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DOROTA DRAŁUS
MONIKA WICHŁACZ

THE PERFORMATIVITY OF WEAPONIZED LANGUAGE: MANIPULATION, POWER, AND RESISTANCE

Abstract. This study explores weaponized communication—a strategic manipulation of language used to influence perceptions, emotions, and behavior while undermining democratic values and societal cohesion. Building on theories of speech acts by John L. Austin and John Searle, it examines how language's performative nature is exploited to reshape realities, normalize exclusion, and disrupt public trust. Weaponized communication leverages modern technology to amplify cognitive overload, disinformation, and divisive narratives, marking a shift from traditional persuasion to emotion-driven, viral rhetoric. This transformation challenges ethical norms and raises concerns about language as a tool of coercion and oppression. The paper also links historical insights from Sophistic rhetoric and Confucian linguistic principles to contemporary issues like propaganda and hate speech. By analyzing these mechanisms, the study sheds light on the intersection of language, power, and societal change, emphasizing the urgent need for ethical discourse in the digital era.

Keywords: speech acts; performativity of language; disinformation; weaponized communication; narrative warfare

Dr DOROTA DRAŁUS – University of Wrocław, Faculty of Social Sciences; correspondence address: ul. Koszarowa 3, 51-149 Wrocław, Poland; e-mail: dorota.dralus@uwr.edu.pl; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6029-9230.

Dr MONIKA WICHŁACZ – University of Wrocław, Faculty of Social Sciences; correspondence address: ul. Koszarowa 3, 51-149 Wrocław, Poland; e-mail: monika.wichlacz@uwr.edu.pl; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7736-422X.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, political language has been saturated with emotionally charged terms essential to persuasive communication, terms that relate to war, conflict, and violence. The objectives of this language have always been tied to imposing control, excluding others, undermining dignity, delegitimizing, coercing, and engaging in similar actions. Persuasive political language is not self-sufficient; it does not cover the full spectrum of language required in politics, let alone social language and its numerous subcategories. Just as the amalgamation of words with weaponry and tools of violence is not new (e.g., ancient Greek terms like *polemos* and *polemikos* meaning "war" and "warlike" or "hostile," respectively), neither is the observation original that language has primarily served to shape reasoning, facilitate understanding of social reality, and act as the language of dialogue and shared truths. It has therefore been a space of contest, governed by a set of signs and meanings that enabled orientation in this space, with truth and falsehood being the foundational markers.

Language is inherently marked by duality: it can simultaneously strengthen and destroy, liberate and coerce, establish and destabilize. In the era of globalized and instantaneous digital communication, the cyber-enhancement of language and the art of communication have lost sight of their purpose—the linguistic essence—transforming it into a means to an end: a tool for the user and an object of refined methods of manipulative influence. Language has become weaponized, and, along with it, the communication. The weaponization of communication involves a departure from traditional ideals of persuasion in which dialogue and rationality played a crucial role. They have been replaced with strategies designed to deepen confusion, misunderstanding, destabilization, and disempowerment. Communication no longer serves to inform, persuade, or foster understanding but rather misunderstanding, cognitive chaos, and emotional manipulation. Weaponized communication does not aim to convince or persuade; instead, it seeks to coerce, to force acceptance of specific positions, or—more commonly—to create a situation in which parties involved in the communication process refuse to accept any arguments, actively avoid reaching consensus, and sustain a state of continuous conflict without the possibility of mutual agreement (Rawski, Kwiatkowska, and Plisiecki, 2024, p. 30). Language has become a „truly destructive technology" (Hill, 2018, p. 70), capable of transforming beliefs and behavior on a massive scale.

