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**Claire Kramersch, *Language as Symbolic Power*,
Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 279**

The latest Claire Kramersch's book *Language as Symbolic Power* (2021) is an overview of the language used by those in power from all walks of life. The publication provides a vast interpretation of language use to achieve one's aim in various situations – from the seemingly innocent exchanges between strangers, to words uttered during a (semi-)formal meeting between a president-elect and his employee.

Claire Kramersch is a Professor Emerita at the University of California, Berkley, and her main interests of research, among others, are: applied linguistics, social, cultural and stylistic approaches to language study, and discourse analysis. She has been awarded the Kenneth Milderberger Prize three times, most recently for her book *The Multilingual Instructor* (2018, with Lihua Zhang).

*Language as Symbolic Power*¹ is based on the Language and Power course conducted by Kramersch at University of California, Berkley, where she discussed all the ideas presented in the publication with her international students. The concepts presented and explained in the book are divided into three main parts, each consisting of three chapters. The first part, relating to the power of symbolic representation, introduces the basic ideas of linguistics and language analysis to the reader, especially one who has not been familiarised with basic linguistic terms such as *face* or *schema*, before. The second part, focusing on the power of symbolic action, presents the issue from the semiotic point of interpretation. The final part, the power to create symbolic reality, discusses a more modern perspective of language use, mostly the language used in social media.

The first chapter presents various concepts of the power of language. The analysis focuses on the speech delivered by the former US president, Donald J. Trump, when he promised to build a wall on the border with Mexico, and the implications the promise had on the American society. Throughout the chapter the reader is presented with the examples of the signification of a language discussed by Saussure (1959), as well as categorisation used in language, first presented by Sapir (1949). Such aspects as the power to interpret the symbols in discourse, the

¹ The title is a reference to Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) where he argues that language is a medium of power used by people for their own gains, thus, it should be viewed as such and not only as a means of communication.

power to manipulate by using or creating myths, and finally the power to construct meaning are also discussed in this part.

The second chapter focuses on symbolic representation by analysing various situations of the (ab)use of language by those in power. The author discusses three main ways of looking at the symbolic representation in terms of language as symbolic power. The first one is the Lakoff's (1987) and Johnson's (1987) interpretation of language as mental and bodily schema, that is the "mental representation of an object/idea anchored in one's mind" (Kramersch 2021:47). The second one is the staged performance, "the presentation and representation of how one wishes to be seen" (Kramersch 2021:49), observed nowadays on social media, discussed by Goffman (1959) as well as Foucault (1995), where examples of schema and staged performance can be found. The third representation is the delegation in form of Hanks's hurled speech (1996) and Bourdieu's (1991) oracle effect. The former being the utterance used between two parties to hurt the listening third one, whereas the latter being the speech used most commonly by the clergy and politicians to speak not only to people, but for them. The background for the analysis is a 17th-century fable with a seemingly innocent story presenting the demonstration of power by using the linguistic, not physical, power.

The third chapter focuses on the power of narrative in enforcing appropriate behaviours as well as reflecting the current social movements. The author uses the example of stories for children published over a century ago to present the narrative's pedagogic purpose. To a modern reader, the stories of *Struwwelpeter* (Eng. *Dishevelled Peter*) (1986, orig. 1845) may seem too harsh for such a young audience, however, as presented by Kramersch, they reflect the German authoritarian rules practiced in the upbringing methods at that time. *The Little Engine that Could* by W. Piper (1930) reflects the current social ideas of the time it was published, which were to state that through hard work and resourcefulness one can achieve even the impossible goal, whereas the *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr Seuss (1953) shows the tolerance and understanding - typical values of that time. As discussed in this chapter, it can be easily seen that even though the narrative is mostly used to teach the young commonly-accepted social standards, it is also (mis)used for the political gain, by creating a narration for the older readers, where their fears or desires might be exploited.

Chapter four discusses the circumstantial reading of the interlocutor's words. The whole part is built around the testimony of a former FBI director, James Comey, given on the event of Donald Trump's (then the president-elect) utterance to him. The example is used to discuss various hidden intentions of the interlocutor in terms of the Austin's performatives (1962), as "utterances not only say things about the world, but do things, such as *state, warn, order* [...] any utterance is also a *performative*, because it performs what it says" (Kramersch 2021: 82). The speech acts (Searle 1979) such as expressives, assertives, commissives and directives are presented in the analysis, along with participation framework and facework (which are explained in the context of rituals and communicative practice), thus, showing the Trump-Comey situation from a different perspective.

Chapter five focuses on presenting the experience of college students uttering the phrase “I love you” in various contexts. Based on those examples, the author presents symbolic violence in the use of language as in the social obligation to reciprocate as well as to “act upon others and to fulfil their need to be respected, admired and believed” (Kramersch 2021:101). Such an understanding of violence can be distinguished into individual and institutional, both having the same purpose, though different outcomes. The analysed example of individual violence is the gift-giving process – discussed in detail by the author and supported by the experiences of her students, whereas the institutional violence is presented by its use in the educational system.

Chapter six continues the topic of symbolic violence; however, it looks into its form of symbolic warfare. The chapter presents the case study of Donald Trump – his manipulation of language (use of “the wall” vs “security border”), his manipulation of the camera during one of his campaign interviews, his use of newspeak and, finally, of Twitter as a political instrument.

Chapter seven presents not the linguistic perception of the language use, but the social one in the aspect of the use of memes and situations spiralling from everyday to viral, such as viral videos shared by many online and memes rising from them, which leads to various social movements. As the author presents, it may be caused by the change of society to a spectacle (Debord 1983), or even expository society (Harcourt 2014), who feel the need to document their every move as well as to publish it online. The author does not omit the paradox of the new media – they encourage people to lead an online life, but at the same time bring them together and upkeep the otherwise fragile relationships.

Chapter eight is devoted to social media, specifically focusing on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Google, as those on which the symbolic power may be executed. Even though honourable ideas were the basis for creating them, they did not stand the test of time and nowadays it is the algorithm that decides what is fed to the users. The common use of those social media platforms is described as cultural and social revolution, followed by the misuse of them to spread post-truths and disinformation.

The last chapter focuses on various aspects of engaging with the symbolic power from social, philosophical and linguistic stances. Such concepts as time, space and causality in mostly post-humanism era are analysed. By discussing those concepts, the author answers the question how learning another language helps people not only to better interpret the human complexity, but also to understand how to respond to symbolic violence in modern days.

The book presents a wide scope of the symbolic power of any language. One of the strong points of the book is that each chapter starts with a real-life example which, apart from being the theme for each chapter, sets the context for the analysis of the discussed concepts. This allows those not familiar with the theory of linguistics not only to better understand the ideas discussed, but also to notice such behaviours in their surroundings. Each chapter ends with suggestions for further reading without the author’s comments, allowing the reader to acquire in-depth knowledge of the topic and draw their own conclusions. Even though the book is presented as one

discussing the key topics in applied linguistics, it can also be used as a coursebook in various theoretical linguistics courses, especially introductory ones. The publication should also be introduced to foreign language teachers, so they may incorporate the knowledge of symbolic power of language use in class, especially to teach the new language users how to navigate in the complex world of socio-linguistic power.

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