PAUSE to PONDER

What stands out to you in what I've covered so far? Why?

Communication and Power

Language

A primary medium for communicating power is language. Power plays a crucial role in how we use language not only to describe the world, but also to create it.[49] Language is used "to educate, comfort, heal, empower and liberate. Then again, it is also used to deceive, mislead, incite, and brainwash."[50] Thus, language is both emancipatory and oppressive.

Although no language is superior to another, one language usually dominates most settings. This seems reasonable. If everyone uses the same language, they will be more likely to understand one another. However, communication inequities arise when humans favor certain languages. People may negatively judge persons who do not employ the dominant language precisely (in speaking or writing). They may stigmatize nondominant persons as deviant or deficient because they do not comply with dominant expectations about language.[51] They may assume that those individuals are not intelligent or competent. They may judge how communicators follow language rules and norms instead of trying to understand what they are expressing. These and other power relations often occur during routine interactions such as everyday talk.

Everyday Talk

Everyday talk consists of ***discursive practices,*** "characteristic ways of speaking and writing that both constitute and reflect our experiences."[52] These practices are political. They usually favor the interests of one group over another. As a result, "all discourse potentially structures relations of dominance and subordination in organizations."[53] Thus, everyday talk helps to produce and maintain systems of power in most organizational settings.

CODE-SWITCHING. One type of power-related communication during everyday talk is code-switching. ***Code-switching*** involves adjusting one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression to fit in and to be accepted in a dominant culture. Everyone engages in code-switching to a certain extent. No one talks, dresses, or behaves the same way at work, school, or other organizations as we do at home or in other informal settings. Do you agree?

However, members of nondominant groups usually face more pressure to adapt to dominant standards. They may consciously or unconsciously

resort to code-switching to avoid validating negative stereotypes about their group.[54] Members of stigmatized racial groups often downplay their racial identity to increase perceptions of professionalism and the likelihood of being hired or promoted.[55] Organizational consultant Kate Stitham shared these examples of code-switching:

- Women changing their tone or cracking lewd jokes to be part of a "boys club."
- People of color changing their natural hairstyles to "look more corporate" or to comply with white-centered dress codes.
- Speakers of other languages trying to reduce their accent or not feeling comfortable speaking to one another in public.
- Nonbinary individuals wearing traditionally gendered clothing in the office.[56]

When individuals do not adhere to dominant language expectations, others may discipline them. A Latina told me that her White female supervisor constantly reprimanded her for rolling her r's when she pronounced certain words. Although she told her supervisor the pronunciation was characteristic of her native language, the supervisor repeatedly told her to pronounce words "correctly."

LINGUISTIC RACISM. The supervisor's attitude exemplifies *linguistic racism,* "ideologies and practices that are utilized to conform, normalize and reformulate an unequal and uneven linguistic power between language users."[57] In contrast to racism based on characteristics such as physical features, nationality, ethnicity, or religion, linguistic racism focuses on language use, accent, dialect, vocabulary, and speech patterns. Three in 10 Americans are bothered when they hear a foreign language spoken. Many immigrants feel self-conscious and unsafe speaking their languages in public. Hate crimes motivated by ancestry increased dramatically since the nativist rhetoric of the 2016 presidential election.[58]

This discrimination (also known as *linguicism*[59]), can be overt or covert. Overt behaviors include explicit verbal attacks such as mocks, slurs, and name-calling. During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals verbally attacked persons of Asian backgrounds through racially charged messages. These and other behaviors (including physical violence) prompted a nationwide campaign to #StopAsianHate.[60]

Covert linguistic discrimination includes various ways that humans implicitly devalue some language systems. In settings where English is the dominant language, people may judge, marginalize, and even penalize "both native and nonnative speakers who differ from what's considered 'standard'. . . for the way their English sounds."[61] They may engage in "implicit and passive-aggressive acts against one's linguistic repertoires or/an (in)ability to speak English."[62] Recall, for example, the supervisor who told the Latina to speak English "correctly."