Communication is a tool for dialogue; however, today it increasingly assumes the form of weaponized rhetoric in the perpetual struggle for influence and power. The development of information technologies has strengthened traditional forms of communication but also contributed to the expansion of post-factual narratives that destabilize societies, undermine truth, and exacerbate divisions. Narratives are tools that not only describe what exists or what is imagined but also construct new realities. The potential of language as a tool for describing reality has diminished in favor of its use as a weapon to reshape perceptions of the world, shaping the identities of individuals and social groups. Language, words, and communication are taking on new, destructive forms. Terms such as *weaponized rhetoric*, *weaponized speech*, *fighting words*, and *weaponized communication* highlight phenomena where language and narratives serve not so much dialogue but rather domination, disinformation, and destabilization. The philosophical foundation of these concepts lies in the theory of speech acts and the performativity of language, developed by thinkers like John L. Austin, John Searle, and Judith Butler, but their origins can also be traced back to the Sophistic movement, whose members approached rhetoric as a tool of both persuasion and manipulation.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the phenomenon of weaponized communication in the context of its philosophical roots and its contemporary political and social dimensions, and to demonstrate the significant changes in the performative impact of language that have occurred since the discovery of speech acts by the Sophists, later developed by Austin and Searle, and further reinterpreted in a variety of ways. Austin's theory of speech acts provides robust tools for analyzing this evolution, showing how persuasion has become a strategic tool for shaping not only individual decisions but also collective realities. This paper does not aim to present an exhaustive reconstruction of the analytical potential of the key works of the discussed authors. Instead, these texts serve here as the conceptual foundation for the presented analysis of the impact of weaponized language. Addressing the specifics of the contemporary phenomenon of weaponized communication involves references to language, speech, and narratives as tools used to achieve the objectives of weaponized communication, applied beyond the regime of analytical definitions.

SOPHISTS AS PRECURSORS OF MANIPULATIVE RHETORIC

The roots of contemporary manipulative strategies, from disinformation in social media to sophisticated propaganda techniques, may be traced back to the deliberations and activities of the Sophists in ancient Greece. By proclaiming that man is the measure of all things (*homo mensura*; Diogenes Laërtius, 1853, IX, 51), the democratically inclined Protagoras thus performed an egalitarian act of inclusion. He stressed the validity of the perceptions and judgments of each individual and thereby included everyone in the circle of those equally entitled to judge their experiences, perceptions, and emotions. However, the relativism inherent in the *homo mensura* principle not only challenged traditional conceptions of truth but also became a starting point of deliberations on the subjectivity of human cognition and left a profound mark on rhetoric, politics, and ethics. Protagoras assumed that truth does not exist as a universal, immutable reality accessible to everyone in the same way. He espoused the relativity of truth, claiming that it depends on individual perception and experience. What is true for one person may be false for another. Such a philosophy naturally led to the development of the art of argumentation, in which opposing standpoints could be equally justified if appropriately presented. This principle, referred to by Protagoras as *antilogos* (Kerferd, 1981, p. 61), i.e., the ability to formulate equally valid opposing arguments, became the foundation of later rhetoric, i.e., the art of persuasion dependent not on „objective" truth but on the effectiveness of argumentation which in practice meant the possibility of successfully proving contradictory theses.

Protagoras's relativism had significant implications, including political ones. The acknowledgement of the plurality of equally valid points of view, of subjective truths, aligned well with the democratic ideals of Athenian society, in which diversity of opinion was the foundation of public life. The critical arguments against Protagoras, most fully expressed by Plato (1997a, 1997b), did not lose their relevance or strength. However, neither of these thinkers could have foreseen how much rhetoric could become distorted, or the extent to which Protagoras's legacy of relativism would manifest in contemporary discussions on truth and informational manipulation.

