

# Power and Truth in Political Discourse



# Power and Truth in Political Discourse:

*Language and Ideological  
Narratives*

By

Vassil Hristov Anastassov

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Power and Truth in Political Discourse:  
Language and Ideological Narratives

By Vassil Hristov Anastassov

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Vassil Hristov Anastassov

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0796-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0796-8

*TO MY STUDENTS, COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS AND FAMILY  
WHO WERE THERE FOR ME IN HAPPINESS AND TROUBLE*

*The major claim of this book is that in communal language interaction the speakers impose (political) power on each other by creating discourse, based on the dominance of “my” narrative over “your” narrative. This is what suggests an “agent” manipulating a “target” by “playing” (linguistically -ideologically) with the plausible issue of (political) truth.*

*I use this framework to create a universal model of the power of political discourse with reference to social semiotics (from structural to post structural) in an interdisciplinary relation with philosophy of politics and philosophy of language. The basis for this model is a historical overview from Plato and Aristotle via Machiavelli and Nietzsche to Foucault, Chomsky, Derrida, and Fukuyama. It examines a process that has always existed in the history of humankind with special attention to the leading role of “strong individuals” within the context of communal order. The model satisfies the need of a larger scope of interdisciplinary analysis than the one that conventional political theory offers usually.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ..... xi

Preface ..... xiii

Foreword ..... xvii

Stephen J. Rosow

Chapter One..... 1

The Language Base of Power Imposition

*This introductory chapter investigates the linguistic side of human social interaction as a process of creation of discourse of power. The assumption is that in the relationship between a “talking agent” and a “listening target” there is no balanced “role shifting”. Instead, there is always a stronger part, that exercises power on the weaker one...This type of relationship suggests the existence of narratives in human communal life that function as “Barthes” myths ,i.e. what is believed to be “right” or “wrong” is taken for granted (“goes without saying”) and keeps people away from the real state of affairs (the truth). The result is “shaping up of the preferred reading” of these narratives, often used by politically interested (governing) sides to manipulate the average community members with imposition of power as a final goal.*

Chapter Two ..... 15

The Language of Political Persuasion in Classical Antiquity

*This chapter uses Classical Rhetoric as a base to elaborate further on the linguistic side of the power of political discourse. I refer to drama performance is referred to as a support of the argument that Aristotelian “ethos” (that is, the dynamics of emotion in human social interaction) plays a significant role in the use of rhetorical power in political governance. The point is that in Classical Antiquity the persuasive and manipulative language of rhetoric did not differ much in the domains of drama, law, and politics. Drama itself was the perfect way of educating the average citizen of what was beneficial for his/her communal political life. The conclusion is that the language of rhetoric provides the necessary “emotion” to keep it relevant to the*

*binary character of social and cultural ethics and thus – to impose and maintain political power.*

Chapter Three ..... 27

Language and Thinking in Imposition and Maintenance of Power

*This chapter deals with the possible (believed or imagined) impact of “language” over “thinking” in the conceptualization of the political life of human society. I refer to the Sapir-Whorf -Hypothesis and the theory of linguistic relativity in the identification of language as the source of political power. George Orwell’s theory of “Newspeak” (“1984”) supports the idea of the use of language for political manipulation. The correlation between “language” and “thinking” is referred to the link between “language” and (political) “reality” (which on its turn triggers debate on the issue whether “language” reflects “reality” and hence – whose “reality” and what “reality?”) The two questions are interdependent because together they shed light on the issue of “political truth.” (to be referred to in the next chapter from a different perspective).*

Chapter Four ..... 35

Language, Reality and Truth

*As a continuation of the previous chapter, this one offers some more speculations on the power of language to conceal the “(political) truth”. I critically analyze some semiotic views on the role of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign in this process. Moreover, I pay attention to “constructivism” in the support of the idea that language “creates” different types of “truth” for the average consumers of political knowledge. The mechanics of “concealing the truth” is associated here with Foucault’s definition of “discursive relations” in his analysis of madness.*

Chapter Five ..... 45

From Power Imposition to Power Maintenance

*This chapter examines the way in which political leaders create narratives to impose and maintain power. It looks into the (Aristotelian) “natural” existence of leadership with an analysis of the different place of powerful individuals in the structure of communal political life. It goes through the “Odysseus-Type” of imposing power by means of “hubris” to move on to Machiavelli’s flexibility and maneuvering in the process of maintaining it. Finally, I refer to some recent ways of “individual means of creating narratives for the sake of*

