

Book introduction

Why focus on the politics of language and creativity?

This book explores the many ways in which linguistic creativity is a resource for political activity, and the politics surrounding the production, ownership and evaluation of different kinds of creative activity in contemporary society. At the heart of this book is a recognition of the recent explosion of ‘production’ activity across texts, modes, media and technologies which, in turn, is forcing us to ask questions about what gets counted and valued as ‘creative’ linguistic and semiotic practice, and why.

‘Creativity’ is treated throughout as a highly contested term, but one which has enduring appeal as a way of capturing a phenomenon that is fundamental to individual and social survival, development and transformation. In exploring the nature and significance of linguistic and semiotic creativity across different social domains, we approach creativity in three broad ways:

- *Creativity as an everyday phenomenon*, referring to making, creating, producing as a fundamental human activity. Exactly *how* people engage in creative activity and *what* they create varies significantly, as is discussed across the chapters in this book.
- *Creative/ity as an evaluative notion* – mainly positive – to refer to particular kinds and types of linguistic and semiotic activity. Historically, certain kinds of creative activity (and creative products) have been more highly valued than others but, as illustrated in the chapters in this book, there is considerable debate about what is and should be valued.
- *Creativity as a resource for individual and social transformation*. While meanings attached to the terms creative/ity continue to be hotly debated, creativity is predominantly viewed as a resource for enhancing and transforming human experience. Chapters in this book seek to explore the particular significance of linguistic and semiotic creativity across a range of social contexts.

The book explores a number of key questions: In what ways is linguistic and semiotic ‘creativity’ a political phenomenon? How are

creative acts shaped and constrained by political, social, economic and technological factors? How is linguistic and semiotic creativity currently being used as a resource for political activity, and why? How is the global status and use of English reconfiguring the nature of linguistic and semiotic practices, and what gets evaluated as ‘creative’?

The seven chapters in this book use authentic examples from across the spectrum of creative text-making practices – including advertisements, political speeches, social media posts, plays, hip hop, poetry, pop songs, memes and digital fiction – to illustrate and debate the nature, value and significance of creative activity across different social domains. They draw on a range of approaches and analytical frameworks including stylistics, social semiotics, multimodality, aesthetics, discourse studies and rhetoric, each of which is introduced and defined in relevant chapters.

How the book is structured

The book begins with David Hann opening up key debates about the politics of language and creativity, which are then pursued throughout the book. It includes definitions of ‘politics’ and ‘ideology’, and locates differing contemporary perspectives about ‘creative value’ in long-standing debates around ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. While acknowledging the unprecedented scale and nature of contemporary production activity, the chapter also seeks to draw parallels with significant historical developments.

The theme of political discourse is further developed in the second chapter, where Theresa Lillis draws on critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, rhetoric and semiotics to illustrate the different ways in which language and other semiotic resources are used creatively in a wide range of political activity. The chapter includes examples from pre-scripted political performances as well as more spontaneous grassroots political activity, both on- and offline, involving different modes and media. It considers the argument that specific creative forms, such as poetry, have a particular value in transforming political consciousness.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on a theme which is central to debates about creativity, that of value and evaluation, with authors adopting contrastive perspectives. Drawing on approaches from stylistics, multimodality and performance studies, Guy Cook explores the stylistic

and semiotic similarities and differences between literary texts and marketing, PR, and advertising texts. Cook argues that although there is a superficial similarity between the kinds of creativity to be found in these texts, their social value and effects are of a different order: advertising's overriding purpose to sell products closes it off from the transformative effects, experiences and interpretations that literary texts encourage.

Deborah Cameron adopts a different approach to value and evaluation in Chapter 4. Rather than argue that a particular type of creativity or creative product is of more fundamental value than another, or has specific effects, Cameron discusses the notion of hierarchies of value and taste. Drawing on sociolinguistics and stylistics, the chapter explores creativity as a value in itself, as well as an evaluation practice in relation to a wide range of creative texts, including everyday, popular and high-status literary texts. In so doing, Cameron interrogates the particular value attached to the flouting of established rules and conventions in different contexts, and the extent to which these are framed as 'creative'.

The theme of globalisation, which is evident across all chapters, becomes the central concern of Chapter 5. Anna Kristina Hultgren explores how key globalising influences are impacting on the range of linguistic and semiotic practices in which people engage. Drawing on sociolinguistics and globalisation theories, the chapter foregrounds the contrast between 'routinisation' and 'creativity' in linguistic and semiotic activity, focusing on two global phenomena: hip hop and call centres.

Chapter 6 turns to the question of the politics surrounding the ownership of creative products, an issue given particular pertinence in an era of rapid technological change. Colleen McKenna explores the regulation of creativity and language in both formal and informal contexts, including questions around authorship, ownership, copyright and corporate interests. She investigates freedom of speech and censorship (both explicit and implicit), intellectual property rights, and how these are developed in different parts of the world, as well as the opening up and closing down of internet tools by state agencies. This chapter also explores the changes to the rights and ownership of artefacts produced via digital media such as YouTube.

The book closes with a chapter that encourages readers to engage reflexively with the key themes of the book by re-reading and re-

writing their understandings about what constitutes creativity in the contemporary world. Rob Pope problematises the simple dichotomies that tend to populate discussion about creativity – literary–non literary, personal–political, private–public, creative–critical, rational–emotional, serious–play, reality–art – and highlights the fact that all dimensions are implicated in processes of production, reception and evaluation.