Purpose: This course concerns how discourse empowers dictators. “Discourse” is a higher-order element of the neural process that compiles and interprets texts; a “text” is any communicative event. A single spoken text is called an “utterance”; spoken text in general is called “talk.” Linguistic discourse selects among cues that recur in language and among arrangements of those recurrent cues, while coordinating their combination into utterances and graphic texts. This course mainly concerns linguistic text, but of course political discourse also proceeds in many non-linguistic events.

Evaluation of performance: Students will write an essay of 5000 words using the evidence in the assigned readings to evaluate the argument made in the lectures. The paper will be due Monday after examination week. It will be submitted electronically through turnitin.com. No paper copies will be accepted, and there is no reason to email the paper to me.

For ease of on-screen reading, please remember to single-space the paper.

Here is the prompt: How does political discourse empower dictators?

An assignment to evaluate an argument means that students may agree, disagree, or express skepticism concerning all or part of the argument. Because disagreeing is more difficult, students writing papers critical of the argument presented in lectures receive a third of a letter grade as extra credit. This bonus should not be sought; it compensates for the greater difficulty of critical thinking and exists to make the student neutral with regard to accepting or rejecting the argument in the course. In either case the student’s paper must show knowledge of the argument.

An assignment to use the evidence in the assigned readings means that each essay will be evaluated in part by how many of the assigned readings the student integrates into the evaluation of the effect of discourse on politics. Do not discuss the assigned readings one by one; group evidence from various readings by how it relates to the thesis. For example, various assigned readings document the presence of different kinds of spatial cues in political discourse. Discuss the spatial cue in question, and provide references to each essay that mentions that particular spatial cue in political discourse.

ALERT: Read and follow the posted guidance on “Rules for References” and “Paraphrasing.”
Schedule of Readings and Lecture Topics:

Week 1: Collective Action in Politics and Discursive Distance


Week 2: Sumerian and Ancient Egyptian


Week 3-5: Greek, Arabic and Russian


Week 6: Latin in Europe


Week 7-8: European Standard Languages: Spanish, English, and French


Week 9: Chinese and Japanese


Week 10: Wrapping Up