*political power” in the construction of a “universal” model. The assumption is that in the development of theoretical thinking about political leadership throughout history there have been different types of perception of the role of the individual.*

Chapter Six ..... 55

The State, the Leadership and the Citizens

*This chapter looks into the way the state handles the “narratives of power” in between the leaders and the citizens. The assumption is that the “leaders- narrators” use it as a medium to indoctrinate politically the average citizens. I use the link between the modern state and the ancient polis is used for the identification of the former as a “text” (as a continuation from the previous chapter). My argument is that the communal political leaders play the role of “authors (tellers, narrators)” who use their power to make the members “read” it and take it “for granted”. Reference to social semiotics supports the major idea of this study about the linguistic background of political dominance.*

Chapter Seven..... 65

“Vox Populi – Vox Dei”

*This chapter investigates the principle of “equality” in the context of “Western Democracy”. My critical stance on the traditional definitions depends on the observed complex status of “nation-states” with their ambivalent implementation of the principle of “equal options for everybody”. It requires deeper insight into the “layers of a democratic society” with regard to the issue of “human rights”. The assumption is that the social imbalance of power, as represented here, explicitly exists in modern democracies no matter how skillfully misleading phraseology may covered it. This is what modifies the democratic principle of “equality” into a fight for dominance of “anybody stronger”. It challenges thus the common understanding of democracy as “Vox Populi – Vox Dei” (“The Voice of the People – The Voice of God”) with the question: “Qui Sunt Populus?” (“Who Are the People?”)*

Chapter Eight.....	75
The Deconstruction of the Ideological Narrative	
<i>This chapter engages social semiotics in the debate whether poststructuralist approach toward the power imbalance of political narratives goes beyond the traditional structural binary character of oppositions or not. I argue here that the post-structural (Derrida's) "deconstructionist" attempts to "destabilize" it do not eradicate the "imbalance". This is what triggers discussion with Derrida and Fukuyama over the concepts of freedom, democracy and equality today to finally come to the conclusion that a really democratic governance should be based on a theory and performance quite different from what has been followed and performed so far for the last couple of centuries.</i>	
Chapter Nine.....	91
The Countdown (I)	
<i>This chapter offers an attempt for a post-structural interpretation of the role of the social media in the deconstruction of the investigated here power imbalance in human political interaction. It is assumed, on the basis of the previous observations that contrary to the expected break in the rigid binary opposition between the official media indoctrination and the expected free, democratic access to the political truth, the social media maintain the conflict by following the same type of "free floating of signifiers" in the (majoritarian) public opinion as described above</i>	
Chapter Ten .....	97
The Countdown (II)	
<i>This chapter offers a roundup, based on the major points of the whole work. The focus goes on the importance of language as the "raw material" that serves for the creation of ideological narratives of political discourse. The claim is that it functions "a priori" as an instrument for power imposition, because it is by itself a process of imbalanced interaction</i>	
Works Cited.....	105

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was not alone in the clarification and the formulation of many of the problems that I am discussing here. In the long and stormy history of this small book, colleagues made me feel the reliability of professional critique. Friends and family gave me warmth, love, and care. Students creatively discussed my lectures and helped me strengthen my points. It will be a long list of names should I decide to include all those that I am obliged to for the appearance of this work. It is impossible though not to mention Stephen Rosow (State University of New York at Oswego), Ivani Vassoler-Froelich (State University of New York at Fredonia), Ivan Dinev Ivanov (University of Cincinnati), and Jean Crombois (American University in Bulgaria) for their positive feedback and friendly attitude. The Cambridge Scholars Publishing team tried their best to make all the technical sides of the “birth” of this “Language, Power, and Politics” as easy as possible. Last but not least: I owe a special “thank you” to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry and the Bulgarian Consulate General in Istanbul for their support and encouragement.

Istanbul-Sofia 2016-2017



## PREFACE

The aim of this research is to point out the link between linguistics and political science in the study of the power of political discourse. It comes as a logical continuation of my previous book on “The Dynamics of Human Interaction”. I profit there from my linguistic professional background to analyze the capacity of language to create power imbalance in human communication. It leads me further to the present study of the issues of power and truth in political discourse.

The analysis starts with an introduction of the language base of political discourse. It is argued that in communication, instead of the commonly accepted by traditional linguistics “balanced role-shifting” of speakers and listeners, there always is a stronger side that dominates with its “will to power”. This makes the so-called “Barthes” myths function as ideological narratives that maintain the power of political discourse.