The views of Gorgias, another prominent Sophist, had similar consequences for the political discourse. Gorgias's observations on language were included in his epideictic speeches, which aimed to craft provocative justifications for negative figures in Greek culture. In *The Encomium on Helen*, Gorgias argued that Helen,

usually blamed for the Trojan War, should be considered innocent. Helen, as a corporeal being exposed to the persuasive power of words, could not resist Paris: „Speech [logos] is a grand potentate who can, by means of an extremely tenuous and altogether invisible body, accomplish effects that are utterly divine … divinely inspired spells by means of *logoi* take away pain and bring on pleasure" (Gorgias, 1948, DK 82, 11; cf. Mourelatos, 1987, p. 156). Other remarks of his about language include statements about the therapeutic function of words:

> It as different drugs draw different humours from the body, and some put an end to disease while others put an end to life, so too with l*ogoi*: on those who hear them, some cause pain, others pleasure, some cause fear, others instil courage, and still others poison and bewitch the soul through some sort of ruinous persuasion (DK 82, 11; cf. Mourelatos, 1987, pp. 157-158).

Rhetoric based on relativism enables the creation of narratives that, although potentially contradictory to facts, possess the power to persuade through emotional and rhetorical techniques. The Sophists demonstrated that language could be a tool not only of knowledge but also of power (Kerferd, 1981, pp. 152-155).

It may thus be said that, beginning with the Sophists' practices in ancient Greece, the theory of language and rhetoric in Western philosophy underwent significant transformations. The Sophists regarded language as a tool of persuasion and convincing, emphasizing its performative dimension rather than its reference to truth or facts. Their work focused on developing rhetorical skills and using language as a means of achieving power and influence. The Sophists aimed to disprove any dogmatically asserted truths. Beyond all the philosophical and logical consequences of the postulate of a single, immutable, eternal truth, its social and political effects were significant. By egalitarizing truth and instrumentalizing language, Protagoras and Gorgias opened the way to emancipatory uses of language. They passed on their skills to all who could and wished to learn from them. The Sophists aimed to delegitimize the supposedly esoteric knowledge accessible only to a selected few. While Sophistic rhetoric based on active participation in discourse acknowledged subjectivity, it not only opened up a space for the emergence of human, democratic, individual, and collective subjectivity but also for weaponized rhetoric which, nowadays amplified through digital technology, serves to enact manipulation. It disperses subjectivity, thereby disempowering individuals, creating incoherent fragmentation, and atrophying autonomy.

AUSTIN AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF WEAPONIZED COMMUNICATION

Sophistic rhetoric demonstrated the potential of language to exert a palpable impact on human actions and social reality. It can be understood as a model of language that inherently performs and transforms the world, subordinating it to the speaker's objectives. A systematic analysis of the performativity of language was developed by Austin and Searle. In his lectures, later compiled in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin outlined a theory of speech acts. His theory distinguished three levels of speech acts: the locutionary act (the expression of content), the illocutionary act (the intended effect of linguistic interaction, e.g., a command or promise), and the perlocutionary act (the effect produced on the recipient, e.g., persuasion or intimidation).

Constative utterances can be evaluated as true or false, while performative utterances are actions in themselves. The phrase „I apologize" not only expresses intention but also enacts the act of apologizing. Similarly, the utterance „I promise" does not describe the act of promising but enacts it (Austin, 1962, p. 5). However, the effectiveness of these utterances depends on context and socially recognized conventions. For instance, the marital declaration, embodied in the words „I take you as my husband/wife," acquires meaning only under specific conditions: during a ceremony, in the presence of authorized individuals, and within established protocols (Austin, 1962, p. 13). It is precisely social norms and structures that grant language its power.

When language becomes weaponized, it uses its performative capabilities to influence people and reality. The act of naming—though it may seem simple—carries significant consequences. Labelling a group as „illegal" or „criminal" not only reflects a particular perspective but also creates social hierarchies, legitimizes exclusionary policies and reinforces stereotypes. Utterances are not confined to stating some facts, but they „do what they describe" (Austin, 1962, p. 5). According to Austin (1962), „performative utterances can establish social facts" (p. 9). Commands, threats, or warnings harness the power of language to induce actions or psychological states, often operating outside rational deliberation.

