



Unspeak: How Words Become Weapons, How Weapons Become a Message, and How That Message Becomes Reality

By Steven Poole

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What do the phrases “pro-life,” “intelligent design,” and “the war on terror” have in common? Each of them is a name for something that smuggles in a highly charged political opinion. Words and phrases that function in this special way go by many names. Some writers call them “evaluative-descriptive terms.” Others talk of “terministic screens” or discuss the way debates are “framed.” Author Steven Poole calls them Unspeak. Unspeak represents an attempt by politicians, interest groups, and business corporations to say something without saying it, without getting into an argument and so having to justify itself. At the same time, it tries to unspeak — in the sense of erasing or silencing — any possible opposing point of view by laying a claim right at the start to only one way of looking at a problem. Recalling the vocabulary of George Orwell’s 1984, as an Unspeak phrase becomes a widely used term of public debate, it saturates the mind with one viewpoint while simultaneously makes an opposing view ever more difficult to enunciate. In this fascinating book, Poole traces modern Unspeak and reveals how the evolution of language changes the way we think.

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Unspeak: How Words Become Weapons, How Weapons Become a Message, and How That Message Becomes Reality By Steven Poole Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1635064 in Books
- Published on: 2007-05-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x .72" w x 6.38" l, .71 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Politicians are held in such low esteem these days that most people assume they are lying or twisting the truth until proven otherwise. Now, as if to confirm that bit of popular wisdom, *Guardian* contributor Poole (*Trigger Happy: Videogames and the Entertainment Revolution*), addresses "unspeak," his term for politically loaded language in which a sound bite implies an entire unspoken political argument. With ample outrage and barbed wit, Poole unpacks some of the most prevalent—and politically charged—expressions animating today's political and media discourse, from "intelligent design" to "global warming," "collateral damage" to the "war on terror." His targets are staples of liberal complaint against current ideology, with much of the book—and his contempt—devoted to disentangling the propaganda that has been marshaled on behalf of the "war on terror" and the war in Iraq. Poole's goal is not only to shed light on how politicians manipulate language to justify their actions but also to shame the media into rejecting the official line rather than parroting government talking points. This book takes no word at face value, which will anger some and enlighten others, just as a book of social and linguistic commentary should. (May)

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From [Booklist](#)

Addressing the politics of language in excoriating fashion, journalist and author Poole (*Trigger Happy: Video Games and the Entertainment Revolution*, 2000) scrolls through ubiquitous terms such as *war on terror*, *pro-life*, and *Operation Just Cause*, labeling these phrases as unspeak for their attempt to silence any possible opposing viewpoint by casting an issue in only one light. Arguing that such phrases are not neutral but "smuggle in political opinion . . . in a remarkably efficient way," he proceeds to analyze the implications of an ongoing effort by politicians and interest groups to manipulate our language, for example, substituting *global warming* with *climate change* as a way of recasting the debate about environmental pollution in less-frightening terms. Similarly, what was once referred to as *creationism* is now called *intelligent design* by fundamentalists intent on passing off their religious beliefs as scientific theory. Furthermore, Poole maintains that journalists often parrot terms handed to them by corporations and politicians, aiding in passing these phrases into mainstream usage. Thought-provoking analysis of an insidious trend. *Joanne Wilkinson*
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Review

A study of [UNSPEAK] is not just timely and welcome but (you'll feel once you've read this book) urgent. ...we should all be grateful to Steven Poole for his public spiritedness in undertaking it. Will someone please give him a medal, or a government office, or a slot on the radio with daily updates? Claire Harman, EVENING STANDARD Poole has a sharp eye for hidden meanings and sub-texts. His account of politician s' addiction to the word "community" is a tour de force. By emphasising that one should always "look to the language", and going about his task with such forensic brio, Po Francis Wheen, THE LIBERAL Steven Poole is to rhetorical doublespeak what the small boy was to the naked emperor: a pin to prick the speech bubbles SUNDAY HERALD Steven Poole is to rhetorical doublespeak what the small boy was to the naked emperor: a pin to prick the speech bubbles ... UNSPEAK sets out the case against, and also offers forensic analysis of, some of the most notorious examples he has found... UNSP SCOTSMAN

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Inez Morales:

Unspeak: How Words Become Weapons, How Weapons Become a Message, and How That Message Becomes Reality can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to put every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Unspeak: How Words Become Weapons, How Weapons Become a Message, and How That Message Becomes Reality however doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource details that maybe you can be one of it. This great information could draw you into completely new stage of crucial contemplating.

Ronald Adams:

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