Language is not simply a tool for communication – symbolic power struggles underlie any speech act, discourse move, or verbal interaction, be it in face-to-face conversations, online tweets or political debates. This book provides a clear and accessible introduction to the topic of language and power from an applied linguistics perspective. It is clearly split into three sections: the power of symbolic representation, the power of symbolic action and the power to create symbolic reality. It draws upon a wide range of existing work by philosophers, sociolinguists, sociologists and applied linguists, and includes current real-world examples, to provide a fresh insight into a topic that is of particular significance and interest in the current political climate and in our increasingly digital age. The book shows the workings of language as symbolic power in educational, social, cultural and political settings and discusses ways to respond to and even resist symbolic violence.

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Language as Symbolic Power

CLAIRE KRAMSCH
University of California, Berkeley
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Acknowledgments

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These Discovery Courses, launched in fall 2005, were promoted on their website as being "deliberately designed to engage and ignite the minds of non-experts, [and] to be unforgettable." Course names ranged from: “Physics for future presidents,” “Physics and Music,” “Introduction to general astronomy,” to “Wealth and Poverty” and “Questioning efficiency: Human factors and existential phenomenology” among many others. The course L&$S$180 *Language and Power* was added in 2006 and was taught since then every year for twelve years. It offered the following course description on its syllabus:

As the saying goes, "Sticks and stones/ Can break my bones/ But words will never hurt me" – but is that really so? We all know that people do things with words and that in turn words do things to people. Language can inform or deceive, seduce or insult, make us fall in love or kill our reputation. What is it about language that gives it that power? How can sounds in a conversation, signs on a page make us laugh or cry? Why are we so attached to the language we grew up with? Why can a foreign language be so sexy? What does it take to speak and be not only heard but actually responded to? How do our words remember, imagine, anticipate, respond to the words of others? And how can we acquire conversational power? This course will
explore the workings of language as social symbolic power in everyday life. We will examine the discourse of politics and the media, children’s books and advertisements, psychobabble and corporate-speak, as well as the relation between language and identity, ideology, and myth.

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As this book goes to print, the COVID-19 pandemic is raging across the globe, revealing long-standing inequalities and injustices. But it has also revealed inordinately powerful forces for social justice led by a new generation of young people, who are both socially aware and politically savvy. I hope the book can contribute to this new awareness in the years to come.