One of the most alarming manifestations of weaponized language is its use in disinformation campaigns. The performative potential of language enables the

destabilization of the boundary between truth and falsehood identified by Austin as the ability to „blur the distinction between description and influence" (Austin, 1962, p. 9). In this context, language not only misleads people but also shapes the way people perceive reality. Performative utterances become straightforward tools of propaganda, aimed at altering social perception and deepening divisions, exploitable at minimal cost and without complex strategies.

However, performative acts are not unconditionally effective and do not always achieve their intended outcome. Austin introduced the concept of „infelicities," which denote the failure of performative utterances to fulfill their intentions. He gives the example of a declaration of war made by an unauthorized individual, rendering it invalid (Austin, 1962, p. 17). He emphasized that the context or intentions of an utterance could lead to its „exposure," acknowledging that the effectiveness of language depends on socially recognized sources of authority (Austin, 1962, p. 14). In his analysis of the performativity of language, Austin raises a question of ethics: what obligations rest on speakers whose words may cause real harm? He also provides an answer: in his view, the ethical dimension of utterances lies in both intention and consequences. Weaponized language, aimed at manipulation or coercion, violates the accepted boundaries of communication participants, rejecting dialogue in favor of instrumentalized objectives.

According to Austin, understanding the performative nature of language also provides tools to resist its abuse. Deconstructing the mechanisms through which language exerts power enables one to expose harmful narratives and restore agency in communication: „Language is not a neutral tool but an act requiring critical engagement" (Austin, 1962, p. 14). This ethical insight is absent in contemporary practices of weaponized communication. It operates in an axiological vacuum, a technicized cyber-juggling act wielding power over masses of users who have no reason to look up from the hypnotic screen encouraging „rightful" clicks on their keyboards. Modern weaponizations of language consist of appropriation, undermining, and ultimately annihilating the smoldering remnants of one's own reason's authority. This leads to the erosion of rational autonomy, and the resulting void is immediately replaced by heightened dominance and control.

SEARLE'S SPEECH ACT THEORY AND THE DYNAMICS OF WEAPONIZED LANGUAGE

Searle developed and systematized Austin's theories, introducing greater analytical precision. He developed a taxonomy of speech acts and examined the rules that determine their effectiveness and meaning (Searle, 1969). His theory is indispensable for analyzing the phenomenon of weaponized language, where communication becomes a tool of manipulation, control, and coercion.

The distinction between literal meaning and intentionality introduced by Searle, along with the category of „illocutionary acts," offers tools for examining how weaponized communication operates at the intersection of language and power. Searle emphasizes the constitutive rules of speech acts which enable a deeper understanding of how authority, threats, or violence can be integrated into communicative practices. His framework expands the perspective on the complex relationships between language, the speaker's intention, and the social and material context, going beyond classical notions of performativity. By refining descriptive categories and highlighting the contextual conditions of speech acts, Searle provides the theoretical foundation necessary for understanding how language enters the realms of conflict and power.

A central element of Searle's theory is his categorization of speech acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Each of these categories plays a unique role in communication and can be used for manipulative purposes. For example, assertives are statements that commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition, such as „The economy is collapsing." In weaponized language, such statements are often employed as tools of disinformation, constructing false narratives intended to influence public opinion (Searle, 1969, p. 33). Repetition of such assertives can blur the boundary between truth and falsehood, creating a fertile ground for uncertainty and distrust.

Directives are speech acts aimed at persuading the listener to perform a specific action, such as commands or requests. Weaponized directives then exploit fear and authority to compel compliance. For instance, political propaganda often employs directives like „Protect your family—vote for stability," leveraging illocutionary force to provoke specific actions (Searle, 1969, p. 21). The weaponization of directives underscores the strategic use of language to bypass rational reflection and appeal directly to primal emotions.

