*English L&L HL*

Written Task #2 on Reader, Culture, and Text

The phrase “climate change” as a euphemism  
 (*Based on Frank Luntz’s "The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America")*

*1. Outline*   
 **Prescribed question:** How could the text be read and interpreted differently by two different readers?  
  
 **Part of the course to which the text refers:** Language in cultural context  
  
 **Texts for analysis:**"The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America" by Frank Luntz  
  
 **This critical response will:** 1. Analyze the language used in Frank Luntz’s memo, its implications and potential effects on two audiences: one of members of the Republican party and one of environmental scientists  
  
 2. Discuss Luntz’s main points and how he manages to convey them to the public through the use of a language that is simultaneously vague and highly imperative in nature   
  
 3. Examine the idea that Luntz’s memo has helped turn the phrase ‘climate change’ into a euphemism, or a milder way to refer to ‘global warming’, which by itself has a harsher connotation

In recent years there has been a serious controversy about the way people with different value systems refer to the issue of global warming. As said in an article from “The Conversation”, written by Sharon Beder, “how we talk about climate change has a lot to do with how we feel about it, and what we’re willing to do to act on it.” (Beder, 2014) The phrases “global warming” and “climate change” in fact differ in meaning and connotation, therefore provoke different emotional responses when mentioned by a public figure in front of an audience. An issue that has emerged is that the Republican Party of the United States has begun to verbally manipulate the public into believing that global warming is not a serious threat as it does benefit their future prospects to acknowledge its urgency. The document that is said to have galvanized this concern is the 2002 memo issued by Republican advisor Frank Luntz, named “The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America.” Since the document is rather lengthy in size and content, this paper’s focal point will be pages 7, 8, and 12 of the memo, and the way Luntz uses well-chosen subject specific language to refer to the issue of dealing with global warming as a subject of linguistic consideration. In order for the main question to be answered, a comparison will be made between the potential reaction of a Republican and an environmental scientist to the imperative language used in the memo, its vagueness, and the way it devalues the weight of scientific evidence. This comparison will eventually point to the idea that Luntz’s memo will only be effective on a member of the Republican party who blindly follows Republican doctrines and is susceptible to manipulation.  
 The main characteristic of the language Luntz uses in the memo is that it gradually becomes more imperative as the document progresses, implying that if they follow all of the mentioned steps, Republicans are guaranteed to win the debate against the Democrats. On page 7, Luntz classifies the points he’s about to mention as “communication recommendations” that will help Republicans gain trust and credibility. Even though a “recommendation” by itself is not supposed to bind the reader to any obligations, Luntz phrases his recommendations in a way that ultimately shapes how any party member ought to express himself. He uses phrases containing modal verbs such as “we need to” and “we should”, and near the end of the essay – “we must”, in order to install obligation and responsibility within his Republican audience. On page 8 we can notice the presence of separate boxes containing explicit distinctions of ‘language that works’ and ‘words that work’ in favour of the party when referring to global warming. This demonstrates how Luntz’s recommendations aim at depriving Republicans of any freedom of expression, as all the appropriate language has already been chosen for them. Whenever a Republican reads Luntz’s recommendations, he would most probably agree to follow them, since his value system aligns with the one of Luntz and the whole party. However, it depends on the extent to which a Republican prioritizes his personal freedom of expression over the values of the party. An environmental scientist, on the other hand, would probably stand against the idea of using political power to exploit the public’s tendency to change their stance, especially in the context of the global warming debate.  
 The verbal manipulation that Luntz is practicing through the memo also relies on vagueness and ambiguity, allowing for further questioning of the actions America should take in regards to climate change. An important element of the memo is that Luntz himself publicly acknowledges *in brackets* that the “scientific debate” about the seriousness of global warming and its urgent mitigation is already closing *against* the Republican party. However, the succeeding statement “there is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science”, implies that Republicans believe they can still convince the public that more experimentation is required to confirm the actual threat of global warming. This lack of clarity aims to once again convince voters that global warming is not an issue of alarming concern. Luntz succeeds at conveying this idea by basing his arguments on generalization and subjective assumptions by presenting them as facts: “Most Americans want more information so that they can make an informed decision.” On page 12 in specific, Luntz directly attacks environmentalists and argues that they’re the ones discouraging the public from voting for the Republican party, which by itself can cause a direct conflict between environmental scientists and Republicans. The two main points that Luntz makes on page 12 are that “climate change” should be used instead of “global warming”, and that party members should build the reputation of “conservationists” rather than “preservationists” or “environmentalists” since words with a more subtle connotation are preferable to words that remind the public that the environment is under an alarming threat. However, those two misinformed statements go against the laws of science, twisting scientific information for the sake of acquiring more political power. Thus, if a scientist reads Frank Luntz’s memo he would probably find it rather offensive and antagonizing, whilst a member of the Republican party, although vexed by the superior connotation of the language used, would eventually conform to the ideas conveyed.  
 All of the previously examined linguistic details highlight that the essence of the memo stands against the laws of both politics and science, and is a pure representation of abuse of power exerted through the manipulation of language. As the two audiences considered in this paper come from vastly contrasting historical and cultural contexts, a Republican has been accustomed to think in terms of gaining political power and authority, while an environmental scientist would prioritize the rights of nature and in turn environmental justice. This would altogether mean that the memo would only be effective when read by a member of Republican, however one that is naive enough to blindly preach the deceptive gospels of his party, as stated by Luntz.

*Word Count:* 1000

*2.* *Works Cited* United States, Congress, Luntz, Frank. “The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America.” *The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America*, The Luntz Research Companies, 2002, pp. 131–146.  
  
 Beder Honorary Professor, University of Wollongong, Sharon. “We Need to Talk about How We Talk about Climate Change.” *The Conversation*, The Conversation Trust Limited, 2 June 2014, theconversation.com/we-need-to-talk-about-how-we-talk-about-climate-change-27372.