This feature of human language communication relates to the political character of classical rhetoric. I refer to its persuasive-manipulative force to construct a linguistic model of political power. The claim is that the manipulative force of language itself when applied in political rhetoric “keeps away” the average citizen from real knowledge of the “political truth” by creating the “myths-narratives” in question, which suit the doctrine of the rulers.

In this context, the study refers to some basic principles of social semiotics (both structural and post structural) in the analysis of the ideological connotation of narratives. This is an attempt to determine political power imposition as an innate (language-based) capacity of humans, when applied to the political governance of communal life.

The official language used for the manipulation of the average consumers of “political knowledge” includes information stimulating reaction that matches the above-mentioned “ruling doctrine”. Consequently, the discourse that conceals the “political truth” often disguises the actual reasons for some political maneuvers. The term “official language” here does not stand for the “official language of the state”. It is the same “language of the ruling doctrine”, that supports the adopted discourse of

the communal governance. This is what directs my research into the investigation of the role of the “actors-manipulators” and the language that they use in between “the state” and the average citizen. The assumption is that the basic linguistic “interactional imbalance” emerges from the capacity of “Homo Loquens” (The Talking Human) to dominate over the rest of the members of the polity as “Homo Politicus” (The Political Human). In other words, my focus goes on language creativity with its innovative force to create powerful discourse, coming from gifted individuals...

One can argue further that language is “Freedom within Constraints” which means that it is “obedience and sticking to the rules of a certain code” along with the capacity to “play”, and to “break” them at the same time... The implication is that the “breaking of the language code rules” supposes an ability for “breaking any rules”. It makes the Aristotelian individual “good among men” with his/her superior strength, supposed to direct the whole community toward its welfare.

The study presents the “welfare of the community” here as a general model of the political governance of human societies based on the Machiavellian principle of “(individual) leadership for power maintenance”. It brings up the issue of “will to power” in the context of the philosophy of ethics of Nietzsche. The individual “actor(s)” manipulate(s) the life of the community by imposing a certain “way of talking about it” to shape up the “way of thinking about it”...

This leads toward the “linguistic relativity-linguistic determinism” principle, and the Whorfian idea that different people think and behave differently depending on the specific languages they speak. When applied to an “official language” of the type mentioned above, the same principle applies in the imposition of power. It “conceals” some language units from the communal vernacular with the intention to eradicate the concepts (the thinking about them) that they stand for. To put it in the terminology of Saussure: alongside the “signifier” to “wipe out” the “signified” with the final goal to achieve a full control on social conduct and hence – total power maintenance.

All this requires an explanation of the status of the state, as an institution maintaining the governmental power and imposing it on the average communal members. The claim is that it functions as a “text”, namely: it exists “independently” in between the community and its members and the governmental body. The “strong individuals” use it in the manipulation of

“the average citizen” to achieve the “shaping up the preferred/manipulative reading” (i.e. his/her perception, understanding and acceptance, followed by a respective provisional social conduct) of the ideological narrative of power. The idea of a “state” related to a “text” becomes obvious when remembered that the latter occupies a similar place (an “independent” one) between the author and the readers. Just for the sake of clarity, it will be relevant here to consider the capacity of the readers of any (literary) text to interpret the initial message of the author in a variety of different ways. This is a point that I refer to on many occasions in the further development of my thesis.

Structural semiotics, in this context, positively contributes to the understanding of the linguistic base of the manipulation as part of the process of knowledge acquisition of the “political truth”.

It fails, however, to explain political interaction outside the rigid framework of the binary oppositions of (+marked) and (-marked) sides: an important issue to refer to in detail in the chapters to follow. In brief: when “my” narrative is juxtaposed to “your” narrative for the sake of power predominance (in a positively versus negatively marked binary opposition) there is a “tertium non datur”-situation. A “third way” could break the dualistic “vicious circle” by offering an option “out”. That is why this analysis introduces Derrida’s post-structural political deconstruction with the intention to investigate power in the context of the status quo of the twenty-first-century- narrative of (Fukuyama’s) “Western liberal democracy”. More specifically: it investigates how power imbalance could be counteracted in a really democratic society that fits the demands of today’s globalized world for no “black” and “white” division of human values.