Commissives, namely speech acts involving promises or threats, also play a central role in understanding weaponized language. Threats are particularly effective tools for establishing dominance and suppressing dissent. When a speaker states, „If you oppose this policy, you will face consequences," they manipulate the structure of the commissive to instill fear and enforce conformity (Searle, 1969, p. 45). Such acts not only suppress opposition but also reinforce the speaker's authority within a given social context.

Expressives, which convey the speaker's psychological state, represent another dimension of speech acts susceptible to abuse. For instance, an ostensibly benign statement like „We appreciate your sacrifice" can be weaponized to feign solidarity while masking manipulative or coercive intentions. Strategically deployed expressives can neutralize critics or disguise coercive actions, creating a facade of goodwill (Searle, 1969, p. 50).

The most powerful category in Searle's taxonomy is declarations, which actively alter social realities. A declaration like „This group poses a threat to national security" transforms social perception, legitimizing discriminatory actions and policies (Searle, 1969, p. 52). In weaponized communication, declarations play a key role in constructing institutionalized narratives, reshaping collective beliefs, and reinforcing social hierarchies.

The functioning of these speech acts is grounded in constitutive rules that determine their effectiveness. Searle identifies rules concerning propositional content, preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions, and essential rules as the frameworks governing speech acts. For instance, a promise is valid only if the speaker sincerely intends to fulfill it and possesses the appropriate authority to do so (Searle, 1969, p. 66). Weaponized language often violates these rules, exploiting the audience's trust in linguistic conventions to achieve manipulative objectives. A politician might promise economic reforms with no intention of delivering them, leveraging the illocutionary force of a commissive act to secure votes while undermining the sincerity condition (Searle, 1969, p. 73).

In his book *The Construction of Social Reality*, Searle expanded his analysis and examined how language creates institutional facts through collective acceptance. Declarations such as „This currency has value" or „This person is the CEO" rely on shared recognition of social conventions to construct and maintain institutional realities (Searle, 1995, p. 28). Weaponized language exploits this mechanism, systematically reshaping collective perception. Repeated declarations, such as labelling

a group as „illegal" or „undesirable," normalize exclusionary practices. The repetition of weaponized assertives or directives on digital platforms amplifies their illocutionary force, while their viral nature magnifies their perlocutionary effects—such as fear, anger, or distrust—on a massive scale (Searle, 1969, p. 95).

Searle's speech act theory provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding the mechanisms of weaponized language. By analyzing how language performs actions and shapes realities, Searle sheds light on the profound influence of communication on societies—both in positive and negative senses. His work emphasizes the need for vigilance in the ethical use of language, especially in an era in which its weaponization poses a significant threat to democratic values and social cohesion.

THE PERSUASION IN MODERN POLITICAL LANGUAGE

Traditionally, persuasion was primarily understood through Aristotle's rhetorical triad: *ethos* (the speaker's credibility), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *logos* (logical argumentation) (Aristotle, 2007, 1356a1-3). This model assumed rational and dialogical involvement between the speaker and the audience. The art of persuasion in this tradition was based on convincing the audience through balanced appeals to reason and credibility.

Austin's speech act theory, which refines Protagoras's conception of language, represents a departure from traditional views of language as merely a descriptive tool. His concept of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts explains how language functions as an instrument of action. Persuasion can be seen as an interaction of these acts, where illocutionary force aims to convince, and perlocutionary effects transform beliefs and behavior (Austin, 1962, p. 109). A well-crafted slogan performs a complex illocutionary act, such as a promise, while simultaneously aiming to elicit perlocutionary effects, such as hope or trust. Among such well-crafted slogans, one may mention the slogan used by the Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum in 2016: "We send £350 million a week to the European Union. Let's fund the NHS instead. Let's take control." Dominic Cummings, the chief Brexit ideologue, acknowledged that without this slogan, which conveyed a lie, the Brexit victory would be impossible (Withers, 2023). This shift in the nature of persuasion

highlights its movement away from rational debates toward performative utterances designed to provoke immediate emotional responses.

