Chapter 1

What is language and what does it do?

Shân Wareing

1.1   Introduction

This chapter provides a context for the topics discussed in the rest of the book, by explaining our approach to the study of language, and positioning this approach in relation to other ways of thinking about language. Firstly, the chapter considers why language is a phenomenon worthy of study; we use an example of a letter to a newspaper to consider the ways in which language, society and power might be related. Secondly, the chapter considers the nature of language, and how its forms (i.e. its manifestations as spoken or written words, or as signs in sign language) and functions (i.e. what people use language for) may be described and categorised. Thirdly, the chapter explores some of the **variations** found in language systems, and the social meanings which are attributed to different languages, **dialects** and **accents**. Fourthly, the concept of power is introduced, with a discussion of some of the ways language creates and maintains power. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the term 'political correctness'.

1.2   Why study language?

People find the subject of language interesting and worth studying for many different reasons. Language can, for example, be used as a way of finding out more about:

• how our brains work, from investigating how children learn language, or how damage to our brains results in certain kind of language disorders (psycholinguistics);

• how to learn and to teach different languages (applied linguistics);

• the relationship between meaning, language and perception (philosophy);

• the role of language in different cultures (anthropology);

• the styles of language used in literature (stylistics);

• the different **varieties** of language people use, and why there are linguistic differences between different groups (sociolinguistics);

• how to make computers more sophisticated (artificial intelligence).

Many of these areas overlap, and the topics discussed in this book employ ideas and methods from more than one area listed above.

Frequently, people who are not linguists are interested in language too. To test the truth of this statement, you only have to look at the letters pages of newspapers and count the number of letters printed per week which are on language-related issues. In the following text, a newspaper columnist complains about the official 'jargon' associated with school teaching in the UK, which she claims she dislikes so strongly, it caused her not to return to teaching:

I have been taking a refresher teaching course, which reminded me why I gave up teaching in the first place. It wasn't the pupils, or the pay, or the mountains of marking and preparation, or the huge classes. It was the rubbish new language that one must learn and use in order to read and write the reams of plans, forms, observations and assessments which clog the road to teaching – sorry "providing learning opportunities" – and marking – sorry – "evaluating learning outcomes".

One look at this page of gibberish gives me the cold shudders. I cannot understand it for toffee.

Michele Hanson in *The Guardian* newspaper, 11 February, 2002

A letter making a similar complaint about the use of jargon in education appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper (7 September, 1997), responding to a previously published article. (Ofsted is the organisation responsible for monitoring standards in schools in the UK: OFfice of STandards in EDucation.)

Ofstedspeak

Lucinda Bredin's concern about the language of Ofsted reports (Review, August 24) is justified. The mysterious world of Ofstedspeak can be difficult to penetrate. The word "satisfactory" which smacks of mediocrity, is discouraged by Ofsted. The word "sound" is encouraged instead.

The bright and shining ones at Ofsted have also given the thumbs down [to] the word "ability".[1] Inspectors are asked not to refer to pupils' different levels of ability. They must instead write about levels of attainment, meaning what pupils can do in relation to what might be expected of them.

That happily relieves everyone of having to say of any child that he or she lacks

ability. Poor attainment may be the result of poor teaching, or inappropriate

curriculum or, come to that, Government policy.

As the second wave of inspections takes place, reports will be written in a

different language from before. In particular, where a first wave report has said that

pupils are performing well in relation to their ability, that will be out of order in a

second wave report.

There is real danger that Ofsted language will become so arcane as to be

unintelligible to ordinary citizens.

Peter Dawson

Ofsted registered inspector

Derby

This letter actually picks up on many of the issues to do with language which we

will be dealing with in this book. First of all, it addresses the concept of whether what we

call things does matter, and whether it is a worthy topic of debate. The fact this letter was

written at all suggests that what we call things does matter, and is a topic worth debating.

A second language issue raised by this letter is the use of jargon; jargon can be

impenetrable to anyone outside a small group of 'those in the know', as both Peter

Dawson and Michele Hanson state.

