LANGUAGE AS A WEAPON:
How Linguistic Choices in Popular Culture Could Trigger Social Change

ABIGAIL HARRISON | 19187044@BROOKES.AC.UK

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

1. Justification

One Piece is a global number 1 Netflix series.

Had 37.8 million views 2 weeks after its release in August 2023.

It's a live-action adaptation of a bestselling manga series.

Netflix has "around 238.4 million subscribers worldwide" (Independent Advisor, 2023).

Research has demonstrated that audiences often mirror their favourite characters' language practices in their everyday linguistic choices and behaviours (Gocen and Okur, 2012).

2. Aim

To present the possibility of power behind discourse (Fairclough, 2015) in popular culture by exploring the types of linguistic devices that might be used by ordinary people in the resistance of power.

3. Methodology

- Qualitative thematic analysis + Charles Antaki's (2002) transcription conventions.
- 3 transcribed texts were chosen because they display various linguistic choices in resistance to power. They include:

Zoro refusing Captain Morgan

Luffy aggravating Captain Alvida

Luffy taunting Buggy the Clown

- The analysis highlights the use of these linguistic devices:

Humour | Threats | Insults | Lies & Deception

Sarcasm | Warnings | Politeness
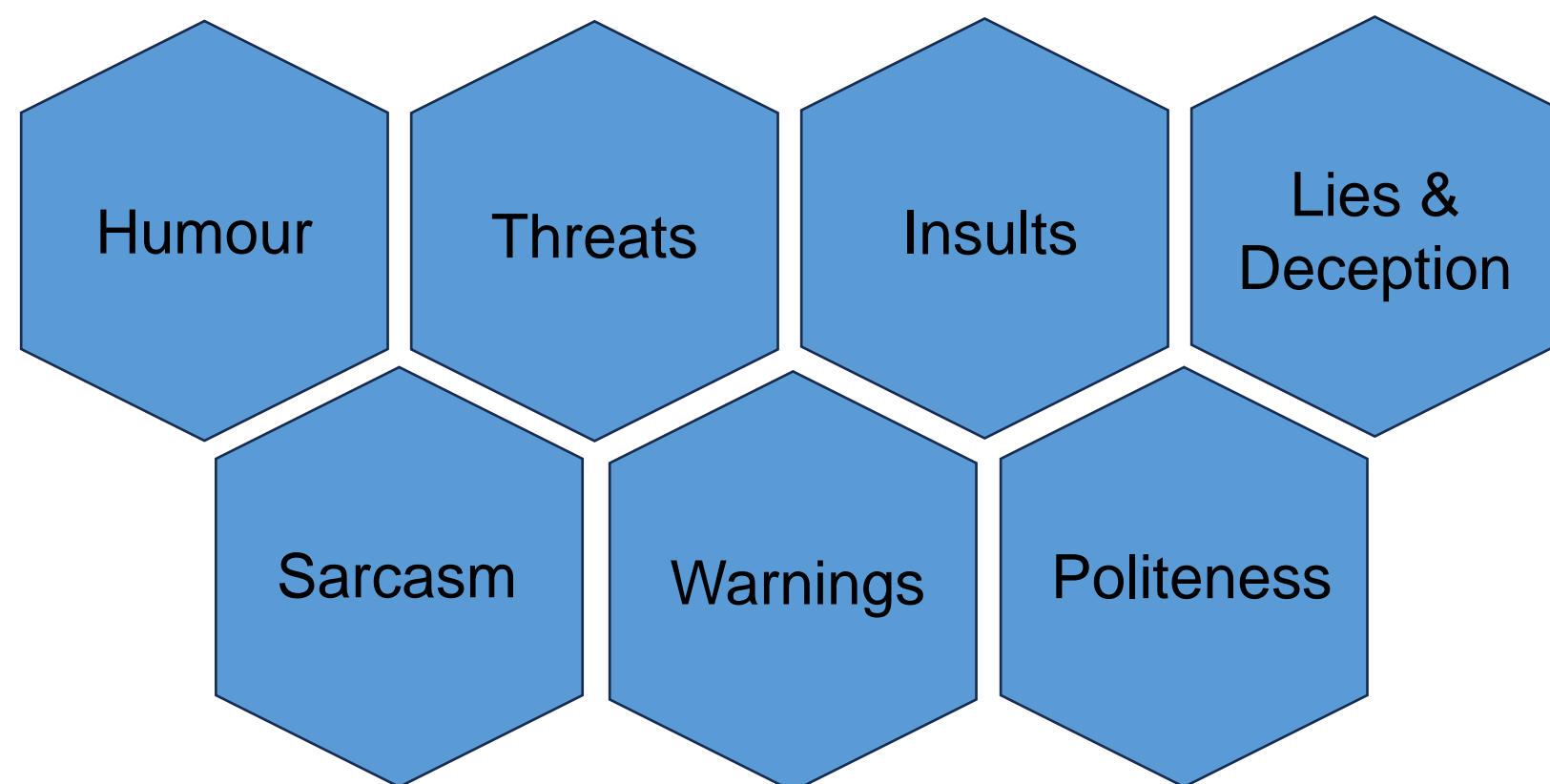
- The analysis also draws on different fields, such as:

Critical Linguistics ✚ Pragmatics ✚ Sociolinguistics

4. Analysis

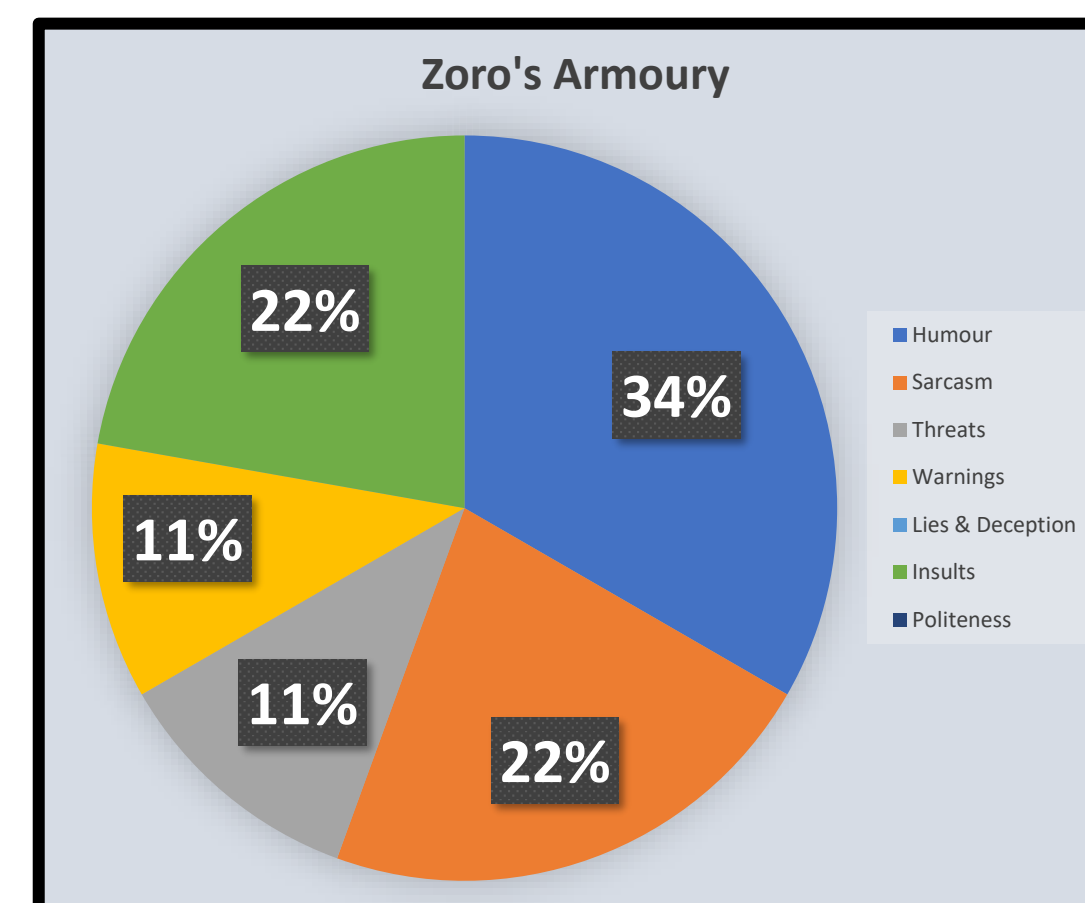| Key:	
Humour	Navy
Sarcasm	Aqua highlighting
Threats	Dark Green text
Warnings	Green highlighting
Lies and Deception	Dark purple text
Insults	Dark orange underlining
Politeness	Yellow highlighting

| A12 | Morgan: | ((hits Helmeppo)) (4) I::: I::ike you: (.) oh we should be (1) working |
A13		for the same te:am (8) you'd make a HELL of a marine
A14	Zoro:	(3) kind of got my own thing going on (.) doesn't leave much time for
A15		playing DRESS-UP
A16	Morgan:	(4) it's a shame to lose a man of your tal'rents (2) since you won't be
A17		able to collect a bounty at any marine base once I get the word out (.)
A18		so (.) what's it gonna be (3) a new career heh (3) or the yard
A19	Zoro:	(3) seven days (5) I could catch up on my sleep

Figure 1. Key for thematic analysis.

Figure 2. Example extract from the text "Zoro refusing Captain Morgan".

5. Key Findings

- Power struggles are evident across all 3 texts.
- Linguistic choices are used like weapons.

