. The political or social dominance of one country or one group over another is often accompanied by linguistic dominance,

in which the more dominant party imposes its own language on the population at large as the standard language to use. When this occurs, the routine use of the imposed language in everyday life would serve to further reinforce the dominance relation, eventually making it appear natural. The linguistic routinization of power inhibits the ability of low-power groups to organize social change, because it acts to reduce the opportunity for group formation and collective protest.

Language Reflects Power

In the main, research dealing with power emphasizes the role of language in reflecting low- versus high-power per se. For example, based upon stylistic differences in the delivery of a persuasive message, a speaker's language may be defined as powerful or powerless. Powerless language is typically defined as the frequent use of hedges (e.g., *sort of, maybe*), intensifiers (e.g., *so*), tag questions (e.g., *that was nice, wasn't it?*), and hesitations, whereas powerful language is defined as the absence of these forms. Although Lakoff (1973, 1974) defined the powerless style as the "feminine register," O'Barr (1982) has argued that the powerless style reflects the relatively low social status of speakers in general. Low-status speakers tend to use the powerless forms, whereas high-status speakers tend to use less of the powerless forms. This perspective thus inheres in the working assumption that language, in and of itself, may be a priori defined as powerless or powerful depending on the presence/absence of particular linguistic features.

However, this perspective, in adhering to the static view of power, abstracts language style from the group memberships of speakers. For example, in the arena of courtroom testimony, Erickson, Lind, Johnson, and O'Barr (1978) have demonstrated that both male and female speakers who use the powerful style are judged as more credible and attractive by both male and female respondents (see also Conley, O'Barr, & Lind, 1978; Haleta, 1996; McFadyen, 1996). The clear implication here is that speakers who use the powerful style should be more influential with jurors, lawyers, and judges. However, although the low-power form tends to coincide with low status, it tends also to coincide with the language of women, ethnic minorities, and the working class. When this intergroup context behind language style is considered, it becomes clear that high-power groups have a stake in preserving their position. For example, Carli (1990) has demonstrated that women who used low-power language were more influential with men, despite being perceived as less competent speakers than females who used high-power language (see also Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995). In contrast, males' speech style, whether in the powerless or the powerful mold, did not affect the amount of influence that males achieved. Along similar lines, Dovidio, Brown, Heltman, Ellyson, and Keating (1988) found that powerful language (measured by interruptions & speech initiations) was enacted by males in intergender conversations when the topic of conversation was masculine, and by females when the topic of conversation was

feminine. Thus, social influence, rather than deriving from speakers' communicative style per se, is context sensitive and depends on what the hearers are willing to concede. To become (situationally) powerful, a member of a subordinate group must use the low-power language form, which, paradoxically, reaffirms the broader power inequality. Powerful groups are willing to withstand short-term concessions in social influence or demonstrations of power, if this serves a broader function of maintaining intergroup power inequalities in the longer run.

To take a further example, high-power language tends to elicit evaluations of argument quality, whereas the low-power form tends to elicit negative evaluations about speakers (e.g., Gibbons, Busch, & Bradac, 1991). This suggests that the low-power form is marked; that is, the low-power style tends to draw attention to the speaker, while high-power language tends to draw attention to argument content. However, discussion of what constitutes the marked form failed to consider the group memberships of respondents relative to that perceived from targets' language. If language style correlates with group membership, then the low-power style may be perceived as marked simply because it is perceived to be outgroup language. Given that respondents are generally university students with a middle-class background, this is a strong possibility. Indeed, the powerful style (high fluency) might correspond to a middle-class (ingroup) prototype, whereas the low-power style (less fluent) might correspond to a working-class (outgroup) prototype.

Although the descriptive approach to language and power is problematic in terms of theoretical explanation, it is further problematic in social terms (cf. Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Where the powerful/powerless distinction corresponds to intergroup differences, the proposition that the low-power form is marked suggests that speakers may become powerful only if they adopt the powerful style. Consequently, a member of a low-status group must pass to a high-status group to become powerful. The result is that the original intergroup divisions that mark the language will remain. This reduces group-based social change to individual social mobility, hence functioning to maintain and justify the status quo. This situation is most commonly seen in stratified societies in which accent marks social status, but is also apparent in situations of ethnic assimilationism and differential employment opportunity.