The term *Ofstedspeak* raises a third language issue. The word has been coined by

analogy with **Newspeak**, the form of English invented by George Orwell in his novel

Nineteen Eighty-Four, and creates a reference to Orwell's dystopian nightmare in which

people's thoughts are controlled and limited by the language available to them. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell reflects on the relationship between language and our perception of reality, also a theme of this letter. When a child is assessed, can their ability be measured, or only their attainment? That is, can their inherent capacity be measured, or only what they achieved on a particular day under particular circumstances? Does it matter which word is used? Peter Dawson obviously thinks that ability can be tested, and the use of the word attainment is a **euphemism** to cover up an unacceptable fact with a 'prettier' word. On the other hand, I prefer the word attainment because I agree with Ofsted that only attainment can be measured, and that ability cannot. If the letter writer and I were to continue this debate, we wouldn't just be arguing about words but our view of education and our beliefs about the nature of human beings. Words can signal strongly our attitudes to fundamental things; debates that appear to be about words can actually be about values and worldview. Which word is chosen may also affect people's perception of the world, and of themselves. A pupil who does badly at school because of poor teaching, or an inappropriate curriculum, or government policy, may want to return to learning later in life. Whether or not they do so may well be influenced by whether they thought their previous lack of success in education was due to low ability (and therefore they may feel that they are never likely to improve) or just to low attainment (in which case, under different circumstances, they may feel they would do much better).

Fourthly, the term *Ofstedspeak* illustrates that human beings use language creatively and make up new words which can nevertheless be understood by others who are familiar with the culture in which the new word was developed.

Fifthly and finally, the letter also illustrates the important matter of who gets to decide how language is used. 'The bright and shining ones at Ofsted' have made a decision about how reports will be written (i.e. using the word *sound* rather than *satisfactory* and the word *attainment* rather than *ability*). Peter Dawson disagrees with this usage and has written to a national paper to complain about it. However, as a registered inspector for Ofsted, he is likely to have to use these terms, despite his objections, if he wishes to stay in his job. The children whose performances are going to be categorised either under the term *attainment* or under the term *ability* however have no say at all in the discussion about which term is used.

These aspects of language, and in particular the third and fifth mentioned here (the extent to which language reflects and creates our perception of the world, and who makes decisions about what is appropriate language use) are major concerns of this book.

ACTIVITY 1.1

Below are two suggestions for straightforward 'fieldwork' tasks you could carry out if you are interested in finding out more about attitudes to language held in the society around you.

1   Check the letters page of two or more newspapers for a period of time such as two weeks or a month. How many letters about language use appear? Are there common themes in the comments the letter writers make? Do you agree with the arguments they put forward?

2   Keep a mental or a written note of the references people make to language use. Particularly record any comments people make that are regretful or angry about

changing language use. Do you agree with the sentiments expressed? If so, why?
If not, why not?

1.3   What is language?

Having discussed what you can expect from this book, let's take a closer look at some of the main themes and ideas we'll be dealing with. The first of these is what language actually is. There are several different ways of thinking about language; which way you think about it depends on which aspect of language you are interested in.

1.3.1   Language: a system

One of the obvious ways of thinking about language is as a systematic way of combining smaller units into larger units for the purpose of communication. For example, we combine the sounds of our language (**phonemes**) to form words (**lexical items**) according to the 'rules' of the language(s) we speak. Those lexical items can be combined to make grammatical structures, again according to the **syntactic** 'rules' of our language(s). Language is essentially a rule-governed system of this kind, but there are other ways of thinking about how language works and what we do with it, and it is those which we are concentrating on in this book.

For example, we usually assume that we use language to say what we mean. However, the processes by which we create 'meaning' are actually very complicated indeed, so we're going to begin with some 'models' of meaning. These will help us get started but which will soon prove to be too simple to be really accurate, at which point we will have make the models more complicated.