The conclusion is that the power imbalance of the linguistic interaction of humans is historically inseparable from the imbalance of power in their political communal life. This parallel explains communal life as a complex model of dynamic relationships. It uses as a base the linguistic capacity of humans to impose and maintain political power by generating “new” language in the creation of a discourse of ideological narratives. I strongly believe that it positively contributes to the better understanding of the activities of “Homo Loquens-Politicus” in today’s “Global Village” in his/her desire to find a way for a “better world” with no antagonistic binary oppositions and no power imbalance...



## FOREWORD

In any polity, this is a complex space, laced with power. This book presents this space as a space of linguistic power. Language, it tells us, is inherently political, inherently a struggle between a will to domination and the will to freedom. Ranging from Saussure, to a critique of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, to Chomsky, and working through Aristotle, Orwell, Machiavelli, Derrida, and others, Anastassov gives us a powerful argument about the manipulative force of language and its role in maintaining unequal power. Language both confines through the myths-narratives leaders and states present to enforce order and promote unity and it enables a freedom of a subject to break the rules, to make new sentences and speech acts that breach that order.

The space in-between citizen and state reflects the “complicated relations between separate individuals and the collective of people performing communal life together”. Speakers and hearers are not of equal status in speech acts. The space in-between is a space of myths-narratives that create power relations between speakers and hearers, relations of domination. Leaders manipulate the dominant myths-narratives while average citizens come to be captivated by them, accepting the narratives as common sense. In political theory since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the space in-between has generally been theorized as “civil society”. As Anastassov’s linguistic analysis presents it, however, the in-between is not a civil society in the Hegelian and liberal sense of an equal realm of voluntary associations governed by mutual self-interest, intersubjective norms that constitute civility, and voluntary associations. There is little egalitarianism about it, and the extent to which it is “civil” the civility disguises undercurrents of domination and resistance.

Political discourse conceals “truth”. Linguistic exchange is not equal and mutual. It constitutes different kinds of subjects: speakers and listeners. Western modernity has tended to treat this as a binary opposition, with the result that it privileges the state as controller of citizens through control and manipulation of dominant narratives that it is able to naturalize as “public opinion.” The result is that the inherent power asymmetry of language allows leaders and states to create a “truth” that conceals the “real”. Citizens become passive conduits who accept the “truth” of the

dominant order. Nevertheless, Anastossov argues, drawing on Chomsky and Derrida, the relation of citizen and state is dynamic and unstable. Dominant ideologies struggle to achieve and maintain their status in democracies as “public opinion”, unable in the end to eradicate the contestability of dominant narratives. States and societies remain unbalanced, and “human linguistic interaction is inseparable from the imbalance of power in their political communal life.”

The in-between is an unstable space in which ideologies operate to stabilize unifying narratives that conceal their instabilities. For example, we might cite the neoliberal identity of freedom with private property. So long as people are free to buy and sell, the ideology goes and political freedom will follow. The ways in which this ideology requires policies that remake the self as an “entrepreneur”, responsible individually to negotiate an increasingly precarious economic environment produced by neoliberal policies, are hidden. In this way, a new truth – the identity of political freedom with private property – is established. Rather than a “free” rational agent, the neoliberal self is constituted by specific policies, the subject of new scientific discourses of “economic man”. The ideology serves to deflect the contestation of the dominant narrative by making alternative narratives of freedom and politics unthinkable. Racist narratives of the poor and immigrants, for example, associate the poor with the other who illegitimately demands “entitlements,” re-characterizing people as threats and dangers to the neoliberal unity, delegitimizing narratives that defend them or seek to include them as equal citizens. Another strategy, prominent in the United States, is the redefinition of “free speech” to identify it with economic choice, extending free speech to corporations not just individuals. The disproportionate and corrupting contributions of wealthy donors and corporations to politicians, and political lobbying thereby become “democratic”, simply expressions of “free speech”. These myths-narratives become widely accepted as neoliberal ideologues deftly re-speak democracy, giving the narratives the status of “public opinion”.

This book contributes to our understanding of the complex relation between state and citizen that has been a subject of democratic theory from its beginnings. It is especially timely in the current era in which national identity and citizenship is more and more called into question. Fukuyama’s triumphalism may have receded in intellectual discourse, but it still feeds a “clash of civilization” argument in which the Western powers arrogantly assert the superiority of their dominant narrative of neoliberal democracy, and seek to maintain linguistic, ideological, and material strategies to cement that dominance. We know have wars to

promote democracy and free trade as international, if not universal global norms to be enforced by a global “consensus” about right and wrong. This dynamic operates inside and outside states, blurring those boundaries as linguistic forms slip and slide across borders.