To summarize, from the stylistic perspective power is treated as a given, mechanically communicated through language. Moreover, although language is treated as epiphenomenal to power, power of style is abstracted from underlying intergroup relations. This promotes a static view of power, wherein language takes on the appearance of possessing invariant properties of power or powerlessness independent of the material conditions of intergroup relationships. In contrast, from a dynamic view of power we would argue that language, far from being a simple reflection of power, underpins the creation of power, its maintenance and change.

Language Creates Power

In this section we outline the processes that underlie conversational control within intergroup social contexts. In particular, we are concerned with conversations in which the power distance between groups either is very low, or if there is power distance, it is not relevant to the conversation at hand. In this sense we are concerned with the microprocesses of power, which may be applied, for example, to inter-organizational discussions, small group communication, or interpersonal communication in which group membership impinges upon the relationships of interlocutors. Specifically, the linguistic and paralinguistic processes that underlie the ability to gain conversational turns are acts of power, in the sense defined by Russell (1938), in that they allow a speaker to control the content and direction of conversation. That is, the focus here is on the ability of a speaker to become powerful, rather than a description of what constitutes low- or high-power conversational styles. Because of the focus on power creation, the principles outlined herein may be applied by both those who wish to wield power, and those who wish to reject its imposition.

As we have discussed, most commonly influence or power in language style is treated as a given, and the effects of this style on social evaluations are assumed to follow directly. To understand the emergence of influence, we need, in addition to the descriptive approach, to consider how power is struggled over within interactive conversations and argumentation. For example, how do speakers come to gain turns? Is it simply a matter of using powerful language, or is what we say constrained in some way by what others would like to say, or in a wider sense, by the social context of conversation? Although some analyses do consider interactive speech, the actual process of conversation is not considered part of the research process, but rather, is considered a nuisance that corrupts inferential test statistics. As a consequence, researchers often use the dyad as the level of analysis to circumvent problems associated with nonindependence of observations. The result is that research that employs data from realistic interactive conversations often retains a focus on language style, and a concomitant lack of focus on the process of conversation. The contrasting view that interaction per se is the important aspect of conversation has been highlighted by Sanders (1989):

in unscripted face-to-face interactions, the effect of a given message on what the partner subsequently says and does is at least in part a consequence of the way that the message limits what can be subsequently contributed relevantly, coherently, to the discursive construction being produced, given structural relations and meaning relations that have already developed among messages produced in interaction. (p. 166)

Clearly, another important source of power may be found in the process of conversational interaction. This process, we argue, should be understood from a social contextual perspective.

In his pioneering work on interaction processes, Bales (1970) made the obvious but nevertheless important observation that to become influential in a

discussion one must take a speaking turn. Indeed, numbers of speaking turns have been shown to be a strong predictor of perceived social influence (e.g., Brooke & Ng, 1986; Ng, Bell, & Brooke, 1993; Ng, Brooke, & Dunne, 1995; Reid & Ng, 1998; Scherer, 1979). If speaking turns are the necessary precondition for influence, the pertinent question to ask, then, is how do speakers come to gain speaking turns? This is a question that could potentially be asked with most any research that addresses interactive communication. In Carli's (1990) study, for example, would females who had few speaking turns, expressed in low-power language, be more influential with males than would females who had many speaking turns, expressed in high-power language? Without considering the interaction of speakers, one might conclude (wrongly) from Carli's findings that the speaker with few turns would be more influential than the speaker with many turns, simply because of the former's low-power conversational style. Indeed, and in contrast to Carli's findings, Brooke and Ng (1986) found that following mixed-gender group discussion, group members who emerged high on the influence hierarchy differed from the others in having a high rate of conversational participation, but not in language style (polite forms, hedges, tag questions, intensifiers, terminal-rising intonations). It is the ability to gain conversational turns, rather than power of style, that is responsible for achieving high influence.²