One model for explaining meaning is to assume that every group of sounds or letters which make up a word has a one-to-one relationship with a meaning. And for every meaning you can think of, there is a corresponding group of sounds (a spoken word) and letters (a written word). When describing this way of thinking about language, traffic lights are often used as a comparison. For the meaning stop we have a red traffic light. For the meaning go we use a green traffic light. An amber light on its own tells you to stop, and that the next light to show will be the red one on its own. In the UK, red and amber lights showing together mean that you should stop, but that the next signal to follow will be green for go. The fact that the lights can only show in certain sequences and combinations is a bit like the syntax which governs word order in sentences, and permits the sequence:

today I went swimming

but not the following sequence (an asterisk* before a phrase denotes that the expression is not one which speakers of that language will accept as well-formed):

*went today swimming I

There are several limitations linked to thinking about language as a system like traffic lights. First, there would only be one signal (group of letters or sounds) for every meaning. If this were the case, Peter Dawson would not be able to disagree with Ofsted about the use of *satisfactory* versus *sound* (where clearly there is some overlap in meaning). Second, there would be a limited number of meanings and signals available. While it would be possible to use a green and amber combination, what would it mean? You would know if you had been informed already, but what would you do if you were driving along and suddenly came to a traffic light showing amber and green? You might

well assume that the lights had malfunctioned, rather than that a new message was being communicated.

1.3.2   Language: the potential to create new meanings

One of the reasons why language is actually a far more complicated entity than traffic lights is that we can use it to create new meanings. Here are some expressions which illustrate language being used creatively to express new meanings:

unleaving

McDonaldisation (of people's diets)

Being perved at

uptitling

Sweatshirting

These are all expressions which I can remember hearing or seeing for the first time, but which I did not have any trouble understanding.[2]

 Perhaps you use some of these expressions yourself, or perhaps they strike you as archaic or peculiar. It's difficult to think of examples of language being used creatively, because successful new uses get adopted very quickly and become just a normal part of everyday language. However, what you can probably still see is that words can be used in new ways to mean new things, and can be instantly understood by people who have never come across that word before. This ability is one of the things that sets human language apart from the kind of communication that goes on, for example, between birds, which can only convey a limited range of messages.

ACTIVITY 1.2

3   List any expressions you recently heard or started to use for the first time. Can you

       remember how you felt about using them for the first time? If you are interested in

       pursuing this area further, ask people of a variety of ages if they are aware of new

       expressions coming into use. You could compile a list of expressions based on their

       answers and, if you have the time available, use the list as the basis of a larger

       survey to find out how many people are already using these expressions, and

       whether there's a pattern to who uses them and who doesn't.

1.3.3   Language: multiple functions

Another important dimension of language is the very different purposes we use language

for all the time. In the course of a day you will probably use language referentially,

affectively, aesthetically, and phatically. Below are some examples to illustrate these

different ways of using language.

    You use language referentially when you say 'put that newspaper on the table'.

Your instruction is referential because it gives information about what you want placed

(the newspaper) and where you want it placed (on the table). This aspect of language, its

ability to communicate information, is very important. Examples of contexts where this

aspect of language is very obvious are: pilots discussing flight paths with air traffic

control; recipes; assembly instructions with self-assembly furniture; school textbooks;

directions on how to get to a friend's house. In all these cases, accurate, non-ambiguous

information is a priority.

However, the transmission of information is certainly not the only reason we use language, and there are many linguistic choices we make every day which are not a consequence of information transmission at all. For example, you could use any of the utterances (a) to (c) below and convey the same factual information. But by selecting one as appropriate and not another, you would be exploiting the affective aspect of language and showing yourself to be sensitive to the power or social relationship between you and the person you are addressing.

(a)   Put the newspaper on the table.

(b)   Could you please put the newspaper on the table.

(c)   Put the ****ing paper on the ****ing table right now!

On the other hand, you might say utterance (d):

(d)   What's black and white and read all over? A newspaper!