Traditionally rooted in classical rhetoric, persuasion has undergone a profound transformation, evolving into a complex interplay of linguistic, psychological, and technological forces. These changes reflect transformations in the tools, contexts, and intentions behind persuasive actions; Austin's speech act theory provides analytical tools for understanding them. Modern persuasion goes beyond the simple transmission of ideas. It is a deliberate manipulation of belief systems, emotions, and actions. Contemporary political persuasion has become democratized, measurable, and easily concealed, which enables microtargeting of audiences with unprecedented speed, scale, and precision. These characteristics allow for extensive personalization and flexible influence. Consequently, the technological aspects of constructing and disseminating information have become decisive factors in the effectiveness and impact of persuasion. Modern persuasion is no longer the refined art of rhetoric, but it rather depends on the use of technical and psychosocial tools to induce cognitive changes in targeted groups. As a result, conventional „guardians of truth"—institutional actors and traditional media—struggle to mount effective resistance, seeing the uncontrolled influence operations as a significant threat to the „cognitive security" of contemporary societies (Waltzman, 2017, pp. 1-3).

The hostile instrumentalization of language for political purposes has long been recognized as a threat to democratic values, particularly concerning the protection of human dignity. In the American legal system, the doctrine of „fighting words," which are not protected by the First Amendment and are defined as those that "by their very utterance, inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace" (Legal Information Institute, 2021), has existed since 1942. Post-war Germany introduced the concept of „incitement to hatred" (*Volksverhetzung*) into its criminal law, defined as „stirring up enmity in an invasive manner, beyond mere rejection or contempt" (Stein, 1986, p. 284). Most developed democracies have adopted regulations prohibiting „hate speech," specified by the Council of Europe as

> all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as "race", colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation (Council of Europe, 2022).

However, it is increasingly evident that such rigid definitions do not adequately address the progressively complex and rapidly evolving communication system in which boundaries blur, cultural and technological spheres intersect, and the information space is saturated with disinformation, fake news, deepfakes, bot farms, and other phenomena. To capture this qualitative shift and the „spirit of the times," researchers as well as social and political commentators continuously coin new terms. These terms often gain temporary popularity before being replaced by new, more precise and useful exploratory and explanatory concepts. One such term, which has gained particular prominence in recent years, is „weaponized persuasion," „weaponized communication," or „weaponized narrative."

The first use of the expression „weaponized persuasion" in the context of exerting political pressure, as noted by Steven Poole, can be found in William J. Grant's 1938 work *The Spirit of India*, in which „weaponising somebody's strength" was associated with creating compelling political arguments (Poole, 2017). In the early 20th century, the term also began to be used in military and political science research to describe methods of control or manipulation through language (Pentón Herrera, and Bryan, 2022, p. 2). Luis J. Pentón Herrera, and Kisha C. Bryan (2022, p. 2) mention the publication of the House Un-American Activities Committee and Stefan T. Possony's *Language as a Communist Weapon* in 1959 as one of the first scholarly works addressing the concept of weaponized language, though in this case, it was discussed in the context of manipulation and propaganda.

The term „weaponized communication" has acquired new meaning in political and military studies, as military doctrines increasingly focus on the cognitive space—including awareness, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions—as a key battlefield (Ornatowski, 2021, p. 15). In this context, information has become the most important weapon, and success in war increasingly depends on proficiency in shaping the content of discursive strategies (Roennfeldt, 2011). Reflecting this significant shift, Roennfeldt (2011) introduced the concept of „productive war," which relates to the broader notion of informational or narrative warfare. According to Roennfeldt, a term should be understood as

> (a) a discursive conflict (b) about socio-political hegemony, (c) which is produced by expedient discursive effects, (d) created by networks of heterogeneous actors (e) operating from local centers of power-knowledge to influence the discursive battlefield (f) with the strategic objective of winning the will of the people (h) during a time span of decades (Roennfeldt, 2011, p. 52).