This book opens questions for democratic theory as well. Democracies are particularly subject to the problematics of asymmetrical linguistic power because democracies need to tell certain kinds of stories about themselves, stories of equality, of self-rule, of mutual respect, that chafe against the domination of the state. As states, however, they must also tell stories about the need for order. Here democracies especially are subject to the life of linguistic power in the space in-between the state and the citizen. Political struggles in democracies take place in the space in-between that is pregnant with the linguistic power this book charts.

“Public opinion,” Anastassov reminds us in this book, conceals political truth as it imposes “my” narrative that constitutes *the* political truth. Public opinion is a production of the power of the strong to use language to dominate the masses. While Anastassov argues that this is a general condition of human communities, in democracies it is particularly deceptive. Recent democratic theories have appealed to the power of language in exactly the opposite direction. Discursive democratic theories drawing on Habermas argue that democracies involve a public sphere of undistorted communication. Language can be a great equalizer if all remain committed to free, open, and truthful dialogue. Anastassov’s more Nietzschean perspective is a useful corrective.

Power is never eliminated from language. On the structural level, subjects of discourse are never equal; some set the terms of dialogue while others accept them. Often, as Foucault reminds us, both dominating and dominated are constituted by the epistemic conditions of their truth. For Foucault, no subject stands outside of the discursive practices through which they are constituted. But language expresses a will to dominate, and Anastassov warns us that “consensus” does not mean truth or equality. It means *someone’s truth* and linguistic relations are always unequal between speaker and hearer. This is especially difficult for democracies to accept, and “public opinion” becomes a strategy to disguise and dissemble the instability of any democratic consensus.

Where does this leave would-be democrats? Here, Anastassov leaves us with an interesting assimilation of a Derridean deconstructive gesture and Chomsky’s appeal to the creative powers of language. On the one hand,

there is the question of time inherent in the phonocentrism of traditional Saussurean linguistics. In a reversal of some classical assumptions of Western metaphysics, writing appears more democratic than speaking. The immediacy that allows for the manipulation of myths-narratives by speakers/leaders must eliminate time as duration as much as possible. Donald Trump and the so-called alt-right succeed, in the US and elsewhere, to the extent the “news” does not live beyond the moment of its speech. This moment allows no questioning, deflects the thoughtfulness that Hannah Arendt argued is so necessary to real political action. Donald Trump does not read books; he swims only in the immediacy of information flows. He gets his news from television, rants against any analysis of policy as “fake news” (news is only what is reported in the immediacy of the moment, all surface, nothing behind it that would require time for analysis and deliberation). If nothing matters but the immediate locution, the response can be little but an emotional, unthinking affirmation or rejection. No elaboration of what it means to “make America great again” for to question what this means elongates the linguistic act, it allows speech to become writing. And writing – written news stories, in archives that can be referred to – can be analyzed, make criticism possible. Writing, in good part by problematizing the binary of speaker/listener, subject/object opens up democratic possibilities. It complicates the temporality of democratic language and politics.

Here is, to me, the most significant aspect of this book for democratic theory. By focusing our attention in the in-between of state/citizen in all its complex linguistic construction, the book opens up thinking about strategies for democratizing democracy. It dovetails with recent agonistic theories of democracy, such as William E. Connolly, Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Ranciere and others. As citizens, we can contest the dominant narratives not in order to replace them with new dominant narratives, but to re-think our communal life according to more democratic imaginaries. Therefore, for me, while this book starts out on what seems a pessimistic note about the inevitability of domination, it ends with a more hopeful gesture to new forms of democratic theory and action.

Stephen J. Rosow  
State University of New York at Oswego  
USA

*The words of the great Eighteenth-Century French philosopher below reveal in a Gnostic form the power of the individual ruler to silence critique and disobedience*

*“POUR SAVOIR QUI VOUS DIRIGE VRAIMENT IL SUFFIT DE  
REGARDER CEUX QUE VOUS NE POUVEZ PAS CRITIQUER”*

*(To learn who controls you simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize)*

*VOLTAIRE*



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LANGUAGE BASE OF POWER IMPOSITION

#### **“My” Narrative vs. “Your” Narrative: From Shifting to Power Imbalance**

*This introductory chapter investigates the linguistic side of human social interaction as a process of creation of discourse of power. The assumption is that in the relationship between a “talking agent” and a “listening target” there is no balanced “role shifting”. Instead, there is always a stronger part, that exercises power on the weaker one...This type of relationship suggests the existence of narratives in human communal life that function as “Barthes’” myths ,i.e. what is believed to be “right” or “wrong” is taken for granted (“goes without saying”) and keeps people away from the real state of affairs (the truth). The result is “shaping up of the preferred reading” of these narratives, often used by politically interested (governing) sides to manipulate the average community members with imposition of power as a final goal.*