In this case you wouldn't be trying to give anyone information. You would be exploiting the ability of language to give us pleasure by its formal properties, its sounds and written appearance: its aesthetic properties.

If later in the day someone came in and said 'Oh good choice in newspapers!' and you said 'thanks', you would both be exploiting the phatic properties of language. This is the everyday usage of language as 'social lubrication'. No important information is being exchanged, but you are both indicating that you are willing to talk to one another, are pleased to see one another, and so on.

In this book, we're largely concerned with the first two functions of language: its referential function and its affective impact. These two functions are the ones most clearly associated with power. The referential function is the one associated with what

objects and ideas are called and how events are described (i.e. how we represent the world around us and the effects of those **representations** on the way we think, as the letter above about the language of Ofsted reports highlighted). The affective function of language is concerned with who is 'allowed' to say what to whom, which is deeply tied up with power and social status. For example, 'It's time you washed your hair' would be an acceptable comment from a parent to a young child, but would not usually be acceptable from an employee to their boss.

1.3.4   Language diversity

Let's focus on another aspect of language now: the aspect of who speaks what language, and what variety of that language they speak.

If you travel to France, you probably expect to be spoken to in French. Language boundaries and national boundaries frequently coincide, but of course the picture is more complicated than that. In many places which are not England or France, English or French is spoken (in India, Canada, and in many African countries for example). Moreover, in different countries, different versions of English or French are spoken. Indian English is different in some of its grammatical structures from British English, as well as in its pronunciation.

Languages do not only vary between countries; they also vary within countries. Schools in large cities are often attended by children who speak many different languages. Not only are many different languages spoken within primarily English-speaking countries like Britain and the US: there is also a great deal of variation within English itself. Chapter 10 looks at variation in English in more detail.

People often have very strong attitudes towards different languages and different varieties of language. Consider this letter from *The Guardian* newspaper (20 September, 1997), written after the people of Scotland and Wales had voted on whether to have separate elected governing bodies from the main UK government:

> Having survived the nail-biting Wales referendum results on TV, I hope and pray that as soon as their assembly is set up, it will be made illegal to speak the unintelligent [sic][3] gibberish called Welsh outside Wales.
>
> Malcolm Everett
>
> Brighton
>
> East Sussex

It is not clear from the letter how seriously the writer intended his point to be taken. *Gibberish*, however, is a strong word to use about other people's language and suggests how deeply prejudices can go against language, against other cultures and ultimately, against other people. Clearly, no language is gibberish to those who speak it, and equally, no language, including English, makes sense to a non-speaker.

To conclude this part of the chapter: language is a system, or rather a set of systems (a system of sounds, a system of grammar, a system of meaning); variations in usage are often systematic as well. Within these systems, there is scope for creativity and invention. How an individual uses the systems available to them varies according to who the speaker is, how they perceive themselves, and what identity they want to project. Language use also varies according to the situation, whether it's public or private, formal or informal, who is being addressed, and who might be able to overhear. Integral to these

choices we make about language use is the dimension of power, and that will be discussed next.

1.4   Power

Power is a complex and abstract concept, and an infinitely important influence on our lives. Power is defined in *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1999) (henceforth referred to as *TNFDMT*) as: 'The ability of its holders to exact compliance or obedience of other individuals to their will' (678). The *TNFDMT* quotes Rousseau: 'The strongest man is never strong enough always to be master unless he transforms his power into right and obedience into duty.' (678) Language has a key role in transforming power into right and obedience into duty. Some scholars would go further and say that language is the arena where the concepts of right (in both the sense of entitlement, and in the sense of what is morally acceptable) and duty are created, and thus language actually creates power, as well as being a site where power is performed.