These changes show that the contemporary understanding of weaponized communication, persuasion, or narrative goes way beyond mere propaganda, disinformation tactics, or psychological warfare. It highlights not only a qualitative change in the depth, objectives, and scope of influence, as well as its acceleration and intensification (Pascale, 2019, p. 910) but also a transformation of the very nature of the persuasive communication process. This fundamental transformation is reflected in the Celine-Marie Pascale's (2019, p. 900) distinction between the language of war and the violence inherent in the language itself, constituted through its weaponization. Similarly, Ajit Maan (2018) points out that it is not only about informational warfare, but „it is warfare over the meaning of the information."

In operational and teleological terms, weaponized narrative can be defined as "the use of information and communication technologies, services, and tools to create and spread stories intended to subvert and undermine an adversary's institutions, identity, and civilization, and it operates by sowing and exacerbating complexity, confusion, and political and social schisms" (Allenby, 2017, p. 66). Jennifer R. Mercieca (2019, p. 266) conceptualizes weaponized rhetoric as „the strategic use of communication as an instrumental tool and as an aggressive means to gain compliance and avoid accountability." Similarly, according to Pentón Herrera and Bryan (2022, p. 3), weaponized language signifies "the process by which words, discourse, and language in any form have been used or are being used to inflict harm on others, and how language education practices, policies, programs, and curricula are weaponized."

Weaponized communication signifies not only a fundamental departure from the basic goals of the persuasive process but also from its very nature and constitutive elements. Persuasion presupposes a certain level of mutual recognition, understanding, and approval of the persuader's intentions and reasons (Zwoleński, 2003, p. 257). It operates within the code of the dichotomy „truth and falsehood" and the regime of factuality—even when the persuader chooses to lie or manipulate facts. It also has a clearly defined goal of communication and expectations for the audience regarding changing their opinions, attitudes, or beliefs, assuming that the audience is intellectually capable of receiving the message and has the subjective choice to accept or reject it (Pałka, 2007, p. 371). Accordingly, persuasion presupposes an element of free will which implies not only acceptance or rejection of the message but also allows the audience to withdraw, abandon, or interrupt the communication process without facing any consequences (Warchala, 2016, p. 73).

Therefore, even in the form of manipulation, persuasion excludes the use of force, coercion, and threats (Karwat, 2000, p. 35).

In contrast, according to Mercieca (2019, p. 270), weaponized communication is a form of violence. It "*denies consent, overwhelms, and acts as force,"* and those who weaponize communication do so to "*prevent themselves from being held accountable, from being questioned, debated, from having to give good reasons and persuade"* (Mercieca, 2019, p. 270). Weaponized communication causes cognitive overload, disorientation, and confusion, leaving the target audience—no matter how intellectually capable they might be—without the time or tools to process information properly (Allenby, and Garreau, 2017, p. 14) while distorting the frameworks from which people, societies, and cultures derive their identity and make sense of events, institutions, and processes—as consumers, citizens, political actors, and individuals (Allenby, 2017, p. 66). Moreover, as noted by Byung-Chul Han (2024), communication itself becomes a compulsion. Society's obsessive relationship with digital communication devices transforms the freedom to initiate, maintain, or cease communication into both an external and internal compulsion.

To achieve its goals, the weaponization of language employs an exceptionally broad and ever-changing range of tactics that Pascale (2019, pp. 901-909) categorizes into four main areas: censorship, propaganda, disinformation, and everyday discourse, defined as „linguistic delivery devices through which weaponized language enters the mainstream" (Pascale, 2019, p. 909). This process involves the routinization and normalization of insults, hate speech, disinformation, and conspiracy theories (Pascale, 2019, pp. 908-910).