In our recent research (Reid & Ng, 1998) we tested the ability of speakers to become influential in interactive intergroup discussions comprising 3 pro- and 3 anti-capital punishment adherents. Based upon previous research (e.g., Ng et al., 1993; Ng et al., 1995), we first of all predicted and found that speakers who achieved more conversational turns became perceived as more influential than speakers with fewer conversational turns. Secondly, we predicted that only specific turns, depending on content, would correlate with influence. Specifically, following self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), we made the prediction, again confirmed, that utterances normatively consistent with the speaker's ingroup position (i.e., prototypical utterances), in this case pro- or anti-capital punishment adherence, would be more strongly correlated with perceived social influence than utterances that did not communicate ingroup prototypical content (i.e., nonprototypical utterances). In other words, individual speakers and utterance content in themselves were not controlling the conversation; control emanated from the social context of the interaction.

²Recent research (Aguinis & Adams, 1998) demonstrates that when power distance preceeds and is relevant to conversation, social evaluations of speakers depends upon language style but not gender. In the present article, we consider situations where power distance is not relevant to conversation at hand, but where group membership is relevant. Aguinis and Adams' research considers a situation where power distance is relevant, but does not consider the relevance of group membership. Future research might benefit from considering both variables simultaneously.

Thirdly, and critically, we investigated the processes of gaining speaking turns, especially those involving the use of interruptions. As predicted, interruption attempts encoded in prototypical utterances were more likely to be successful than unsuccessful in gaining turns, whereas interruption attempts encoded in nonprototypical utterances were more likely to be unsuccessful than successful in gaining turns. This finding suggests that the ability to gain speaking turns, and consequently to be perceived as influential, depends on utterance content grounded in the social context. To the extent that utterance content serves to confirm for speakers their respective social identities, as defined within social context, they are granted speaking rights, and hence place themselves in a position to become influential. This process is clearly interactive. To the extent that utterances are prototypical, speakers are granted the right to speak, and to the extent that utterances are nonprototypical, speakers are blocked in their attempts to gain the floor.

The findings above may be understood from a social contextual perspective. People are accepting of words that confirm their beliefs about the prototypical content of groups, and reject information that disconfirms their beliefs. Carli's (1990) finding that females were more influential with males when they used low-power language may reflect the enhanced ability of females to gain conversational turns when they spoke in the low-power, ingroup prototypical form. But in so doing, they might well be paying the price of confirming both for themselves, and for males, their subordinate social position, thus reinforcing it further. By contrast, in within-gender talk (when males converse with males, and females with females), Carli found that the high-power style led to more social influence than the low-power style. This also makes sense from a social contextual perspective. When speaking with ingroup members, conversation was taking place at an interindividual level, and hence shared group membership along gender lines would be irrelevant. Here, powerful language might lead to more influence because it appealed to group members' wider beliefs about persuasive communicators.

These conclusions might appear somewhat pessimistic in that they suggest, *prima facie*, that by using the low-power style to gain short-range influence with males, females simultaneously inhibit large-scale social change because the low-power style also functions to maintain their subordinate social position. However, this need not be the case. In fact, social categorizations may be re-created and rejected within language in such a way that self and the target of influence may be recategorized as sharing an ingroup categorization. When this is accomplished, for reasons that we shall discuss in the next section, on the linguistic depoliticization of control, ingroup prototypical information becomes irrelevant and loses its control.

To conclude this section, we may speculate on how females may use the low-power form strategically. Female speakers might use males' receptiveness to the low-power language style as a means of gaining a turn, but having gained a turn, they can establish conversational control through techniques that no longer rely on low-power language. For example, they may assert their agenda in such a way that

would discourage others from interrupting: "I have three points to make, they are. . . ." They may use adjacency pairs, such as question-answer and offer-reply, to constrain the next speaker to a particular form of response. Further, they may address a specific other person, and involve this person in a sequence of turns so as to exclude unwanted third parties from the conversation. This would allow control over the content and direction of conversation, which may be used to advance a personal or group agenda.