One of the writers whose theories have had most influence on thinking about language and power is Louis Althusser, the French philosopher. Althusser argued that 'in order to persist over time… an economic system such as capitalism must continually 'reproduce' its relations of production, i.e. the exploitative class relationship arising out of ownership or non-ownership of the means of production' (*TNFDMT* 24-25). Althusser called the mechanisms by which economic systems reproduce their relations of production 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs). ISAs include the political parties, trade unions, religious and educational institutions, the family and culture, including the mass media. 'All these act to integrate individuals into the existing economic system by

subjecting them to the hegemony of a dominant ideology, a set of ideas and values which

ultimately supports the dominance of the capitalist class.' (*TNFDMT* 25) In other words,

the values and beliefs we hold which seem to be 'normal' and 'common sense' are in fact

constructs of the organisations and institutions around us, created and shared through

language. It is more effective and efficient for a system to control our behaviour by

controlling our perception of reality than it is to control us with force (such as the police,

prisons and the military).

The concept of power has already surfaced in this chapter: the power of Ofsted

inspectors to decide what words to use; the power of one person which makes it possible

for them to give another person a command such as 'wash your hair' without

jeopardising the relationship; the status of some languages compared to others, such as

the relative standing of English and Welsh. For the rest of this chapter, I will present

some examples of language and power at work together, to illustrate some of the ways

these two phenomena are interlinked.

To begin with, consider these statistics published by the *State of the World Forum*

(September 2000)[4].

- Number of pages on the World Wide Web: 320,000,000

- Percentage of all websites in English: 80

- Percentage of world population that understands English: 10

These statistics indicate the extent to which the web is dominated by the English

language, and to which the majority of the world's population are excluded linguistically

from the most of the material on the web, even if they had the physical means of

accessing it. The web is frequently talked about as a democratising media, one which

enables everyone to have their say, or publish their ideas. These statistics show that this description of the web is only really true for English speakers. What language/s you speak is one way in which you immediately have access to, or are excluded from, some kinds of power. Bearing in mind these statistics, how appropriate is the term: 'World Wide Web'?

We also find power at work in our everyday use of language. **Discourse** structures create power relations in terms of we negotiate our relative status through interaction with others. Two examples of this follow. The first is an email I received at work:

> Pfs2 crashed at 11:04PM Sat reporting fan failure and excessive temperature in the SSA (where user data is held). It failed in its re-boot because two disks had gone. It is now back and the fan assembly appears to be working normally. However two disks have gone which means that one of the user volumes is running un-mirrored. The disks will be replaced by Sun and that will entail further down-time, possibly today but probably tomorrow morning although I have no timescale currently. Y drives were re-available at 10:25AM today. As pfs2 was considered available by sun to the extent that it was pingable after the crash, that system was effectively unavailable due, e.g., to network timeouts on NFS mounts.
>
> A.

Although this email was not intended for me, as it was sent to me by mistake, I tried to read it. It immediately triggered feelings of frustration and inadequacy, as I struggled to understand it, reminding me of the many times I have needed to ask the advice of a computer expert but not understood their response. Sometimes I have suspected that the

expert knew I didn't understand their reply, but enjoyed feeling they had knowledge that I didn't have and that they had the power to make me feel ignorant. As a result of the power imbalance, I would not be brave enough to demand they explained in language I could understand. This particular email was not sent to me to intimidate me; that was an unintended side effect. However, the phenomenon of a layperson not understanding an expert is one illustration of the dynamics of power and language. The layperson becomes increasingly aware of their lack of knowledge; perhaps feels confused, embarrassed or frightened, possibly too scared to ask for an explanation, or perhaps having asked and received an explanation as confusing as the original statement, they have given up. Many of us have encountered this situation in dealing with experts in the fields of computing, medicine or law. The World Wide Web statistics published by the *State of the World Forum* demonstrated that which language you speak can be a pathway to power. The computer email example demonstrates one of the ways in which what variety of language you speak , and how you make use of that variety, are sources of power.

