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MISDIRECTION AS A LINGUISTIC MANIPULATION

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Language is a powerful tool not only for communication but also for control. Although the language can be used to inform and persuade, it can also be misleading. The misleading function of language is directly used to misrepresent the current reality. The usage of a misleading function of language is called misdirection. Misdirection manipulates the listeners' attention, leading them away from facts and bringing false information. Misdirection as linguistic manipulation is a rhetorical strategy in which language is used intentionally to influence interpretation. This manipulation often relies on word choice, tone, and structure to guide perception in a way that benefits the speaker.

Many researchers have studied misdirection as a manipulation strategy. Leech investigated how misdirection techniques focus on controlling what people see (1980). Sharpe explores how diverting someone's attention away from something important is to hide or disguise what is happening (1988). Environmental sociologists Freudenburg and Alario investigated how politicians divert public attention from bad news and military leaders use tactics like feints to confuse enemies (2007).

Linguistic misdirection is effective because it controls how the individuals interpret the received information. Focusing attention on exact words or phrases leads to distraction from facts. Linguistic misdirection as a tool of manipulation is characterized by several features. It directs the audience's attention to specific concepts, influencing the focus. These features are ambiguity, emotional appeals, selective omission, and framing.

The use of ambiguity brings uncertainty, giving multiple interpretations. Emotional appeals provide affective processes, often influencing critical reasoning. Omission of information affects comprehension and the process of making a decision. Framing transforms the perception by contextualizing information with particular structures.

Linguistic misdirection is used in different spheres of our lives: politics, marketing, social media, and even personal communication. For instance, phrases like `The White House announced` pay attention to the individual, for example, the personality of the President, instead of the institution, masking who is responsible for this decision.

The sentence `I thought the story was about the hero's journey, but then, plot twist, it was actually about the villain's redemption` sets up an expectation by requesting the concept of the `hero's journey`, bringing the audience to focus on the protagonist's narrative. This technique creates an impactful surprise, illustrating how language can be used strategically to subvert audience expectations.

Conclusion. Misdirection is a linguistic manipulation tool, that is used as a powerful strategy for controlling and shaping individuals' perceptions. By recognizing this strategy, humans are able to defend themselves against manipulation in a better way, which is essential in nowadays world.

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