

Foreword

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Although post-democracy is a relatively recent term, the concept it denotes has long been familiar to those of us within linguistics, on account of the writings of the man who has led the field for almost sixty years, Noam Chomsky. For decades he has argued that democratic elections, particularly in the US, are a facade for the corporate-governmental-military establishment that really controls the levers. Most of what he publishes is devoted to chronicling the workings of this establishment across the globe, interspersed with the occasional article and book on syntactic theory ('occasional' relative to his political writings, though compared to other linguists his output has always been vast, and continues to be so as he enters his 90th year).

Nevertheless, only a minority of linguists see the field as having the political dimension of language as part of its brief. As Emilia Di Martino explains in her Preamble to this special issue, citing Deborah Cameron, linguists have been loath to countenance the politics embedded within their own analytic practice, let alone accept that a scholarly analysis of language might want or need to take account of the political uses of language in order to claim any impact beyond the endless circulation of ideas amongst scholars. That attitude represents post-democracy in its truest sense: the failure to comprehend that, unless our work engages with and circulates back into the use of language by everyone in society, it risks being sterile and pointless.

Language and politics is clearly a thriving and growing field of research. Each of the articles in this special issue takes on real data of

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serious significance, well beyond what they tell us about the present state of English and other European languages, which is already considerable. So do the Introduction, by Luke Blaxill, a corpus linguist working at the forefront of methodological advancement of the field, and Di Martino's Preamble, which offers a comprehensive guide to the analysis of political language. The passion of the authors never gets in the way of their clear vision. Each of the papers has taught me much, and enriched and shifted my understanding of the topic. What is most important, however, is that they represent our chance, as members of the scholarly community, to help to keep the general political discourse one in which language is a force for the values most of us share – being in Paris as I write this, I shall sum them up as liberty, equality and fraternity, which pretty well covers the bases – rather than the incendiary device that it has too often proven to be.

Democracy has proven to be a robust institution, at least since the American and French Revolutions, and I suspect that reports of its post-ness are premature. But it is work of the sort gathered together here that will help to guarantee that it endures.