Zoro's Armoury
- 34% Humour
- 22% Sarcasm
- 11% Threats
- 11% Warnings
- 22% Insults

Luffy's Armoury
- 7% Humour
- 7% Sarcasm
- 14% Warnings
- 14% Lies & Deception
- 29% Insults
- 29% Politeness

- Zoro
Ideology: centres on him becoming the world's greatest swordsman and, meanwhile, helping to rid the world of bad pirates.
Power: aims to strip Morgan of his power by refusing to acknowledge it and failing to produce the preferred response of subordination, instead offering humour, insults, and sarcasm.
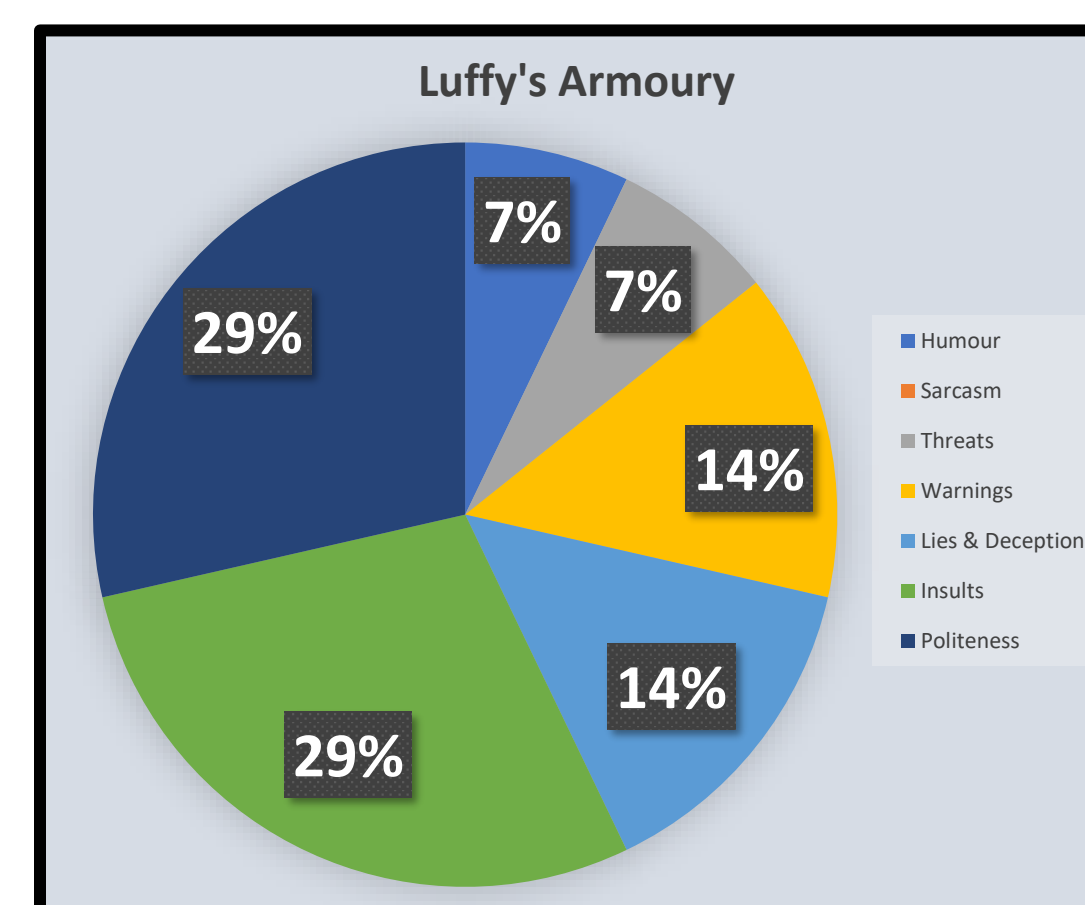
- Luffy
Ideology: despite wanting to claim power, he wants to change piracy for the better.
Power: aims to strip the power held by Alvida primarily through false politeness and Buggy primarily through insults.
Positioning: Luffy starts taking the lead in the interactions, placing himself in a position of power.

6. Conclusion

- Watching how the fictional characters use language to fight for positive change could motivate or influence viewers to take similar verbal actions of rebellion as they realise they could tip the balance of unequal power relations in their favour.
- Simpson, Mayr, and Statham (2019) argue that powerful groups can influence language use. Media/entertainment could initiate a challenge of social structure and orders of discourse by showing people that subordination in the face of power is not the only option.
- One Piece shows its audience that power is needed to create a movement and that power can be taken from others by using language as a weapon. It could also be argued that One Piece presents the narrative that good will prevail. Based on this, popular culture could be a tool for planting the seeds of revolution in the minds of youth.
- The desire for change, however, means little if no action is taken as a result. It could be argued that increasing resistance themes in popular culture could trigger people to take action against institutional power to create positive change.

7. Real-world examples

	Humour	Sarcasm	Threats	Warnings	Insults	Politeness	Further Examples:
Greta Thunberg: Climate activism	√		√	√	√		
Joey Carbstrong: Animal activism	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Benjamin Zephaniah: Vegan Poetry	√		√	√			

LinkedIN

8. References

- Fairclough, N. (2015) Language And Power. Third Edn. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Gocen, G. & Okur, A. (2013) 'The Effects of TV on Speech Education', Educational Research and Reviews, 8(2), pp.63-68. Available At: 10.5897/ERR12.156.
- Independent Advisor (2023) Netflix Statistics 2024: Subscriber Amount, Time Watched, And Platform Growth. Available At: www.Independent.Co.Uk/Advisor/Vpn/Netflix-Statistics (Accessed: 8 January 2024).
- Simpson, P., Mayr, A. And Statham, S. (2019) Language And Power: A Resource Book For Students. Second Edn. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.