Power can also be played out in other ways in ordinary conversation, and we all have experience of this. Indeed it is probably true to say that power is a dimension of every single conversation we have, in one way or another. This extract from Ian McEwan's novel, *Atonement*, illustrates two characters, Cecilia and Mrs Jarvis, battling for power in a conversation. Briony has visited her sister, Cecilia, and has not so far been invited in., so both are in the hall of Cecilia's lodgings

> At that moment, the door snapped open and the landlady stood right in front of Briony, so close to her that she could smell peppermint on the woman's breath. She pointed at the front door.

'This isn't a railway station. Either you're in, young lady, or you're out.'

Cecilia was getting to her feet without any particular hurry, and was retying the silk cord of her dressing gown. She said languidly, 'This is my sister, Briony, Mrs Jarvis. Try and remember your manners when you speak to her'.

'In my own home, I'll speak as I please,' Mrs Jarvis said. She turned back to Briony. 'Stay if you're staying, otherwise leave now and close the door behind you.'

Briony looked at her sister, guessing she was unlikely to let her go now. Mrs Jarvis had turned out to be an unwitting ally.

Cecilia spoke as though they were alone. 'Don't mind the landlady. I'm leaving at the end of the week. Close the door and come up.'

Watched by Mrs Jarvis, Briony began to follow her sister up the stairs.

'And as for you, Lady Muck,' the landlady called up.

But Cecilia turned sharply and cut her off. 'Enough, Mrs Jarvis. Now that's quite enough.'

Briony recognised the tone. Pure Nightingale, for use on difficult patients or tearful students. It took years to perfect. Cecilia had surely been promoted to ward sister. [6]

Cecilia asserts her authority through her body language (getting up slowly), her speech acts (giving direct commands, such as 'try and remember your manners', and 'Enough Mrs Jarvis', and through speaking as if the landlady were not present), presumably through her accent, which indicates her higher social class (hence the comment 'Lady Muck'), and through her use of a tone associated with her authority at work ('Pure

Nightingale'). The landlady retaliates by her body language (turning away from Cecilia to address Briony), by giving commands to Briony ('either you're in… or you're out'), and by insulting Cecilia ('Lady Muck'). This book looks at insults in chapter 5 on gender and chapter 6 on ethnicity, at talking as if others weren't there in chapter 7 on age, and at attitudes to accent in chapter 11.

Finally, let us return to the matter raised by the letter about Ofsted and the use of language in the education system: who decides what terms are acceptable and which are not. In the 1980s, campaigns to change language use (where language was sexist, racist or discriminatory to people with disabilities) attracted considerable media attention and the term 'political correctness' (or PC) was and still is used to describe such campaigns. Language reform has been around for a long time: it was very influential in the eighteenth century, for example, so the implication that no one argued about the use of language prior to the emergence of 'political correctness' is false, and is one example of the way the term is manipulated. According to Cameron (1995), the term 'political correctness' was probably first used in a straightforward way, in the sense of political actions which the speaker approved of. However, it took on an ironic sense and was used amongst people active on the political left as a self-mocking joke to describe the extreme and unrelenting standards of behaviour of some of their fellow activists. In this sense it was directed at those who were overly pious or 'holier-than-thou'. While 'politically correct' was used in this ironic sense, to be politically 'incorrect' was to mean 'something like "I am committed to leftist causes, but not humourless or doctrinaire about it"' (Cameron, 1995: 122). The term 'political correctness' was then appropriated by the political right as a slur against all left wing activity. This, as Cameron points out,