As this section clearly illustrates, both the contextual aspects of conversation, as well as stylistic variables, must be considered in unison to develop a wider picture of influence processes. Although independent research might take place from either level of analysis, both levels are required in theoretical understanding, and hence in application. The research we have reviewed here is simply a beginning in understanding the emergence of power within conversation. However, there are more strategic and political means to control conversation that have a more macro social emphasis. These strategies are represented in the linguistic depoliticization of power.

Language Depoliticizes Power

Most people have had the experience of being talked into a deal against better judgment or, worse, without knowing it. Manipulative persuasion and deceit are as old as biblical Adam and Eve, and as contemporary as many politicians of today. Clearly language alone cannot be held fully responsible for this darker side of human conduct because a host of other factors are also involved (Cialdini, 1993). Yet there can be little doubt of the vital role played by language or of the grave issues that such a role raises for ethics, the law, and democracy (Ekman, 1985; Robinson, 1996; Shuy, 1998). The linguistic depoliticization of control is an area of study that represents an analysis of the more subtle aspects of power. A particularly subtle aspect of wielding power is that it is often simultaneously hidden, that is, "depoliticized," by using a number of linguistic techniques. These techniques, broadly speaking, may be categorized into language that misleads people, and language that masks control. Although there are a multitude of strategies available to language users (see Giles & Wiemann, 1987; Ng, 1990a, 1996; Wiemann, 1985), a number may be understood from a social contextual perspective. We focus, herein, on the strategic use of social categorizations, or stereotypes, in acting out power and then legitimating and obscuring its use. These processes are particularly relevant to situations in which there is a large power distance between groups, and consequently, to uncovering the means that powerful groups use to hide or justify power. At the same time, these techniques are amenable to use by the powerless; the study of depoliticization strategies is therefore particularly relevant to processes of social maintenance and change.

As yet, however, these processes have received little research attention. For this reason, it is useful to critically evaluate what research is available. A strong criticism of research on power is that it tends to elucidate processes by which the

powerful establish and maintain control over the powerless, but not processes of social change (Moscovici, 1972, 1976). This situation may be understood in light of the metatheoretical underpinnings of social scientific research; that is, implicit assumptions in social science may serve as barriers to social change, and may even constitute barriers in and of themselves (Deutsch, 1969). These implicit assumptions may, additionally, if put into action, function to render social change impossible even when it is explicitly theorized. This problem is particularly relevant to the area of stereotyping, because stereotypes underlie social action (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). The processes through which stereotypes are created within language constitute a source of depoliticization strategies. That is, language may be used to hide influence attempts by grounding information within a specific stereotypical context. By invoking social categorizations or stereotypes within language, a speaker may place self and the ingroup in a position to be influential (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, 1996b), or use a categorization as a masking strategy that hides group boundaries or makes them ambiguous. Moreover, stereotypes function as justifications because they may be used to ground definitions of self and others in legitimated social consensus (cf. Tajfel, 1981).

In spite of the argument that stereotyping is essential to social action and hence social change, the dominant trend within the area of social cognition is to characterize stereotyping as inaccurate and therefore negative and controlling, but to characterize individuating information as accurate and therefore positive and liberating. This tendency becomes further problematic when the research is applied. The work of Fiske and colleagues provides a useful illustrative example of how metatheoretical assumptions might undermine social change (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991; Fiske & Morling, 1996).³ In this work, the interrelationships between power, defined as control, and attention processes as well as stereotyping are outlined. Consistent with the social cognition perspective, stereotyping is conceptualized as a category-based response strategy for simplifying social information, is said to be more likely to occur for those high than low in power (cf. Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Spears, & Wegener, 1998), and is controlling insofar as stereotypes function to maintain social inequalities, and hence existent power relations. The model states that power determines attentional processes, and that attentional processes determine the use of stereotyping; power change is thus equated with attentional processes. According to the model, by finding ways to get the powerful to pay attention to the powerless as individuals, stereotyping would cease to be used and hence, the control of stereotyping would cease (cf. Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998). Or would it?

