

## Embrace the rich mosaic of diversity

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Language can be used to empower or disempower, it can be used to exclude or include. Language is a tool to communicate, but there is always a strategy to motivate how one speaks, writes and communicates. Discrimination through language happens, especially with exclusive language. Exclusive language has been used in some Old Testament texts to create identity, but in the process, it has also excluded.

To understand the meaning of the term “exclusive language”, it is necessary to look at the development of thinking about language as an instrument. I will briefly discuss this development, especially in the postmodern paradigm and particularly concerning power. Although certain philosophers such as Foucault never used the term “postmodern”, and in fact Foucault insisted that he should not be understood within any kind of paradigm, his thoughts were part of a paradigm shift that took place following modernity and post-structuralism.

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According to Foucault (1977, 1979, 1984), everything that we attempt to understand continuously and systematically configures connections with power and suppresses them into something else. In the process of understanding, we are misled by these configurations and the masking of power. All forms of knowledge create and interpret, whilst participating in reality from a certain context and tradition. Therefore, no form of knowledge can be seen as strictly exploratory and documentary. Power has never arrived and is never completed, but continues indefinitely. In essence, Foucault sees power as the relations between persons, where one person affects the other’s conduct.

Bourdieu (1991) sees language as not just a system for communicating but also as an instrument of power. A person’s relational position in a field or social space determines his or her language. For example, a particular accent can reveal an individual’s origins. This means that the relevant social paradigm determines whose opinion is accepted as reliable, who can be listened to, who may ask questions and who may not. Through forms of rational depiction, with signs and symbols, language acts as an instrument of power. Bourdieu (1995: 343) also refers to the effect that the abuse of power has on language: “The same intention

of autonomy can in effect be expressed in opposite position-takings (secular in one case, religious in another) according to the structure and the history of the powers against which it must assert itself."

The problem of legitimacy is of special interest to Lyotard. Keane explains it as the process "by which every particular language game seeks to authorize its 'truth', 'rightness' and (potential) efficacy – and therewith its superiority over others" (Keane 1992: 85). Every utterance in a language game should be understood as a move with or against other players, and these language games are always rooted in matters of power: "power here understood as the capacity of actors willfully to block or to effect changes in speech activities of others". Keane classifies these language games as "definite social practices", in the sense that they aim to produce, reproduce or transform forms of social life.

Dews (1984: 40), referring to Foucault, says that "normative thought can only operate in the interest of power". Perdue (2005: 239) quotes Foucault, saying: "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." According to Foucault, reason will always exclude and will only selectively include. Reasoning will be authentic when it succeeds in not excluding, but where the other (the historically minimised) segments of truth are realised, recognised and included.

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Exclusive language will thus be the discourse used in certain circumstances to strengthen a certain group's identity and to empower it; to legitimise the group's conduct, behaviour and claims, and in the process to exclude other groups. It is imperative to note that exclusive language is not always uttered speech or language of an emphatic nature, but can also involve what has not been said. Exclusive language can often be seen in what is underplayed or what is clearly left out of narration.

Several Old Testament studies have looked at identity-finding in Israel. Jonker (2010: 600) says, inter alia, that "texts are not mere reflections of well-defined identities, but are rather part of ongoing identity negotiation processes. This applies pertinently to texts originating in contexts of transition, such as the post-exilic period under Persian rule in Yehud." Israel needed to find an identity after the Babylonian exile. To this end, the people had to rely on their collective memory. Before the exile, their identity was unproblematic because Judah had its own kingdom.

Most of the studies concerning Judah's identity-finding in the Second Temple era reveal that the nation was confused and in disarray after the exile; by distancing themselves from the "other" (whether the "other" referred to other nations or to other ideologies (sects) within Judaism), the people attempted to create an identity for themselves. This particular period was a time when a nation with diverse ideologies was seeking identity. Most sought it by using exclusive language; very few attempted it by using inclusive language. Old Testament books such as 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah are examples of books with exclusive language.

Israel's universal exclusivity was mostly concerned with the preservation of Israelite identity. There are also inclusive texts in the Old Testament, which act as contra-texts against the master-narrative. Inclusive Old Testament texts protest against the universal exclusivity of Israelite identity. Most scholars agree, for example, on the inclusiveness of the book of Ruth. Cohn (2014: 163) says that Ruth is: "... a quiet, domestic tale in which tolerance and openness flourish, and no one says a mean word ... a Moabite widow is transformed into a proper Israelite matron ... Ruth offered a counterview to the more chauvinistic perspectives in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah ... Ruth made a claim for a shift in the national memory to undergird a wider Israelite identity."

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Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, as well as Malachi, are books that can also be seen as inclusive. The "Other" in the book of Jonah is the city of Nineveh; this book has an inclusive tone where power was exclusively left to YHWH. Inclusive texts were not only in the minority, but also appear to be contra-texts, polemically directed against the major texts, that were interspersed with exclusive language.

Every community uses exclusive language in certain circumstances to strengthen the group's identity and to empower its members, to legitimise the group's conduct, behaviour and claims, and to exclude other groups in the process. A question that might be asked is whether it is wrong for a confused nation to create an identity for itself. The answer will be negative in most contexts. The problem arises when the nation excludes others from God's "salvation" and love by believing that only its members possess the truth and that they are the only ones worthy of His grace.

The concept of "exclusive language", or "power discourses", that was named by post-modern philosophers has been used spontaneously through the ages; we could say that it is part of being human. History also shows that whenever people find themselves in a position of power they tend to abuse that power. South

Africa is no exception. What needs to be done to be truly democratic without discriminating, and what language should be used? How can a truly democratic identity be created in a country with such diversity? An inclusive discourse might be the only way to contradict exclusive language and discrimination.

Inclusive language is filled with respect. An inclusive discourse says that everyone is accepted with his or her own background through mutual respect and with no harm to the other. This respect is empowering without being overpowering; it grants equal opportunities and respect without attempting to equalise. Everyone's identity must be cherished in a mosaic of diversity, without trying to force a certain culture or behaviour onto another. The basic requisite for mutual respect is to respect and to value the fact that everyone has an opinion, which creates a rich mosaic of differences. It goes beyond mere acknowledgement of difference; it means treating difference with respect, not trying to level away all difference. Van Den Hoogen (2011: 145) says that these are actions of religious people, derived from a living relationship with the living God, and that these people "live differently, and therefore speak differently". "A new life", he says, "entails a new language game".

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