leaves those on the political left in a difficult position. How, for instance, do they answer the question 'Are you politically correct?' when they're not sure if the answer 'Yes' means 'Yes I'm left wing' or 'Yes, I'm bigoted/extreme/doctrinaire/joyless'. This appropriation of meaning is what Cameron calls a 'triumph of linguistic intervention' and its success is apparent in that the negative connotations of 'political correctness' are so well established that it is now virtually impossible to use the term in any positive sense. So anything you label as 'PC' takes on the negativity of the label, obscuring the real issues about whether the thing itself is worthwhile or not. The term 'political correctness' is thus a good illustration of the way terms can 'slide around', having slightly different meanings for different people, and being a 'site of struggle' (in this case, a struggle over who controls the meaning and thus whether 'political correctness' is a good thing or a bad thing, a joke, a serious threat or a worthwhile cause). It is ironic that having been a 'site of struggle' over meaning itself, the term 'political correctness' can be used as against proposals for language reform, on the basis that such proposals are interference with language and its meaning. Such attacks have resulted in sets of joke coinages such as 'vertically challenged' (short), 'chronologically challenged' (old), and 'follically challenged' (bald), which effectively undermine serious attempts at language reform and deflect attention away from the underlying issues. (For more on political correctness, see Cameron, 1995; Dunant, 1994).

1.5   Summary

This chapter outlined why the topics of language, society and power might be worth studying, and why in this book we are assuming the three topics are related. Several ways

of thinking about, or 'modelling', language were offered and some of the kinds of variations in language you might encounter were commented on. The chapter looked concluded by looking at some of the ways language, power and society are related.

The study of language is worthwhile, we believe, because is it such an important part of all our lives. We also believe that by studying it we can learn a great deal about how society is structured, how society functions, and what are the most widespread, but sometimes invisible, assumptions about different groups of people.

Some people find that this knowledge is valuable because it contributes to their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others. Knowledge about language, society and power may enable people to make choices in their language use which make them feel better about themselves. People can also find knowledge about the areas discussed in this book valuable because it can be used to challenge what they perceive as unfairness in society. Whatever your reasons for reading this book, we hope you find it interesting and useful.

Notes

1   The use of square brackets in this sentence indicates that the original text has been altered in some way, and that what is contained within the square brackets is the addition of the present author. In this case, the text was shortened slightly, by removing some words from either side of the word to.

2   U*nleaving* is a word invented by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins from the poem 'Spring and Fall'. From the context, it refers to the fall of leaves from trees.

The *McDonaldisation* of diets refers to the global increase in high fat fast food consumption.

I found *being perved at* in a fashion column, which was describing the consequences of wearing summer clothes to work which showed a lot of flesh.

Uptitling was coined to describe the practice changing jobs titles to make them sound more prestigious.

Sweatshirting is a word I encountered as a heading in a mail order catalogue for the pages with sweatshirts and jogging bottoms on them.

3   The use of the Latin term sic indicates that what may appear to be a mistake made in this publication was in fact a correct transcription of the original. In this case, the letter writer may have confused the words unintelligible (language which cannot be understood) with unintelligent (not clever). He may have made a mistake in writing his letter, the newspaper may have made a mistake in their reproduction of his - letter, or he may have deliberately chosen unintelligent to cast a slur on the Welsh - people.

4   Statistics published on the *State of the World Forum* web site (2000):

http://www.simulconference.com/clients/sowf/dispatches/dispatch2.html

5   McEwan, Ian (2001) *Atonement* London: Jonathan Cape: 334

Suggestions for further reading

Andersson, Lars-Gunnar and Trudgill, Peter (1992) *Bad Language*, Harmondsworth:

Penguin.

This is a small accessible book written for the general reader which aims to start you thinking about language issues.

Montgomery, Martin (1996) *An Introduction to Language and Society* (2nd edition), London: Routledge.

An introductory text which covers a wide range of social and linguistic issues.

Fairclough, Norman (2001) *Language and Power* (2nd edition), London, Longman.

Linguistic analysis of political and advertising texts. See in particular chapter 3 'Discourse and Power'.

Klein, Naomi (2000) *No Logo*, London, Flamingo.

A political text for the layperson, critically analysing the ideological mechanisms of multinational corporations, consumerism and branding.

Dunant, Sarah (ed.) (1994) *The War of the Words*, London:Virago.

A collection of essays directed at the general reader, including 'The culture war and the politics of higher education in America', 'Sex and the single student: the story of date rape' and 'Liberté, Égalité and Fraternité: PC and the French'.