The resulting communication breaks rules, is subversive and exploits social, cultural, and personal vulnerabilities. However, one should emphasize that weaponized communication is not merely a random collection of harmful tactics: it is a deliberate, systematic, and politically constructed process capable of undermining socio-political consensus and the status quo while disrupting the core of how communities, societies, and states define themselves (Krieg, 2023, p. 2). Social injuries and divisions deepen, and the integrity of public information spaces is undermined. The resulting communication chaos weakens the desire for clarity, nuance, and public debate (Pascale, 2019, p. 901). As expressed by Herbert Lin (2017), „the victims are truth, reason, and reflection" (p. 41).

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary discourse demonstrates that practically anything can be weaponized: traditional concepts of femininity, plagiarism, laws, the climate change, "public health systems, truth, innocence, children on playgrounds, mental health—the list could probably go on endlessly" (Kessler, 2024). The abuse of this more aggressive, escalatory form of the word "instrumentalize" undoubtedly reflects increasing factionalization and hostility in public debate. However, as noted by Joseph Epstein (2023), the term well fits into Henry W. Fowler's category of „fashionable words": words that „from time to time emerge from obscurity or mere potentiality into sudden popularity" (Fowler, 2009). Out of the six main reasons the author provides for a word gaining such status, two are relevant for the term „weaponization": its rhetorical appeal and "the joy of showing that one has acquired it" (Fowler, 2009). There is an evident danger that the term „weaponization" will quickly become part of „a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power" (Orwell, 1946).

As already shown, the recognition of the power of language to shape reality and influence human behavior is not a contemporary phenomenon, nor is it typical of the Western world. Confucius highlighted the importance of „the rectification of names," arguing that social harmony depends on the proper use of language (Confucius, 2007, p. 88). He believed that if names are not correct, language does not accord with the truth of things. This doctrine points to the ethical responsibility of using language that reflects reality, as incorrect naming can lead to social chaos. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1961, 5.6) emphasized the way linguistic constructs shape our understanding of reality by arguing that the limits of one's language are the limits of one's world. When language is weaponized, it distorts these constructs, leading to manipulated perceptions of truth and morality. Weaponizing language goes beyond mere rhetorical manipulation; it encompasses profound philosophical issues regarding the ethical use of discourse and its impact on human dignity and agency. This phenomenon involves the deliberate use of language to cause harm, marginalize individuals or groups, and perpetuate systemic inequalities, raising significant questions about the moral responsibilities associated with communication and the potential of language as an instrument of oppression.

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PERFORMATYWNOŚĆ „UZBROJONEGO" JĘZYKA: MANIPULACJA, WŁADZA I OPÓR

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł dotyczy zagadnienia „uzbrojonej" komunikacji, definiowanej jako strategiczne użycie języka do kształtowania percepcji, emocji i zachowań oraz podważania wartości demokratycznych i spójności społecznej. Odwołując się do teorii aktów mowy Johna L. Austina i Johna Searle'a, autorki analizują, w jaki sposób performatywny charakter języka jest wykorzystywany do przeformułowywania rzeczywistości, normalizacji wykluczenia oraz erozji zaufania publicznego. „Uzbrojona" komunikacja czerpie z nowoczesnych technologii, wzmacniając efekt przeciążenia poznawczego, dezinformację i narracje dzielące społeczeństwo, co oznacza odejście od tradycyjnych form perswazji na rzecz emocjonalnej, szeroko i błyskawicznie rozprzestrzeniającej się retoryki. Taka transformacja podważa dotychczasowe normy etyczne i rodzi obawy o postrzeganie języka jako narzędzia przymusu i opresji. Artykuł przywołuje ponadto historyczne perspektywy retoryki sofistycznej i konfucjańskich zasad językowych, zestawiając je z wyzwaniami współczesności, takimi jak propaganda czy mowa nienawiści. Analiza tych mechanizmów ukazuje ścisłe powiązania między językiem, władzą i zmianami społecznymi, podkreślając pilną potrzebę dyskursu etycznego w erze cyfrowej.

Słowa kluczowe: akty mowy; performatywność języka; dezinformacja; „uzbrojona" komunikacja; wojna narracyjna