³We present the work of Fiske and colleagues because it represents the most successful and well-elaborated application of work on social stereotyping and power. It is therefore this work that has attracted both our admiration and critical attention.

A consequence of applying this analysis is that it places group-based power change predominantly in the hands of the powerful, who have a stake in preserving the status quo. Simultaneously, it informs the powerless by suggesting that power change is to be equated with individuating processes. However, this is misleading because for power change to occur, it is necessary for the powerless to mobilize as a cohesive group, and to stereotype the powerful. That is, stereotyping not only functions to reinforce the status quo, it is a necessary ingredient of power change. To view an oppressive high-power group as a collection of individual entities would be to ignore the fundamentally intergroup nature of power differentiation. In other words, individuating information has the potential to be every bit as controlling, if not more controlling, than stereotyping.

The major import of these criticisms is that emphasis needs to be placed on processes that underline categorization and individuation within language: Both function toward social change and reinforcing the status quo, and both may be understood from a social-contextual perspective.

Recently, Reicher and colleagues (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, 1996b; Reicher, Levine, & Gordijn, 1998) have argued that the construction of social categories within language is an important resource for influence. They note, following self-categorization theory, that social influence follows the depersonalization of self to an ingroup category. Ingroups are influential, by definition, because they provide self-defining information (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Consequently, a speaker who is able to construe self and audience as constituting an ingroup category stands a greater chance of being influential than a speaker who does not. Reicher and associates' central argument is, however, that categories are not fixed structures but are flexible and may be constructed, represented, or misrepresented within language. Thus, the language and politics of exclusion often involves constructing and using categories to constitute the outgroup as the "outsider" or the "other." The process of "othering" minority and other low-power groups, in turn, contributes to their marginalization (Riggins, 1997). Does this imply that low-power groups should disown all categorizations that may separate them from the high-power group? We think not. On the contrary, low-power groups should guard themselves against the adverse effects that may arise from the blurring of categories.

To take an example, Australian Aborigines are currently in the process of debating land claims, and there is a clear divide of power between these people and the Australian government with whom they must debate.⁴ There are a number of ways in which the Aborigines might approach this issue in terms of social

⁴We should point out that this situation is shrouded by a history of conflict, and that many other economic, political, and historical processes operate at the forefront of this debate. Our account simply serves as a means of illustrating the role of social categorization processes. A fuller account would need to explicate and articulate historical context with social categorizations.

categorizations. They might want to argue that they are Australians, “just like everybody else,” hence casting themselves, clearly, within an ingroup category with government. From the viewpoint of self-categorization theory, one might argue that this blurring of categories would be the best strategy for gaining influence. However, by taking this stance, Aborigines would be ignoring the fact that they are at present in a grossly worse position than any other ethnic group in Australia. Perhaps a more optimal strategy would be both to categorize themselves as a distinctive subgroup with special needs and to appeal to a superordinate categorization that encompasses both mainstream Australian identity and Aboriginal identity. This might be achieved by arguing that Aborigines are Australians first and foremost, in the mainstream sense, but that although they are Australian, they have been disadvantaged in a number of ways. By doing this, they would cast themselves in an influential ingroup relationship with the government, while simultaneously appealing for their need for reparation.

Many Aboriginal groups have indeed taken the strategy of casting themselves as people with a special interest. For example, they have justified their claims to Crown-held land by casting themselves as the original Australians. This has the effect of differentiating themselves from a wider superordinate (ingroup) categorization that would otherwise tie them explicitly to a mainstream view of “Australian” that subsumes other Australian ethnic groups. This tendency may be seen commonly in press releases and in newspaper and television commentaries. For example, the chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Gatjil Djerrkura (1998), in making a speech on economic development, states:

The challenge for our young people is how to respond appropriately to the pressures and expectations of both their own *communities and the mainstream society*. In looking ahead at how *our people* can develop economic opportunity, there is no escaping the fact that native title is a reality that we all have to deal with. (emphasis added)

It is of course necessary for Aborigines to state that they are separate from mainstream society in some sense, because this highlights the need for reparation, and where reparations should be focused. However, if this is the sole categorization strategy, it opens the possibility for the government to categorize Aborigines as wishing to be un-Australian, thus casting them as an undeserving outgroup.

