

## Language, law and power

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The paper provides an analysis of language as the main legal tool and demonstrates through different linguistic mechanisms to what extent language (in a broader sense) serves as the principal instrument for establishing and maintaining power relations.

It is possible even within the same language to speak different "languages", at least in psychological and sociological terms. What is basically important in a courtroom context, is the difference between "powerful" and "powerless" speech style (once called "female" speech), because people using a "powerful" style to express the same ideas are perceived as being much more convincing, trustworthy, competent, intelligent, credible. Such impressions, of course, can have a decisive influence on the outcome of a trial. There are some other linguistic factors which have an important impact in a courtroom context, such as the possibility of dictating a theme, addressing questions, the use of silence etc. Domination through linguistic techniques has a special weight in pre-trial procedure, in which each individual feels particularly vulnerable in her/his relation to the state. In spite of adopting Miranda rights, which grant the right to silence and a defence lawyer, the number of persons who are silent and those who confess to a crime have not considerably diminished. It is obvious that while law regulates for the literal meanings of words, it takes no account of more subtle linguistic forms of pressure and pre-existent structures of power (in police stations, prisons and courtrooms).

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