We tend to believe that in language communication there is a ‘shifting’ role of speaker and listener, which provides a ‘balance of power’ between the two:

**speaker ↔ listener**

As Marina Yaguello claims in her impressive “Language through the Looking Glass”:

“I” and “you” alternate during dialogue and for this reason are called shifters  
(Yaguello 8)

This formula presupposes that the “speaker” and the “listener” are in an equal position as regards the level of imposition of power onto each other. However, it can easily lead to a logical misunderstanding, as humorously

suggested by the same scholar with the reference to the following Jewish anecdote:

Dear Riwke, be good enough to send me your slippers. Of course, I mean “my slippers” and not “your slippers”. But, if you read “my slippers”, you will think I mean your slippers. Whereas, if I write: “send me your slippers”, you will read *your* slippers and will understand *my* slippers. So: send me your slippers  
(Yaguello 8, original emphasis)

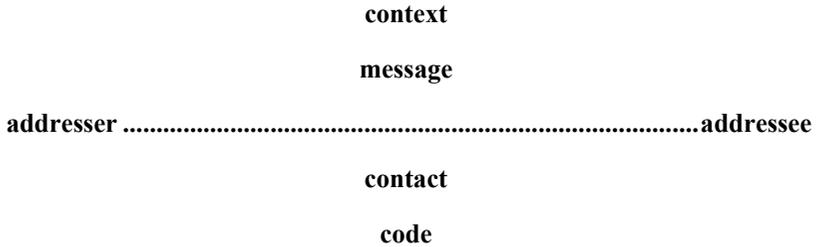
More than a century before Marina Yaguello, Lewis Carroll noticed the same in his famous novel “Through the Looking Glass”:

Alice attended to all these directions, and explained, as well as she could, that she had lost *her* way. “I don’t know what you mean by *your* way,” said the Queen: “*all the ways about here belong to me* – but why did you come out here at all?  
(Carroll 61, original emphasis)

The implication is that “role shifting” may lead toward identity swap between the “speaker” and the “listener” due to the reversibility of the personal pronouns, which causes the confusion. The specific humorous effect taken aside, in both Carroll’s and Yaguello’s works there is an implicit skepticism as regards the existence of an absolutely balanced shift between the interlocutors in the process of communication. Cf. Noam Chomsky’s reference to the same process in his “Aspects of the Theory of Syntax”:

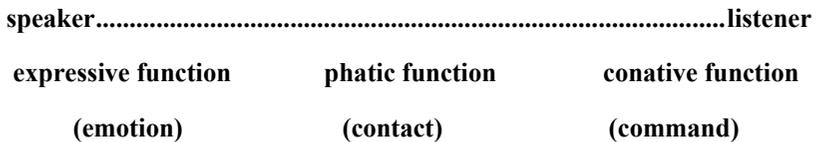
Linguistic Theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker – listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows the language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance  
(Chomsky 3)

Chomsky’s requirement for a “perfect and unaffected knowledge of the shared language” (for the sake the ideal mutual understanding) implies at first site an equal position of each of the interacting language users. Similarly, a speaker – listener “shifting relationship” lies in the base of Roman Jakobson’s model of communication as regards the “constitutive factors...in any act of verbal communication”:



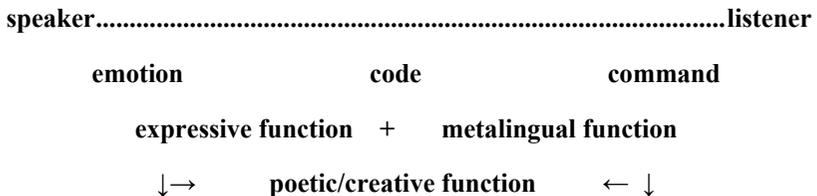
(Jakobson 353)

The “constitutive factors”, according to the famous linguist imply provisionally equally powerful sides in the process of interaction. This is the base upon which he built his well-known scheme of the functions of language:



(ibid. )