Indeed, categorization processes appear to have played some part in the process of the debate. One aspect of the power inequality of the situation is that Aborigines were excluded from government discussion of the land debate. Prime Minister John Howard, in turn, attempted to justify this move by stating this solution avoided a “divisive race-based election” (see Windsor & Shanahan, 1998):

The vote is a wonderful outcome for all Australians, it takes from the national political agenda something that was always, in the eyes of some, divisive. (p. 6)

In so doing, the government implicitly categorized Aborigines as mainstream “Australians,” rejecting their status as a legitimate special-interest group, thus

implying that acknowledgment of Aborigines as a separate group would somehow work against a common, and presumably legitimate, sense of Australian identity. This strategy, although constituting an ingroup relationship, served to blur crucial distinctions between groups, thus undermining Aboriginal attempts to gain power, and hence the success of their land claims.

This example suggests that, indeed, as Fiske and associates have argued, stereotypes are controlling. If, on the other hand, following Fiske's model, the government had treated Aborigines as a collection of individuals rather than as a consistent, if not legitimate group, it seems unlikely that there would have been discussion in the first instance. Clearly, the outcome of intergroup relationships in which there are strong power divides is closely related to issues surrounding the strategic use of stereotypes as justifications. Both the powerful and the powerless need stereotyping processes, they are necessary to both social change and maintenance (Tajfel, 1981). Indeed, if we simply view language as a reflection of power, there is no theoretical facility to predict a situation in which the Aborigines might win their case, as power clearly resides with the government, and it, at present at least, does not appear to want to offer concessions.

Language Routinizes Power

The processes discussed above, how language creates and depoliticizes power, are closely related to the linguistic routinization of dominance. The latter is most clearly illustrated in military conquest and colonialization but, as will be discussed later, can also be found in other situations.

Conquest and colonialization are often followed by the imposition of the foreign master's language over the native people. By necessity, or simply to improve the chance of upward social mobility, the native people will have to learn to use the master's language. This process of second-language acquisition may coexist with the maintenance of the native language, and when this occurs, it leads to additive bilingualism. The two languages, however, are unequal as they reflect the asymmetrical, master-subject power relation. So although the native language is retained, it is the foreign language that commands the most social prestige and utility. Thus the spread of additive bilingualism in the native population represents the cultural extension of military and political dominance that has been taking place. The widespread use of the master language has the effect of wedding military and political dominance to the native culture, making it a natural part of everyday life. Ng and Bradac (1993) refer to this state of social change as the linguistic routinization of dominance. In the extreme case, additive bilingualism may give way to subtractive bilingualism when the overuse of the master language leads to the disuse or even extinction of the native language in later generations. The psychological costs of losing one's heritage language are many: "To the extent that language is connected to one's self-identity. . . , the dominated party may lose or fail to gain an

authentic sense of self. . . . In the extreme case, one may see identification with the oppressor. In such a situation the dominated party lives in a world out of joint, a world that conduces to a schizoid stance toward self in the context of events" (Ng & Bradac, p. 180).

The linguistic routinization of dominance is not confined to military conquest or colonialization, though. Within a country where all citizens speak the "same language," the dominance of one group over another may also be linguistically routinized. For example, the dominance of the legal profession is augmented by the promulgation of a legal language that effectively renders laypersons illiterate and dependent on lawyers and barristers for interpretation and representation.

Another example, more subtle than the first, is linguistic sexism. As this topic has been extensively reviewed (e.g., Kramarae, 1990; Miller & Swift, 1991), it would be sufficient for present purposes to highlight only three aspects of it, all of which stem from the fact that language is man-made and biased in favor of males.

First, the conventional order of combining female and male words is male-before-female (e.g., "Adam and Eve," "I now pronounce you man and wife"). This may simply be a matter of arbitrary convention, but as Smith (1985) has suggested, it relegates females to a secondary position commonly reserved for less positive objects (e.g., "good and *bad*," "rich and *poor*," "life and *death*"). Secondly, females are defined in relation to males rather than as an entity on their own right. Thus, whereas "Jill is Jack's widow" sounds natural enough, "John is Mary's widower" does not and is in fact rarely used. These two particular ways of language use have become standardized as "good English," and anyone who questions them risks being dismissed as trying to make a mountain out of a molehill (Henley, 1989). However, the fact remains that they embody a not altogether positive view of females, and hence their unquestioned usage in everyday life will help to routinize the prejudices and to make the underlying power relations appear to be natural.

The third aspect of linguistic sexism that illustrates how language use may routinize male dominance is the so-called masculine generic. When referring to both genders or to a gender-indefinite person, masculine words (e.g., "man" and "his") rather than their feminine counterparts are the grammatically approved words to use. This grammatical convention was itself a political decision that reflected the dominance of patriarchy (Bodine, 1975). What this amounts to is that masculine words have been proposed as generics, rather than letting meaning itself find the right word. Not surprisingly, there is evidence to show that masculine generics are male centered and do not function generically (e.g., Miller & Swift, 1991; Ng, 1990b; Wilson & Ng, 1988). For example, "Throughout most history, men have always breast fed their babies" would give readers a jarring experience that disappears only after a conscious effort to read "men" generically. To the extent that "man" and "his" are routinely used in speech or text to refer grammatically to both genders, they serve at the cognitive level to conceal women and girls

from hearers or readers. The same concealing effect may also apply to speakers or writers themselves; that is, they may well be thinking of males specifically, even when they appear to be writing or talking about both genders. For example, one could hardly expect William James to be thinking of females when he wrote about the self-concept using masculine generics: "*In the widest possible sense, however, a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his **wife** and children*" (James, 1890/1950, p. 291; italics and capitals in original; boldface emphasis added).

By obscuring the female category, a sexist language actively suppresses the ability for women to mobilize as a group and strive for social change. This is perhaps one reason why a number of feminists see the creation of new vocabularies as central to the feminist agenda (Coates, 1986). It is important to note that this state of affairs applies not only to women, but to any group that occupies a low-status position and does not contribute to the making or definition of the language that they use. One of the difficulties of countering routinization is that both the powerful and the powerless collude in the linguistic routinization of dominance. For example, in intergroup situations marked by status differences, low-status-group members often display outgroup bias (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992), women often fail to perceive personal deprivations (Crosby, 1984), and people show loyalty to institutions that provide distributively unfair outcomes as long as they perceive the distributions to have been apportioned in a procedurally fair manner (Smith & Tyler, 1996; Tyler & Degoey, 1996). These findings suggest that both low- and high-power groups are in some way motivated to perceive their lots as just.

Jost and Banaji (1994) have proposed a system justification explanation of why people willingly participate in social arrangements even at personal cost. System justification refers to the tendency to participate psychologically in social arrangements, regardless of positivity or negativity to self; or in other words, people are motivated to perceive structure and continuity in the social world, regardless of implications for self-enhancement. In this sense, system justification represents a social psychological manifestation of false consciousness. Jost and Banaji have argued that system justification might be used to understand, among other things, negative self-stereotyping, beliefs in a just world, institutional loyalty, and hierarchy enhancement.

The concept of system justification gels closely with our argument that language routinizes dominance. However, we might add that not all power differences are stable, and that where power differences are perceived to be unstable, there exists the possibility for challenging the system. A useful example of an unstable power relationship occurs in intergenerational communication. This power relationship, at least in Western cultures, represents an unstable power situation for two reasons. Firstly, the elderly are increasing in number, and this numerical increase will likely come to underlie the ability to gain greater political and social

power (Ng, 1998). Secondly, there are a number of linguistic techniques that the elderly might employ to create conversational control.

