

Politicians and advertisers, among many others, consciously use language persuasively in order to serve their interests. How has language been engineered in the past and does this still occur today? What are the implications? Discuss with reference to two themes covered in the course.

AUTHOR'S NAME

The very nature of language is that of a malleable device – one that has been wielded (and is continuingly be employed) to propagate and garner support for ideologies and beliefs. Lexical engineering is not inherently malignant, but often its employment has involved the manipulation of ideas to render subversive and discriminatory mechanisms palatable; to lend them a guise of legitimacy.

The utilisation of linguistics under National Socialism in Nazi Germany was a key instrument in shaping people's understandings of morality, particularly susceptible children. The strident appeals to nationalism in the context of a broken society following the aftermath of World War I allowed their ideas to take root, and the constant linguistic reinforcement of their "worldview" (Hutton 1999, p.3) forged a strong place in society.

In the context of contemporary Australia, the lexical framing of a supposed 'refugee crisis' and the threat of 'boat people' has given rise to the portrayal of asylum seekers as threatening, feigning the identity of refugees and arriving in droves and undermining the quality of life for Australians. Processing the claims of asylum seekers is challenging, since the general lack of documentation makes determining the place of origin very difficult. This gave rise to the development of Language Analysis for the Development of Origin (LADO), and its application for considerations of determining refugee status – a tool used (in theory) to aid people in proving their place of origin, but one that is riddled with problems and prejudice in its deployment. The concept of LADO and the linguistic rhetoric of National Socialism are linked in the lingering implications they project: they both give the impression that language is bound to ethnicity, with the view that language is confined by borders and statehood. They are characterised by the ideology of "homogeneism" (Eades 2005, p.53).

The notion of 'linguistic relativism', of different cultures possessing different understandings of the world as a result of the variances in spoken languages, has formed the basis of many

justifications of racist and unequal views and, in some extreme instances, government policies. As linguist Christopher Hutton has highlighted, “Nazism was steeped in anti-universalism and in the rhetoric of cultural difference” (1999, p.4), an ideal of relativism they cited to justify their agenda and to glorify Nazism as a movement for strengthening Germany. Moreover, the link between language and the strength of the Nazi regime is deeply embedded – they stressed the importance of the ‘mother tongue’ to German nationalism and strength, propagating the idea that “the loss of the mother tongue, linguistic assimilation, was the first step to complete assimilation ” (Hutton 1999, p.13). Language was constantly reinforced as being inextricably linked to race, with the implication that non-Germans speaking the German tongue would corrupt its linguistic purity. Further, this notion was a part of their driving force for reunifying the ‘displaced’ German people across other European states, as they projected language as being defined by borders – a notion that is continuing to persist in the minds of people studying language in contemporary instances of refugees and asylum seeker speech patterns, as many instances have surfaced where the intermixing of people and languages has been overlooked through ignorance, such as decisions citing: “Urdu is not spoken in Afghanistan,” (p.510). Hitler was a powerful orator and he applied his great command of language to mobilise Germans to support his toxic nationalism, appealing to fears that “language and race were drifting ever further apart” (Eades, p.13). The manipulation of these fears through their linguistic bombardment created a host of deeply embedded psychological concerns that connected National Socialism and their plan of ‘Making Germany Great Again’ as the vehicle to preserve German traditions and culture.

Victor Klemperer in *The Language of the Third Reich* explains the toxic discourse that permeated Nazism, the means in which the warping of words such as ‘heroism’ and how the repetition of phrases and ideologies solidified their place in established speech and thinking conventions. The Nazi Party did not invent many new words, as they did not create so much as they destroyed: they “just changed their value” (Klemperer 2000, p.3), warping lexical items to suit their toxic ideology, to alter traditionally positive acts of heroism into acts that are supportive of the regime. They made “language the servant of its dreadful system” (2000, p.14). In doing so they gained immense power. By controlling the public discourse and the means of communication they were able to exert power over people’s opinions and thoughts, to influence them in their understandings of reality. This ‘Nazification’ of language did not immediately disappear once the regime was defeated. The alterations had become, unconsciously, part of the German lexicon; the linguistic traces were harder to expunge than the overt symbols, as the

phrases and figures of speech were often internalised into the language's development: "it isn't only Nazi actions that have to vanish, but also the Nazi cast of mind, the typical Nazi way of thinking and its breeding-ground: the language of Nazism" (Klemperer 2000, p.2). The poisonous language of the regime is further embodied in Klemperer's metaphor that "words can be like tiny doses of arsenic" (2000, p.14), a gradually corrupting method that continues to feature in the contemporary world. This is poignantly evident in the many attacks on asylum seekers as people who choose to 'country-shop', who are 'illegal immigrants', all of which undermines the cornerstone of human rights protection under international law because of a culture of fearmongering.

Immigration has been at the centre of debate throughout Australia's history. One of the first laws passed in the newly federated state was the Immigration Restriction Act, a law to regulate who would be allowed to settle in Australia based on race and, later, political beliefs. The overt racism underpinning the legislation was encapsulated through the dictation test that would be administered at the discretion of immigration officials to prevent 'undesirables' from being allowed to enter the country. The Australian Government thus employed a spontaneous test that could be given in any European language and, after 1905, in any language, as a means of advancing the White Australia Policy. They weaponised linguistics in order to thinly veil a policy of racism. A test could be administered as many times as necessary until a person finally made a mistake, the pretext for their deportation.

Today, modern Australia prides itself on multiculturalism, however, the language in relation to asylum seekers has markedly polarised the discussion, moulding them not as 'refugees' but as people seeking to capitalise on Australia's wealth. The very phrase 'asylum seeker' has become laden with negative connotations, and virtually a synonym for economic issues of employment. Asylum seekers are being increasingly scapegoated through constant slander in mainstream media channels. The concerns revolving around this issue resulted in the Australian Government utilising LADO findings as a basis for determining the status of these people. These findings have proved themselves to be quite complicated, as the analyses have been riddled with problems, and quite often been overturned by the Refugee Review Tribunal.

The distinct nature of the issue revolving around LADO and Australian cases is that the Australian Government has outsourced the analytical work to foreign private companies, with analyses frequently carried out by people possessing no formal linguistic training, with

improper understandings about the complex nature of linguistic change, resulting in incorrect, skewed results and perceptions. Diana Eades has outlined and dissected the concerns around using LADO, ultimately emphasising the over-generalisation that characterises the findings of people's backgrounds. She foregrounds the "problematic" (2005, p.507) nature of using a person's language to form the basis of important legal rulings. The concept of LADO and the name itself project the image of a factually accurate research technique; it gives the illusion of almost indisputable evidence. This engineering of the methodology attempts to mask human errors and the often-misinformed conclusions. Furthermore, the utilisation of LADO for legal rulings is fraught with damning implications, as analysts have been found to use incorrect methods of transcription, such as not employing the International Phonetic Alphabet (Eades 2005), resulting in material that cannot be properly analysed. The methods are not globally consistent: some countries use interpreters to conduct interviews in the person's native language, while others, for example Germany, employ a lingua franca like English that the person is often unable to properly articulate their story in. Eades further articulates that "there is a clear possibility that the interviewee might accommodate to the interpreter's dialect" (2005, p.503), that codeswitching and linguistic politeness might alter the person's language so as to suit the context of their interview.

As a direct consequence of these sub-standard examinations, in 2004 a group of five linguists, including Eades and McNamara, studied 58 cases in which LADO had resulted in the rejection of asylum claims and their reconsideration in Australia's Refugee Review Tribunal. They found that 40 of these findings were overturned and the people were recognised as legitimate refugees (McNamara 2003, p.23). Thus, LADO is a device that has become much maligned because of the means in which it has been utilised, and can be viewed as a continuation of the dictation test in a few ways. It can be improperly carried out and then conveniently cited as the pretext for not granting asylum, by blaming the asylum seeker and mischaracterising them as an economic migrant. Although LADO has the potential to help people, the methodology and the manner in which it is conducted is unable to fully realise the scope of linguistic diversity and the impacts on asylum seekers being surrounded by other languages and mannerisms.

The engineering of language under National Socialism and through the analytical reports of LADO and surrounding the issue of asylum seeking highlights the polarised and politicised nature of public discourse and the linguistic manipulation that underpins power structures. The use of LADO is surrounded by a host of issues concerning its legitimacy: it has the capacity to

solve questions of the identity of asylum seekers, but the condemnatory findings of malpractice completed by unqualified practitioners has tainted its reputation. Hence, in order to shift the discourse about asylum seekers and refugees in Australia, LADO could play a pivotal role in helping to mend the critical perception of ‘boat people’, but only if it is conducted correctly, by professional linguists, transcribed using official methodology and considerations are made of the continuously changing borders of conflict zones.

The corrosive implications of the manipulation of language under National Socialism by the Nazi Party is still reverberating across the globe, as a devastating example of the wielding of lexical particles to inspire support and a fear to challenge a destructive regime. Klemperer signposts that under Nazism language “increasingly dictates [people’s] feelings and governs [their] entire spiritual being” (2000, p.14). Language fundamentally altered perceptions to suit the regime, a fact that demands increasing attention in the continual polarisation in modern political discussions.

References

- Eades, D. (2005). Applied Linguistics and Language Analysis in Asylum Seeker Cases. *Applied Linguistics*, 26(4): 503–526.
- Hutton, C. (1999). *Linguistics and the Third Reich: Mother-tongue Fascism, Race, and the Science of Language*. Routledge.
- Klemperer, V. (2000). *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii, A Philologist’s Notebook*. Continuum.
- McNamara, T. (2003). What’s wrong with using language tests to establish the claims of asylum seekers? *Human Rights Defender* 12(3): 23-25.