One can explain the “shifting” in question accordingly with the expressed emotion coming from the speaker that reaches the listener as a “command”. It comes as the result of the urge or the impulse to communicate something. The “command” then represents the reaction to the emotional flow from the speaker, taken by the listener as a message to be “obeyed”. The latter provides the contact line with the former which (seemingly) “keeps the balance” by means of the phatic function. Following the same model Jakobson introduces the metalingual function with its major task: to point at the specific code of the narrative:



He claims further that the combination between the expressive and the metalingual functions creates the so called “poetic function of language”:

...the *poetic* function (which I intended to refer to any creative use of language rather than simply to poetry) highlights “the palpability of signs”, undermining any sense of natural or transparent connection between a signifier and a referent  
(Chandler 185, original emphasis)

However, at this point the “poetic/creative” function of language indicates a certain “break in the shift”. It logically suggests a “stronger” and a “weaker” position in the exchange of meaningful utterances in the process of verbal interaction. One cannot expect each side to be equally creative, simply because creativity that depends on emotion excludes uniformity. This view, on its turn, supports Chomsky’s idea of “language competence”, as relevant to Jakobson’s “creativity” connected in fact with the capacity of the speakers to “generate new language”...

A grammar of a language purports to be a description of the ideal speaker – hearer intrinsic competence. If the grammar is, furthermore, perfectly explicit – in other words, if it does not rely on the intelligence of the understanding reader but rather provides an explicit analysis of his contribution – we may somewhat redundantly call it a generative grammar.  
(Chomsky *ibid.*.)

Apparently, Jakobson and Chomsky, independently from each other started the development of their theses from the assumption that “role shifting” really exists, to come indirectly (without though officially admitting it) to the awareness of the “imbalance”. This is the major claim of this part of my study and it matches the thesis that the linguistic side of power imposition is expressed (“generated”) when “my” narrative is juxtaposed to “your” narrative. In what comes next, I build a model, based on the assumption that the capacity of humans to generate creatively “new language” makes them successfully use these narratives in a discourse where they exercise power on each other. This explains how these narratives in question appear and function on the base of the interpretation of “myths”, as shown in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes:

It is very interesting to look at the way /./ in which an individual, who has by right and by inheritance a certain account of the mythology or the legendary tradition of his own group, reacts when he listens to a different version given by somebody belonging to a different family or to a different clan or lineage, which to some extent is similar but to some extent too is extremely different

.....

Now we would think that it is impossible that two accounts which are not the same can be true at the same time, but, nevertheless, they seem to be accepted as true in some cases, the only difference made is that one account is considered better or more accurate than the other  
(Lévi-Strauss 41-42)

The implication is that myths, in their evolution in human cultural history from religious parables to Barthes' beliefs "that go without saying" have always been in a serious connection with the creation of narratives of power:

For Lévi-Strauss, myths were systems of binary alignment mediating between nature and culture. For Barthes, myths were the dominant discourses of contemporary culture. He argued that myths were a metalanguage operating through codes and serving the ideological function of naturalization.  
(Chandler 254)

All of the above requires a deeper insight into the type of interrelationship between "narratives" and "myths". Narratives, according to Michael Toolan:

...are everywhere, performing countless functions in human interaction... systematic analytical attention to the logic and dynamics of language behavior can shed light on any sub-domain or mode of (language) behavior. The mode spotlighted here is narrative  
(Toolan 8)

This complex observation provokes the author to exclaim:

What is it about narrative that makes it such a pervasive and fascinating phenomenon? And how can one begin to answer such a question without entering into a narrative of one's own?  
(ibid.)

In the search of an answer to this rhetorical question, Michael Toolan discovers the basic components: the "tale" and the "teller" with the remark that:

There is always inherently a speaker, separate from what is spoken  
(ibid. )

The inference is that narratives exist somewhat "independently" between the "teller" and the "addressee". This is what makes possible the freedom of a "teller" to shape up the preferred reading, i.e. – to interpret the "tale"

in such a way so that it manipulates the addressees and imposes power on them because:

Narrators are typically trusted by their addressees...Narrators assert that their authority to tell, to take up the role of knower, or entertainer, or producer in relation to the addressee's adopted role of learner or consumer. (ibid. )

The author supports the idea more specifically with the following statement:

Narratives...told by journalists, politicians, colleagues.... all those, which originate from those who have power, authority, or influence on us

.....  
Any narrator then is ordinarily granted, as a rebuttable presumption, a level of trust and authority which is also a granting or asserting of power (ibid. )

All of the above allows Michael Toolan to conclude that:

**To narrate is to bid for a kind of power**

This conclusion determines the narrative itself as a source of power. One can explain it logically with the previously mentioned "trust". The question however is "what is it that makes the average community member trust the narrators to an extent, which gives them power to manipulate the former"?