In intergenerational communication the speech directed from young to elderly people resembles baby talk in the use of high pitch, simplified vocabulary, terms of endearment, slower speech, repetition, and so on. The use of these linguistic forms has become known as *elderspeak*. To this list might be added the use of interruptions, as younger speakers often attempt to speak for the elderly. Although elderspeak is motivated by an attempt to be warm and considerate, it remains that it is controlling. When they are addressed in this form of speech, the elderly are patronized, prevented from participating in conversation on their own terms, and effectively removed from the “normal” speech community. This is a process that may function to hasten social aging through a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The linguistic strategies that the elderly might use to circumvent this situation have already been described under the heading “Language Creates Power.” However, these strategies may be understood as existing within a wider intergroup social context. Namely,

factors that increase the tendency for subordinate group members to contrast their language with that of the dominant group, to focus on language with high consciousness, or in other words, to view language as an opaque (not a transparent) phenomenon will work against linguistic routinization (Ng & Bradac, 1993, p. 188).

Although a number of researchers investigating various different phenomena are converging upon the view that people are indeed motivated to justify systems, to fail to acknowledge injustice, to kowtow to the powerful for no real reason, and so on, work on the linguistic routinization of power is in a unique position to uncover power, and to empower those who are in an unjust position to get out of it.

Conclusions

There is a notable and lamentable paucity of research on social power, and in particular, research that addresses the intersection of intergroup relations and power. In spite of this, all intergroup behavior may be defined in terms of relative power equality or inequality, and many accept the argument that power is the sine qua non of intergroup relationships (Deschamps, 1982; Ng, 1980, 1982). Consequently, we should attempt to understand intergroup language in relation to power. In so doing, it becomes clear that power is not always a given; most often it is argued over, created, and re-created within language. That is, the interrelationships of language and power are dynamic, and closely related to processes of social change. For this reason, language is indispensable to the study of power and intergroup relations. The processes through which language reflects, creates, depoliticizes, and routinizes power have real consequences not only for the powerful, but also for the less powerful. A detailed understanding of the interrelationships of language and power is therefore essential to the application of the social psychology

of intergroup relations. Although this research is in its formative stage, we have attempted to outline some of the basic issues involved in this area.

The metatheoretical underpinnings of research carried out under the banner of social psychology is relevant not only to the scholarly enterprise, but also, perhaps more importantly, to the social relevance of social psychological theories. The social relevance of theory and research is often glossed over, yet psychology continues to take on an increasing role in informing policy makers. Indeed, social psychologists have applied their theories to expert testimony (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Fiske et al., 1991), desegregation (e.g., the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case), and affirmative action (e.g., Skedsvold & Mann, 1996). Given this increasing role, it is important to ask whether the underlying assumptions of our research meet with our beliefs about what our theories should look like. We have argued that for social psychology to produce research with social relevance, it is necessary to eschew explanations of social processes predicated upon individual psychological functioning that is detached from the social-structural context.

In spite of this, it remains that in the area of language and power, an individual level of analysis is afforded primacy; the relationship between power and language is typically formulated from the perspective of individuals qua individuals. Such a perspective is limiting for two reasons. Firstly, the individualistic perspective reinforces the view that power relationships are fixed, natural social arrangements. Consequently, individual-level theories do not allow for the explication of social change, and hence implicitly function to justify and reify the status quo. Secondly, and related to the first point, by naturalizing control relationships, individual conceptualizations of power actively remove power from the powerless in real-world applications. In contrast, by taking a social contextual perspective to the explication of power, it is necessary to consider power as a dynamic process closely related to language use. As power becomes more diffused and its exercise more covert in postindustrial societies (Lukes, 1974), language has played an increasingly important role in all power processes (Foucault, 1980). This role will become even more important with the advent of an information age. In underscoring the links between language and power, particularly the more subtle ways in which language may reflect, create, depoliticize, or routinize power, the present article will hopefully contribute to the understanding of both contemporary and future social issues raised by power and intergroup relations.

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