

The Language of Persuasion in Politics and the Media

An Introduction

Second Edition

Alan Partington

Designed cover image: Getty Images

New edition published 2026

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2026 Alan Partington

The right of Alan Partington to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

First edition published as *The Language of Persuasion in Politics: An Introduction* by Routledge, 2018

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-66274-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-64824-8 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-66272-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781032662725

Typeset in Sabon

by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Contents

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xvi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xxvii</i>

Unit 1: Politicians, the media and us: The language of persuasion	1
1.1 <i>Politics is conducted through language</i>	1
1.2 <i>Persuasion and rhetoric in a democratic society</i>	4
1.3 <i>Professional persuaders and the art of the 'spin-doctor'</i>	9
1.4 <i>Epilogue: when persuasion is superfluous to requirements, even in some 'democracies'</i>	16
<i>Further reading</i>	18
<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	18
Unit 2: But then along came social media . . .	21
2.1 <i>What are 'social media'?</i>	21
2.2 <i>Platform or advocate? Two election 'scandals'</i>	23
2.3 <i>Political social media sites</i>	25
2.4 <i>Social media and freedom of expression</i>	28
2.5 <i>Social media and freedom of speech: 'scandals' and tough decisions</i>	30
2.6 <i>The six principles of persuasion on social media</i>	31
<i>Further reading</i>	33
<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	34
Unit 3: Evaluation: What's good and what's bad	36
3.1 <i>Evaluative language</i>	36
3.2 <i>Grammatical evaluation</i>	38
3.3 <i>Textual evaluation</i>	39
3.4 <i>Lexical evaluation</i>	39

3.5	<i>Extension task</i>	41
	<i>Further reading</i>	45
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	46
Unit 4:	Evaluation by language choice: Selection and omission	48
4.1	<i>Denotation and connotation</i>	48
4.2	<i>'Insider' words (good), 'outsider' words (bad)</i>	51
4.3	<i>Hooray words and boo words</i>	54
4.4	<i>Evaluation by selection of information: what to leave in and what to leave out. A case study</i>	56
4.5	<i>Evaluation and evidence: evidentiality</i>	59
4.6	<i>Evaluation and modality</i>	60
4.6.1	<i>Modality as your degree of commitment to a belief</i>	60
4.6.2	<i>Modality and evaluation in political comment</i>	61
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	63
Unit 5:	Sounding good: Rhetorical effects in action: 'Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!' (But not for all . . .)	66
5.1	<i>Creative repetition, creative contrast: playing with language to persuade</i>	66
5.2	<i>Binomials and bicolons</i>	67
5.3	<i>The three-part list (or tricolon)</i>	69
5.3.1	<i>Beyond three</i>	71
5.3.2	<i>Crescendo</i>	72
5.4	<i>The contrasting pair (or antithesis)</i>	72
5.4.1	<i>Chiasmus</i>	75
5.5	<i>Oxymorons</i>	75
	<i>Extension TASK</i>	77
5.6	<i>Rhetorical figures in times gone by: liberty, freedom and emancipation</i>	77
5.7	<i>The Declaration of Independence</i>	77
5.8	<i>The rhetoric of anti-rhetoric: 'This Fourth of July is yours, not mine'</i>	81
	<i>Websites to explore</i>	84
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	84

Unit 6: Strategies of persuasion	89
6.1 <i>Face and facework</i>	89
6.2 <i>Five models of persuasion</i>	92
6.3 <i>Model 1: authority</i>	93
6.4 <i>Model 2: comparison and contrast</i>	97
6.4.1 'Us' against 'them'	97
6.4.2 Two-party system dualism and comparison and the 'Have you stopped beating the wife?' question	100
6.4.3 Beyond 'us and 'them'	100
6.5 <i>Model 3: problem-solution</i>	103
6.5.1 The 'simple' problem-solution model	103
6.5.2 The 'complex' problem-solution model	104
6.6 <i>Model 4: the hypothesis-evidence-explanation model</i>	106
6.7 <i>Model 5: association</i>	108
6.7.1 Corporate 'virtue-washing' persuasion by association	110
<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	113
 Unit 7: High-risk tactics: Fooling and insulting your audience: The Garden Path technique	 122
7.1 <i>Garden Path 1: Steven Pinker, linguist turned anthropologist: 'The Surprising Decline in Violence' (2007)</i>	122
7.2 <i>Garden Path 2: Philip Fernbach, psychologist: 'Why do we believe things which aren't true?'</i>	124
7.3 <i>Garden Path 3: Leslie Chang: 'The Voices of China's Workers'</i>	126
<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	128
 Unit 8: 'Joined-up' thinking: Propositional and evaluative cohesion	 130
8.1 <i>Cohesion: helping listeners and readers follow</i>	130
8.2 <i>'Standard' propositional cohesion</i>	131
8.2.1 Entity-marking textual cohesion	131
8.2.2 Cataphora or forward-leading phenomena	135
8.2.3 Moving forward by listing	136
8.2.4 Linkers as cataphoric devices	137
8.2.5 Parallelism and matching phrases as cataphoric devices	139

8.2.6	Moving the discourse forward by question and answer	140
8.2.7	Conclusions on propositional cohesion	143
8.3	<i>Evaluative cohesion (or harmony): evaluative intentions; why we say what we say</i>	144
8.3.1	Reading texts evaluatively: how evaluative cohesion is constructed	145
8.3.2	Evaluative blocks: the processes of embedding and contagion	145
8.3.3	Multiple 'voices' in text	150
8.4	<i>How the two forms of cohesion – propositional and evaluative – interact</i>	151
8.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	154
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	155
Unit 9:	Dirty tricks: Really? Caveat emptor!	160
9.1	<i>Arguments good and bad, true and false, logical and non-logical</i>	160
9.2	<i>Euphemism and dysphemism</i>	161
9.3	<i>The ad hominem argument</i>	163
9.4	<i>Tu quoque (also known as 'You're just as bad' or 'Do two wrongs make a right?')</i>	165
9.5	<i>Deflection: 'whataboutism' (US) and 'whataboutery' (UK and Indian English)</i>	166
9.6	<i>The slippery slope</i>	169
9.7	<i>(False) binary opposition (false dichotomy, the excluded middle)</i>	171
9.8	<i>False parallels (odd couples, false equivalence)</i>	175
9.9	<i>Causation or correlation? (Post hoc ergo propter hoc: 'After this, therefore because of this')</i>	176
9.9.1	Two phenomena can be linked by a third factor	176
9.9.2	Two phenomena might simply be coincidence	177
9.9.3	Multiple causation	178
9.9.4	Causation denial and causation rationalisation	179
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	180

Unit 10: Dirty tricks? Perhaps: Dis/information wars, collusion with tyrants and conspiracy (theories)	181
10.1 'Truth'	181
10.2 Disinformation	182
10.3 Disinformation: fabrication, Zombie stories	184
10.4 Disinformation: from 'gaslighting' to cover-ups	186
10.5 Disinformation, distortion and the dictator-collusion	188
10.6 Self-censorship: suffocating persuasion at birth	190
10.7 Disinformation by looking the other way: sins of omission	191
10.8 Delegitimisation	195
10.9 Conspiracy or conspiracy theory?	196
10.10 Conspiracy theory or conspiracy 2? Pedophile rings	201
10.11 Conclusion	202
Epilogue: 'Pardon me'	203
Keys and commentaries	204
 Unit 11: The importance of importance marking in persuasion	 205
11.1 The marking of importance	205
11.2 Text-oriented importance marking	206
11.3 Exophoric or 'real-world' importance marking	207
11.4 Some tactics of importance marking	208
Further reading	212
Keys and commentaries	213
 Unit 12: Metaphors and company: The subtle persuaders	 215
12.1 Metaphors	215
12.1.1 How metaphors work	217
12.1.2 Metaphor and irony	219
12.1.3 Sport and war	220
12.1.4 The dangers of metaphors: how a metaphor nearly started a war	222
12.2 Similes	223
12.3 Making the 'right noises'	226
12.4 Metonymies	227

12.5	<i>A case study in metonymy: how the Arab world is seen and how it sees itself</i>	230
12.5.1	The frequency of use of <i>the Arab world</i>	231
12.5.2	The grammar and agency of the Arab world	231
12.5.3	Topics discussed in 2010, before the Arab Uprisings	233
12.5.4	How <i>the Arab World</i> is reported on in 2013, after the uprisings	233
12.6	<i>Beware of arguments by comparison-analogy-resemblance that employ metaphor, simile or metonymy</i>	234
	<i>Revision exercise: 'I Have a Dream'</i>	235
	<i>Further reading</i>	238
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	238
Unit 13:	Questions and responses: Softball questions, hardball questions and how to handle them	245
13.1	<i>Institutional discourse</i>	245
13.2	<i>From deference to hostility</i>	246
13.3	<i>Difficult questions, difficult responses</i>	248
13.3.1	Assertions and presuppositions	248
13.4	<i>Question structure</i>	252
13.4.1	Repetition and interruption	253
13.5	<i>Taking responsibility (or not): attribution and neutralism in questions</i>	255
13.6	<i>Primary and secondary sources</i>	256
13.7	<i>Fighting back</i>	259
13.8	<i>Who is talking? One above you or one of you?</i>	260
	<i>Revision exercise: cultural difference in Q-R discourse</i>	263
	<i>Further reading</i>	266
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	266
	<i>Key: Revision exercise: cultural difference in Q-R discourse</i>	269
Unit 14:	Humour, irony and satire in politics	271
14.1	<i>Politics and humour</i>	271
14.1.1	Humour and subversion	272
14.1.2	Self-deprecating humour and affective face	274

14.2	<i>Irony</i>	276
14.2.1	Explicit irony	276
14.2.2	Implicit irony	278
14.3	<i>Sarcasm</i>	279
14.4	<i>Definitions of satire</i>	280
14.4.1	Satire's long history	281
14.5	<i>Animal Farm (George Orwell, 1945)</i>	284
14.6	<i>Modern satires</i>	287
	<i>Further reading</i>	289
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	289
Unit 15:	The language of referendum campaigns	293
15.1	<i>Referendums</i>	293
15.2	<i>The 2014 Scottish Referendum</i>	294
15.2.1	Background	294
15.3	<i>The European Union ('Brexit') Referendum</i>	296
15.3.1	Background	296
15.4	<i>The wording of the referendum question matters</i>	297
15.4.1	The wording of the Scottish Referendum	297
15.4.2	The wording of the European Union Referendum	299
15.5	<i>The referendum campaigns: Scotland</i>	300
15.6	<i>Metaphors of the UK Union</i>	302
15.7	<i>The referendum campaigns: on the European Union</i>	304
	<i>Further reading</i>	307
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	307
Unit 16:	The year of the six elections	309
16.1	<i>The elections in India and South Africa</i>	309
16.2	<i>Elections for the French and European Parliaments</i>	309
16.3	<i>The UK general election 2024</i>	310
16.4	<i>The US presidential election, 2024: the most divisive ever?</i>	312
16.4.1	Campaigning on social media	314
16.4.2	The July presidential debate	317
16.4.2	Can words kill?	319
16.4.3	'Dialling down the <i>rhetoric</i> '?	321

16.5	<i>Campaign metonyms</i>	323
16.6	<i>Gendered evaluation</i>	324
16.7	<i>The final words: Late campaign rhetoric: Harris versus Trump</i>	327
	<i>Keys and commentaries</i>	335
	Conclusion	342
	<i>Glossary</i>	343
	<i>References</i>	350
	<i>Index</i>	355