The narrator him/herself according to the same author: ...is often "impersonalized" and attended to as a disembodied voice (ibid. )

In other words, they function as the myths above that go "without saying". Therefore narratives execute power on the addressees, being the product of an (kind of a)" impersonalized" teller. This definition can easily lead toward links with mythology and religion because of the "whiff" of metaphysical power coming from a "disembodied voice" ...

Originally, myths are narratives that are associated with secrets and mystery on a religious basis as the very etymology of the Greek word "mythos" (μῦθος ,with the same original meaning) suggests.

As regards their contents, they represent attempts to explain the basic principles of cosmogony.

One can admire the creativity and the poetic value of the metaphors referring to the human habitat, no matter how unreal, metaphysical or fantastic they may sound. On the contrary, quite often these metaphors give artistic, but absolutely down-to-earth answers to questions that humans have always been interested in...

However, myths not only are the earliest cognitive narratives in the history of human culture: they also represent the beliefs of our ancestors about the structural organization of individuals into communal political order. A relevant reference here would be the Ancient Greek “Pantheon” as a projection of the relationship between the “oikos” ( οἶκος – the household) and the “polis” ( πόλις – the city-state, the polity). The “community” on top of Mount Olympus, for example is a sample of both a polity and a big family (not far though from the structure of ancient/primordial societies) where the frequent adultery of Zeus, the jealousy and the vindictiveness of Hera, the repulsiveness of Ares and the vanity of Aphrodite, the clumsiness of Hephaestus, etc. form a bunch of individuals subjugated to a certain common order that every normal human society is built upon. These myths give an explicit idea of the beliefs of the Ancient Greeks about the political structure of a society, based upon the specific role of individuals within its collective “ensemble”.

That is why part of my analysis of myths as political (ideological) narratives indicating social order is related to the interaction of an individual or a group of individuals (different from the rest) and the collective of community members.

As I claim elsewhere:

In an archetypal community ... “to be different” is unacceptable, not allowed, even dangerous  
(Anastassov 2012 a)

The problem is that to be “individual” traditionally means to “sway” from the communal rules, which immediately triggers creation of ambivalent narratives, because there will be many in favor of the “rule break” alongside those who would stick to the status quo.. A striking example in this respect is the controversial stance on Prometheus’ behavior in the famous myth. The trivial story goes that the titan saved humanity from annihilation (as Zeus had planned) by giving people the divine fire from Heaven (I am not going here into the details of the symbolic meaning of “fire” – it is the subject of a different type of study). The meaning of the endeavor has two well known antagonistic interpretations: Hesiod’s – who

claims that Prometheus was a rebel who committed a crime because he disobeyed the will of Zeus (as the chief God) and deserved to be punished, and the other one - belonging to Aeschylus who praises the bound titan as the Hero-Savior.

The fact that there are two narratives supports the above idea by Claude Lévi-Strauss about the two different interpretations of the same myth with one of them considered “better” than the other, depending on the ideological position of the interpreters. This is what creates the antagonism between what is believed to be the “right” and what - “wrong”. Moreover, it provides the necessary circumstances for the proclaiming of an (ephemeral and plausible) “objective truth” according to the specific biased interests of groups of people.

It would be a triviality to refer here to the universally valid at all times cultural opposition between “positive” and “negative”. Science in its long history did not always need structuralism and post-structuralism to discover the natural human urge to polarize the surrounding world into “paired signifiers”, a term used by Daniel Chandler in his “Semiotics. The Basics” in the explanation of “semiotic alignment”:

Paired signifiers are seen by structuralist theorists as part of the “deep/or “hidden”/ structure” of texts, shaping the preferred reading (Chandler 100)

“Semiotic alignment” suggests sets of references/associations that go alongside the “paired signifiers” and function as myths/narratives. A general “good” vs. “evil” will then evoke the emergence of series of clusters of aligned oppositions (of the type of “black” and “white” or “up” and “down”) offering a useful platform for the perception of the polarization in question “for granted”:

Myths can function to hide the ideological function of signs. The power of such myths is that they “go without saying” and so appear not to need to be deciphered, interpreted or demystified. The similarity to Levi-Strauss is clear here: “I claim...to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men’s minds without being aware of the fact” (Chandler, 145).

In other words: Lévi-Strauss’ claim supports Barthes’s definition of “myth” as equal to “metalanguage”: