NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS IN ADJECTIVES VERSUS NOUNS:

THE TEST CASE OF *POOR*

by

LAURA GREIFNER

(Under the Direction of Lewis C. Howe)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the extent to which a difference in grammatical form—e.g., noun or adjective—can convey a difference in a speaker's attitude toward elements of the discourse. The distributions of adjectival *poor* (i.e. *poor people*) and the nominal *the poor* are observed from two separate news networks, Fox and MSNBC, representing opposing sides of the political spectrum. A hybrid analysis, linguistic in nature but incorporating aspects of mass communication theory, compares the instances of adjectival *poor* with nominalized *poor* between the two networks and then uses context, discourse analysis, and media framing to illustrate the differences. No major differences were found in the frequency of forms between the two networks. While the noun phrase *the poor* seems to occur in more sympathetic situations, a multitude of factors including the topic, context, and speakers' tone coexist with the choice of noun or adjective and affect the way the term may be interpreted.

INDEX WORDS: adjectives, media bias, media frames, discourse analysis

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LAURA GREIFNER

BA, University of Virginia, 2005

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2009

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LAURA GREIFNER

Major Professor:	Lewis C. Howe
Committee:	Sarah Blackwell
	William A. Kretzschmar Jr.

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2009

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1. Introduction

This study aims to demonstrate the implications of using an adjective or a noun to describe a group of people, using a case study as an example to illustrate the factors involved in the way this choice is perceived. Nouns are considered to be more exhaustively attributive than are adjectives, which perform more of a predicate function, indicating one particular trait of a group but not the essence of the group itself (Wierzbicka 1986). Mautner (2007) claimed that the noun *the elderly* had a more negative connotation than the adjective or predicative *elderly*. Since a noun theoretically entails all of the qualities associated with its definition, her assertion may be true if the speaker associates being elderly with negative qualities. However, it does not stand that all nouns automatically carry a more negative sentiment with the label than adjectives do, as Mautner seems to imply. As an example, *the poor* seems to be more positive and more sympathetic than the adjective *poor*, as in *poor people*. Compare the adjective[1]:

(1)   You can live in a nice house and still do a lot for **poor** people. And he still is. (Fox

        O'Reilly 2007)

and contrast with the noun version, for example:

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[1] All examples were extracted from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008). The keyword *poor* has been emphasized in all tokens. Following each token is the network, the name of the moderator or program, and the year.

(2)   He made it work and created a middle class. We have got to make capitalism work for the

        poor. (Fox Cavuto 2006)

        In the examples above and elsewhere throughout this paper, it will be demonstrated that

the tendency is for adjectival *poor* to read as more negative, less sympathetic, and more distant

from the perspective of the speaker toward the subject. In the first example, the actions of living

in a nice house and helping poor people are juxtaposed, and joined by the word *still*, as though

they would not be expected to go together. Both examples contain an example of unequal power

relations: the speaker has the option to help or not help the poor, and is therefore in a position of

power. The referent of *poor* is in a beneficiary, and thus less powerful position. However, in the

second example, there is more of a feeling of urgency and obligation surrounding the need to

help, as in "we have got to". In addition, the concept of helping the poor is linked to "making it

work" which is clearly a positive notion according to the speaker. This contributes to the element

of sympathy evident in the token.

        Scheufele (2000: 309) asserted that "subtle changes in the wording of the description of a

situation might affect how audience members interpret" some situation and that these changes

could be "subtle nuances in wording and syntax". The noun/adjective distinction of *poor*

therefore has the ability to evoke separate reactions from readers or hearers. However, it is not

merely the distinction between noun and adjective that causes this differentiation; there are many

factors at work here, including the choice of surrounding words and the aspects of poverty that

the speaker wishes to highlight.

        It has been demonstrated that language can demonstrate bias in the media (van Dijk

2000) and that language of the media affects the public's attitudes (McCombs & Bell 1996). If a

difference in linguistic form implies a difference in attitude, then these attitudes can be subconsciously suggested during a broadcast.

The intricacies of the choice of grammatical structure of noun versus adjective can be difficult to extract at the surface level, but may be illuminated by a discourse analysis of competing news networks that have been shown to embrace opposite ideologies. The claim presented in this thesis is that the adjective/noun distinction serves only as a guide in determining the intended interpretation of a particular instance of *poor* and, moreover, that specific contextual factors must be considered in calculating the overall pragmatic effect of any given token. This study is primarily linguistic in that it compares two grammatical forms using critical discourse analysis, but it also incorporates aspects of mass communication theory in order to understand the contextual impact of language choice and usage. I begin with a survey of the data, extracted from a corpus of spoken English, and then proceed to a more in-depth critical discourse and frame analysis (see Entman 1993). The formal syntactic differences between nouns and adjectives will not be discussed in detail here, nor will the political factors influencing the motivations behind each network's willingness to present their positions in the way that they do. The focus is on the differences between the occurrences of *poor* from the two separate sources and how the two forms appear in different contexts even across both networks. This hybrid analysis contributes to our understanding of the differences between these two parts of speech and how the attitudes that they convey and the constitution of the audience affect the decision to use one of these two forms.

First, a brief summary of the relevant studies and literature is presented. The following chapter explains and justifies the methodology involved in the current study and reveals some of the areas in which *poor* appears in the corpus. After the basic distribution of tokens is shown, a

contextual and media framing analysis will demonstrate what can be learned from the

occurrences of the two forms. Finally, the paper closes with some explanation of the possible

impact of and reasons for the trends that are found and a short conclusion.

2. Review of previous literature

2.1   Introduction

        In reviewing the previous literature on the subject, I will focus primarily on three studies

of particularly "loaded" words that can have an effect on hearers. Two of the words, *elderly* and

lame, are used to describe marginalized groups of people and have the potential to cause offense.

The third study looks at words that co-occur with criminal activities and newspaper tendencies to

align them with parts of the world. The studies analyze semantic prosody of contexts to obtain

the evaluative senses of their target words. Semantic prosody refers to words taking on the

meanings of their common collocates (see Leech 1974 and Sinclair 1991). In addition, a framing

analysis study of language in the printed media demonstrates how particular schemas can trigger

associations on the part of the audience. Also discussed are a few implications about the

differences between different grammatical forms and finally, a few notes about what the current

thoughts and preferred terminologies are for some of these marginalized groups of people, such

as the disabled.

2.2   Orpin (2005)

        Orpin (2005) used the practice of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989, 1992; van

Dijk 1997) to study particular words designating corruption and criminal activities from a corpus

of British newspapers. Her study found that certain words indicating what she believed to be a

more negative connotation often described events that occurred outside of Britain and that

particular words for activities were more commonly associated with certain countries. The underlying assumption of her study is that in a corpus, a word's collocates "provide a semantic profile of [that] word [i.e. its semantic prosody], and thus enable the researcher to gain insight into the semantic, connotative and prosodic meanings of a word" (39). From research she conducted in 1995, Orpin had noted that the word *sleaze* seemed to be preferred over *corruption* when referring to events in public life in Britain and the U.S., but similar unsavory conduct in other parts of the world, such as Italy or Pakistan, was more likely to be described by *corruption*. In this study, she intended to explore these earlier findings further by delving into the ideological implications and exploring the distributional details of other common collocates. After determining that the most relevant "synonyms, near-synonyms, and hyponyms" (41) of *corruption* were *bribery, corruption, cronyism, graft, impropriety/ies, malpractice(s), nepotism,* and *sleaze,* she extracted instances of these words from four prominent British publications and studied which countries and realms of life (finance, sports) seemed to be more likely to be associated with each word. The concordances seemed to imply that, for example, *bribery* and *corruption* are mentioned more closely in connection with the countries of Britain, Pakistan and Italy, while *graft* is often used to describe activities in Italy and China. Italy also seems to appear with more than its representative share of *bribery*, *corruption* and *graft*. As Orpin points out, this might have the effect of reinforcing existing national stereotypes. In terms of what she calls "domains", while all of the words are linked with politics, *bribery* is further linked with business and sports and *malpractice* is connected with financial, legal and medical institutions.

However, Orpin does not take her analysis as far as she could; most of her findings are quite predictable, and there are areas where she could have explored further or added caveats to bolster her reasoning. For example, she seems quick to point out that "*bribery*, *corruption*, *graft*,

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nepotism and (to a very slight degree) *malpractice* all show a connection with criminal activities"
(51). This seems quite unsurprising, as these activities are, in fact, all either criminal or
potentially related to crime. She also documents speaker attitudes that appear to indicate negative
connotations: *rampant* and *rife* collocate with *corruption*. "The semantic profiles of the words
bribery, corruption, graft and nepotism appear to have particularly negative connotations. All are
associated with criminal activities" (53). In this matter, it is doubtful that statistical analysis
would be expected to reveal any significantly new aspects of the distributions of these lexical
items. These words all do represent criminal activities, so naturally they would come with some
negative connotations, although how she defines "negative" and measures the degree of
negativity is not explained.

Additionally, some of Orpin's methods are not ideal for a corpus study that seeks to
undercover issues of semantic prosody. She fails to account for some possible correlations that
do not imply causation. First, her token count is so low that it is entirely possible that several of
her stories are about one isolated incident, about which multiple newspapers might have run a
number of stories. In that case, it would be natural for the same word to appear multiple times if
in conjunction with a particular crime. For example, some of the unique collocates for *graft* (with
the meaning of extortion, or goods obtained via extortion) include *di Pietro, jail, given,
influence, Milan, money, opportunities, paid, years, 1993*. It is easy to envision a situation in
which the Italian politician Antonio di Pietro was involved in a case of graft in Milan in 1993. In
that case, naturally we would expect to find his name and the location, consequences (such as
jail), and time of the offense associated with his story. Many of the words—*given, influence,
money, opportunities, paid*—have to do with the very definition of graft. If a story about this
crime ran in all four of Orpin's source newspapers, naturally we would expect to find high

instances of those words, but it does not necessarily mean that British reporters are quicker to use the term *graft* in conjunction with Italian crimes, which seems to be what Orpin is implying. Additionally, many news stories make use of information from a press release, news service, or press conference. If a word or phrase was used in one of these source materials, it is far more likely to appear in the resulting stories.

Moreover, the so-called "near-synonyms" do not cover the same semantic space: *bribery* and *nepotism*, for example, refer to more specific types of disreputable actions than do *corruption* or *impropriety*. Therefore, it seems problematic to compare which term is more favored under the same circumstances. And there are not any obvious synonyms for *nepotism*, so a reporter has far fewer lexical choices for describing such a situation than for choosing to describe an instance of *sleaze*. Perhaps a kind of crime is simply more common in a particular area, such as kidnapping in Venezuela, or online music piracy on college campuses. All of these issues do not necessarily nullify all of her results, but the analysis should at least acknowledge that these possible confounding factors exist.

Orpin's study is significant in its treatment of words triggering other words, associations, and judgments, particularly in a media setting. These are all concepts raised in the current study. However, she does not consider the motivations behind the usage of the different words or how the presence of readers is factored into the process of choosing one word over another.

2.3   Mautner (2007)

Mautner (2007) performs a similar study of semantic prosody in her corpus analysis of the word *elderly* and its collocates which, she claims, reinforce certain stereotypes about aging. In her work, Mautner claims that the word *elderly* has specific negative associations, connected

with its frequent co-occurrences with words like *infirm*, *disabled* and *frail* that give the

connotation of advanced age being associated with "discourses of care, disability and

vulnerability" (51). Per the definition of semantic prosody, she believes *elderly* has acquired

some of the negative connotations associated with these common collocates. Her study used a far

larger corpus than did Orpin's; Wordbanks Online[2] comprises not only newspapers but in

addition books, magazines, unscripted speech and radio broadcasts, mostly from Britain but from

sources from the U.S. and Australia.

Mautner believes that a large number of the attested lexical collocates are related to

"discourses of care" which indicate a negative relation to the word elderly.

> They include not only more of the fairly general expressions such as *relative* and
> *population*, but also domain-specific nouns that once again reflect semantic
> preferences clustering around discourses of illness and care, namely patients and
> homes…significant adjectival and adverbial collocates …come from the same
> (prosodically negative) domains: *infirm, frail, handicapped, mentally*, and *blind*.
> (57)

She also notes that *elderly* appears in the same contexts as words such as *young* and *children*,

which may at first look paradoxical but actually demonstrates "the shared fate of two vulnerable

social groups" (59).

Regarding her findings, Mautner says "[i]ntuitively, one would expect *elderly* to have a

comparatively more negative semantic prosody when it functions as a noun phrase head (*the*

elderly) than when it serves in an attributive or predicative syntactic role" (57). However, she

does not explain what she means by this or why this might be the case. Like Orpin, Mautner uses

her own judgment to determine which of the collocates have negative semantic values. While

some words such as *sick* may be agreed to have a pessimistic sense inherent in them, others are

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[2] www.collinslanguage.com/wordbanks

less clear-cut. *Care*, for example, which occurs on the list of lexical collocates of *elderly* (57) could be negative in the sense of someone infirm requiring care, certainly, but the concept of caring for another human being can undoubtedly also be construed as a positive one. Additionally, she fails to acknowledge that, quite obviously, older people are factually often more likely to be infirm, sick, disabled, in need of care and so on than are others and thus are more likely to have these words occur in contexts near to the word *elderly*. Without acknowledging this oversight, there is no way to prove that the co-occurrence of these words indicates a causal relation of a negative view of *elderly*.

Mautner also does not attempt to take into account who the speaker or writer of these words may have been, despite noting the co-incidence of discourses of care for vulnerable social groups. Every speaker has a rhetorical agenda, though it may be subconscious; in particular advocates for traditionally vulnerable populations such as the elderly, poor or disabled have agendas when they speak, and for the words that they choose to describe their group of interest. As Fowler (1991) explains,

> What is being said is that, because the institutions of news reporting and presentation are socially, economically and politically situated, all news is always reported from some particular angle. The structure of the medium encodes significances which derive from the respective positions within society of the publishing or broadcasting organization. (10)

The idea of "encoded significance" is related to the difference between nouns and adjectives in choosing how to describe a person or group, as Mautner briefly mentioned, although she did not justify her reasoning. Using a noun such as *the elderly* means that the speaker has an idea about what kinds of characteristics elderly people have, and that this speaker

believes that someone described by that word possesses all of those qualities. But using an

adjective, as in *older people*, indicates only that the people in question can be categorized as

having some, not all, of the characteristics in question, whatever they may be. Therefore, the

term *elderly* is seen by some (including Mautner, clearly) to be harsher in some way than *older*

people. It would have been insightful had she worked into her paper an explanation of why

sympathizers and/or adversaries of these "vulnerable social groups" might make use one or the

other form.

Wierzbicka (1986) comments on this distinction between noun and adjective selection

and what they might mean to speakers. She refers readers to Jespersen (1968:74), who pointed

out that that there is a cross-linguistic tendency to make a noun/adjective distinction between

certain kinds of items. He notes that the words for *stone*, *tree*, *knife* and *woman* are nouns

"everywhere"—that is, in various languages he surveyed—just as the words for *big*, *old*, *bright*,

and *gray* have always been found to be adjectives (353). Wierzbicka expands Jespersen's

observation by claiming that even though languages often have many pairs of words that are

essentially synonymous but for one being a noun and the other an adjective (cf. *circle* and *round,*

or *fool* and *stupid*), there is a semantic weight associated with each part of speech and thus a very

slight difference in meaning between the two parts of the pair. She proposes that human

characteristics that are seen as permanent or important tend to be described using nouns, because

they denote a category or class, and that adjectives are seen more as mere descriptions of

particular traits. Wierzbicka offers the following examples to support her proposal:

> One might describe a person as tall, thin, blond, freckled, and so on. But if one
> categorizes a person as a hunchback, a cripple, a leper, a virgin, or a teenager, one
> is not mentioning one characteristic among many; rather, one is putting that
> person into a certain category seen at the moment as "unique". One is putting a

label on that person, as one might put a label on a jar of preserves. One might say that a noun is compatible to an identifying construction: "That's the kind of person that this person is." An adjective, on the other hand, is comparable to a simple predicate compatible with many other such predicates: "this person is X, Y, Z". (358)

She suggests that an adjective defines an abstract class, but not necessarily a salient, recognizable "kind."

In describing how a noun, in contrast to an adjective, represents an encompassing of not just a feature but a kind, Wierzbicka writes

Nouns embody concepts which cannot be reduced to any combination of features. They stand for categories which can be identified by means of a certain positive image, or a certain positive stereotype, but an image which transcends all enumerable features. (361)

However, it is uncertain why the image or stereotype in question is necessarily a "positive" one. Mautner certainly felt that the noun form of *the elderly* had a more negative element; it may well vary among different adjectives or depend on the point of view of the speaker. If a noun more exhaustively defines a kind, then one factor should be whether the speaker views this kind sympathetically or not. I am questioning whether the trend that Mautner raises, that of nouns carrying more negative sentiment than adjectives do, by examining *poor* as a test case.

2.4   Aaron (forthcoming)

Aaron (forthcoming) studied the word *lame* and how its usage has evolved over time, from describing a physical handicap to becoming gradually an indicator of anything negative, going from concrete to abstract meanings and descriptors. Following a usage-based approach to semantic change (Traugott & Dasher 2002, Kemmer & Barlow 2000), she argues that during a

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period when a word is acquiring new meanings, the multiple meanings coexist and influence each other (18-19). During this process, more innovative meanings can emerge from older meanings, and so a word's definition may travel from concrete to more abstract. She demonstrates the phenomenon of semantic retention, by which words preserve remnants of older meanings while slowly acquiring new ones:

> I propose that modern *lame*, a polysemous form, has a newer, abstract social meaning that shows retention of certain distributional (and thus semantic) patterns from when it was used primarily to refer to disability. I further suggest that the elements that were retained were those that frequently occurred in disability contexts. Thus, new contexts of use—giving rise to innovative meanings—retain some, but not all, of the elements commonly associated with *lame* in more conservative contexts. (5-6)

In this way, she says, meanings commonly associated with disability in the early 20th century have shaped the semantic path *lame* has taken.

Using data from the British National Corpus (BNC)[3], the *Time Magazine* corpus (TIME)[4], and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English[5], Aaron utilizes the notion of semantic prosody more convincingly than do Orpin and Mautner, because she does not rely on intuition to gauge whether words have a positive or negative connotation. Instead, she merely observes whether the term is used as something contrastive or non-contrastive to the incidence of *lame* in the given token (12): "In coding, my own evaluation of the 'good' or 'bad' semantics of descriptors was not taken into account, but rather only the particular discursive role of each descriptor in relation to *lame*". An example of a contrastive meaning with *lame* is:

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[3] http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/
[4] http://corpus.byu.edu/time/
[5] http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/micase/

(3)   For my life I cannot understand, what is it makes this man now so lame, so hesitant, so crippled, who was wont to be hale and prompt enough. (BNC, HGG)

Above, *hale* and *prompt* are clearly seen as in opposition to *lame*. An example of a non-contrastive descriptor is *careless*, below:

(4)   The lame and the careless are taken down quickly. (TIME, 23 February 1987)

After studying the correlates diachronically, she accounts for the negative meaning and generally abstract referents that the word has today. Interestingly, Aaron does not claim that the use of the term has anything to do with any remaining stigma attached to the vestiges of the meaning of the disability. This is relevant because she is attempting to explain motivation or lack thereof on the part of the speakers, "those who defend the use of lame in non-disability contexts as benign or who simply see no association may indeed have a point" (35). In this way, Aaron more fully completes her account of the usages of this term better than Orpin and Mautner do, because she gives reasons for the word selection of the speaker. While one criticism of the previous two articles was that the researchers did not attempt to address speakers' perspectives, Aaron at least acknowledges them by demonstrating that *lame*'s current usage should not offend, at least in theory, because it has cut all semantic ties to its preceding meaning(s). This is of note to the current study because it approaches the concept of speaker motivation, and of subconscious conveyance of connotations. The study of *lame* presents an excellent model for the study of *poor* because both represent marginalized groups. However, instead of observing the semantic trajectory of a word over time, the present study is able to more closely account for speakers'

perspectives in using forms of *poor* because of the opposing attitudes typically used by the news network sources toward the group in question.

2.5   Smith (2005)

Smith (2005) employed a media framing analysis (Entman 1993; Scheufele 2000) to compare language describing burn injuries in U.S. print coverage from 1990. She tallied instances of the phrase *burn victim* versus instances of *burn survivor*. Discoveries included the use of media frames to place emphasis on certain aspects of the injuries and an abundance of "disabling language," defined as language that perpetuates stereotypes or uses demeaning or outdated terms to reference persons with disabilities.

Smith's study is based upon the social model of disability, which posits that instead of the physical or mental impairment, it is society's response to the impairment that causes oppression and social exclusion. Through correspondence with an advocacy group, Smith determined that the phrases *burn survivor* and *burn victim* have different connotations (13). "While victim refers to someone who has given up or to one who has no control over his or her situation, survivor signifies someone who is reclaiming his or her life and is thriving despite the injury." She chose the years 1990 and 2000 as a basis of comparison due to the 1990 passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act, to see if the decade allowed for the news media to make changes to eliminate demeaning terminology, examining not just the language itself but also the media's tendency to "frame" the issues in a certain light. In 1990, 11 articles were analyzed: two with "burn survivor," and nine using "burn victim." In 2000, there was a significant increase in the total number of articles located and analyzed: 66 articles total, six for "burn survivor," and 60 for "burn victim."

Media framing demonstrates which aspects of a topic are highlighted as being the most salient in order to call them to the audience's attention. After application of a framing analysis, Smith found there to be no major differences in the media frames used between the 1990 and 2000 articles. The media placed particular emphasis on the gruesome aspects, such as pain and the lasting physical disfigurement of a burn injury. While psychological care was mentioned, a much greater emphasis was placed on the graphic details of the physical care involved in treating a person who has sustained a burn injury. In framing the stories of *burn survivors*, the media tended to emphasize lower socio-economic or minority status as the underlying cause for the burn injury and linked this status with violence against women and children as underlying causes.

Smith concluded that the media can choose to emphasize certain aspects of a situation— in this case, the "sensational" side of an injury and the suffering of the injured—in order to fulfill the audience's preconceptions of what they think a burn injury should comprise. Consequently, per the social model of disability, society perpetuates its marginalization of the injured based upon what the media tells them to think about in their schema of persons with burn injuries. The frame analysis demonstrated that the media selected which language to use and thus impacted how the injuries, and the group of people, could be interpreted by the audience. Framing and schemas are of great relevance to the current study in that they can demonstrate associations or positive/negative connotations at a separate communicative level. In addition, Smith's work is significant here because correlations can be drawn between the disabled and poor populations due to their similarities in social status.

2.6   Current preferences

Potential negative connotations of words are significant considerations when determining the appropriate designation for groups of people, particularly groups that are concerned about the construction of their identity with respect to the rest of society. The present usage guidelines state that *elderly* is currently a less desirable term than *older people*, according to a media guide on reporting issued by The International Longevity Center and the ageism campaign group Aging Services of California. Released in early 2009, the manual says it aims to help journalists report stories in a "fair contemporary and unbiased" manner. From its preface:

> It is ironic…that at the same time Americans are beginning to see an unfolding of the entire life cycle for a majority, we continue to have embedded in our culture a fear of growing old, manifest by negative stereotypes and language that belittles the very nature of growing old, its complexities and tremendous variability. This report is an important step in overcoming ageist language and beliefs by providing journalists and others who work in the media with an appropriate body of knowledge, including a lexicon that helps redefine and navigate this new world. (7)

As a related aside, this group, Aging Services of California, changed its name in 2006 from California Association of Homes and Services for the Aging—a switch, it must be noted, from *aging* as a noun to *aging* as an adjective. A press release from the organization calls the new moniker "simpler and more inclusive".

A similar distinction can be seen in the difference between the term *midget* and its current preferred alternative, *little people*. In July 2009, the interest group Little People of America petitioned the Federal Communications Commission to ban the word *midget* from television as, according to a statement on the LPA's Web site, it is "a word that many people of short stature consider a slur and a word closely associated with the public *objectification* of people of short

stature" [emphasis added]. It need not be noted that *midget* is a noun and *little* merely an adjective modifying a kind of people. This demonstrates that presenting a minority, marginalized or vulnerable group as a particular subsection of society (*little people*) is seen as preferable to making this group seem like a completely distinct unit, (*midgets, the aging*) apart from the norm.

This shift in terminology preferences has been called "person-first language" or "people-first language and is intended to place the emphasis on the individual, not the disability (LaForge 1991). Examples include *persons with disabilities* instead of *disabled people,* or *person with autism* instead of *autistic person*. However, there is not always agreement—by advocates, researchers, or the subjects themselves—on which type of terminology is preferred. In a study on usage of preferred language terms in rehabilitation journals, LaForge concluded that

> [l]anguage relating to recognizable disability which put the person or people first and disability second was scored as preferred. For example: "person with a spinal cord injury" or "people who are deaf" was counted as preferred vis-à-vis their non-preferred counterparts of "visually-impaired person" or "the mentally retarded." (50)

However, whether as a backlash to this type of thinking or no, certain opposition to person-first language has emerged. Bickford (2004) reports that there is some dissent in the community of the visually impaired over how they prefer to be referred to, and the National Federation for the Blind has rejected person-first terminology (Jernigan 1993), as have many in the hearing impaired and autism communities (Smeltzer et al. 2004; Brownlow 2007). The reasoning seems to be that many of these individuals feel that their conditions are intrinsic parts of their identities and do not wish to de-emphasize them. In addition, Vaughan (2009) feels that person-first language can be awkward and tedious to say or write, and that "the awkwardness of the preferred language focuses on the disability in a new and potentially negative way". Lynch et al. (1994)

found that although about one-third of respondents could not detect a difference between the people-first and disability-first language, the majority of respondents indicated a preference for the people-first variant.

2.7   Summary

    To understand the appropriate context for any of these assertions, it is necessary to acknowledge that social constructs can in fact affect the use of language. According to Durkheim (1982:59), a *fait social* 'social fact' is "any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; or, which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations." Cameron (2007:6) explains the concept of constraints as "not simply inconvenient restrictions on behavior…[t]hey provide the basis for recognizing systematic, patterned behavior". So, a preference for a particular variant (here, the nominal grammatical structure over the adjectival, or vice versa) can demonstrate a pattern, and possibly reveal a correlation with the point of view of the speaker. In this situation, the notion of *elderly* itself—or *lame* or *victim* or whatever the quality may be—may be acting as a social fact that manifests itself in language when used as a noun. This is an instance of language indexing someone as part of a group based on the idea of constraints, as described above. Cameron also notes that "as social actors enact social identities, they do so in ways that suggest knowledge of and orientation to one or more institutional frameworks…[h]ence, an interaction exists between the discursive construction of social identities and the institutional frameworks which provide context" (7). Thus, an institutional framework in society, such as a mass media outlet, can provide a cornerstone for using a word as

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a social fact, and a pattern of systematic preference for a particular form might be able to shed light on the construction of that social identity.

The case studies of specific words demonstrated how the use of semantic prosody can help in evaluating implications of terms such as *elderly* or *bribery*, but left some work wanting in the area of speaker motivation, associated connotations, and the role of society. Smith's study of language surrounding burn injuries using a framing analysis was helpful in factoring in associations and schemas. The current study adopts a combined approach by studying formations of the target word *poor*, conjecturing about speakers' intentions or even subconscious tendencies, and taking into account trends popularized by the recent trend of person-first language.

3. Methodology

3.1　　Introduction

In this chapter, the selection of the corpus and the two networks used as sources are explained. Examples of the two contrasting forms of *poor* are presented, as are instances of *poor* that were not counted in the tally. This chapter presents an overview of how *poor* appears in the corpus from both sources and serves as a starting point for a discussion of the relevance of context and media frames, explained in the following chapter.

3.2　　The test case: *poor*

Mautner claimed that "[i]ntuitively, one would expect *elderly* to have a comparatively more negative semantic prosody when it functions as a noun phrase head (*the elderly*) than when it serves in an attributive or predicative syntactic role" (57). However, this does not seem to be a general trend for all adjectives of person. Specifically, *poor* behaves differently than the way Mautner describes, and so will serve as an appropriate test for her claim. The adjectival form, *poor people,* has a more negative connotation than the nominalized *the poor*—almost as though the speaker is distancing himself more from the group he is describing. Compare the senses of sympathy evoked by the following contrastive examples:

(5)　　How do you know I have a lot of money? I— I give away an enormous amount of money
　　　　to **poor** people. (Fox O'Reilly 2007)

(6)   Those who got out were people with SUVs and automobiles and air fares who could get

out. Those who could not get out were the **poor** who rely on public buses to get out. Your

Web site says that your department assumes primary responsibility for a national disaster.

If you knew a hurricane 3 storm was coming, why weren't buses, trains, planes, cruise

ships, trucks provided on Friday, Saturday, Sunday to evacuate people before the storm?

(MSNBC Meet the Press 2005)

Example 3 seems less sympathetic than example 4, and the choice of the nominal form of *poor*

may be a factor of that. In example 3, the speaker seems to be distancing himself from the

population of "poor people," while the speaker in the last example is expressing more concern on

their behalf. There is also a difference in the degree of individuality expressed here: *poor people*

reflects a nameless, faceless group, distant from the speaker, and places less emphasis on the

individuals; it is de-individualizing, maybe even dehumanizing. Recall the Durkheimian notion

of speech being indicative of that which the speaker views as a social fact. In this case, it is that

the nominal form indicates the belief that *poor people* represents a distinct group of people,

separate from the speaker. This is in direct contrast to Mautner's claim about the "negative

semantic prosody" of nouns such as *the elderly*, and deserves to be explored further via discourse

analysis.

As Wierzbicka noted (and as explained in detail in the previous chapter), the nominalized

form of an adjective is seen as a more complete description of a person than is the adjective (*a

smart person* vs. *a genius*, etc). Across languages, the difference between alienable and

inalienable possession can be represented structurally. Inalienable possession exists when the

possessed object is an inherent part of the possessor, such as a body part or in some languages, a

kinship term (Alexiadou 2003: 167). Alienable possession, such as ownership, is not dependent in this way. The use of the adjectival *poor people* might suggest that the state of being poor is an inalienable attribute, or an inherent part of someone's identity. The choice of using a noun is significant because it indicates that the speaker did not actively choose the adjectival form, and vice versa. The choice of linguistic form is an active one: a speaker may choose either the noun or the adjectival form, and this choice can possibly imply judgmental connotations depending upon the point of view of the speaker towards the characteristic in question, such as a particular trait or disability. Examples in the previous chapter have demonstrated that advocates for a particular group have the tendency to disfavor or even take offense to the nominal form.

The reasons for *poor*'s behaving differently from *elderly* may lie in its pragmatic sense. In general, our society would most likely rate youth as being a positive attribute and age and poverty as less desirable traits, so that cannot be a relevant distinction between attitudes towards the two qualities. There is, however, also something about aging that is universal and inevitable. Although becoming old may be undesirable, it is a shared conclusion for all humans—aside from death, there is no way to avoid old age. However, the state of being poor is not seen the same way. True or not, many people view poverty as something that, if not a choice per se, is somehow escapable. Old age is permanent; penury does not have to be.

In addition, there may be something in this distinction that has to do with the noun/adjective dichotomy spoken of earlier. In the case of age, *elderly* sounds more like a self-contained unit, as though the speaker wishes to distance this group from the rest of society: *the elderly* as opposed to *older people*, which merely sounds like a group that is designated as different, but still a part of the larger unit *people*.

If *poor* does not behave in exactly the same way as does *elderly*, it is possible that different forms of the same word—in this case *poor* as an adjective and *the poor*—carry different grammatical baggage with them. The quantitative comparison of usages between the two networks provided below is intended as an initial guide for the subsequent qualitative comparison. Later, it will be shown that a more in-depth analysis using context and framing enables us to better account for the differences in usage between the forms.

3.3   The corpus as a source

In order to explore the ways in which speakers employ differences in the adjectival forms of *poor* to accomplish their intended messages and the factors that affect these choices, these two contrastive forms of *poor* were compared using the 400-million-word Davies Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)[6]. This corpus was selected because it provides an array of choices for studying speech or written language from a variety of sources. COCA is composed of more than 400 million words in more than 150,000 texts, including 20 million words each year from 1990-2009. The texts' sources include: spoken language (transcripts of unscripted conversation from nearly 150 different TV and radio programs); fiction (short stories and plays, first chapters of books from 1990-present, and movie scripts); magazines; 10 U.S. newspapers; and nearly 100 different academic journals, covering the range of the Library of Congress classification system. The ability to narrow down the selection of data from different newspapers or even newspaper sections, types of magazines, TV networks, etc., made COCA an ideal choice for this study, which aims to contrast the views of speakers from different sources.

For the purposes of examining the word from opposite ends of the sociopolitical spectrum, instances of *poor* from MSNBC, an example of a liberal outlet, were compared with

[6] http://www.americancorpus.org

instances from Fox, an example of a conservative newscast. These two sources were chosen due

to their status as being seen as the most representative of their particular viewpoint, as shown in

the study "The color of news: How different media have covered the general election" (2008),

conducted by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). This report

found that during the period leading up to the 2008 presidential election, MSNBC's coverage

strongly favored Democratic Party candidate Barack Obama, while coverage on Fox News was

found to show Obama in a more negative light. (Incidentally, coverage on CNN was judged as

falling between the two extremes, and the newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC tended to be more

neutral and generally less negative than on their more polarized counterparts). This 2008 study

corroborates the tendencies seen in other reports including "The state of the news media 2009",

also conducted by the PEJ, which found these two channels, Fox and MSNBC, to be the most

extreme in their partisan coverage. In addition, "A measure of media bias" (2005), a UCLA-led

study, also ranked Fox News as the most conservative outlet and the news source with the views

furthest from the center, regardless of in which direction.

From a traditional view of political ideologies, one would likely expect the more

conservative source to demonstrate a higher number of instances of the adjectival form, which

seems to be less sympathetic, in opposition to Mautner's evaluation of the forms of *elderly*.

Fowler (1991) believes that news is socially constructed, meaning events that get reported are

not necessarily the most important, but are selected according to specific criteria and then

"transformed" so that they fit the norms of the pertinent medium, such as television or newsprint.

He relates this to a process of semiotics, signs acquiring meaning via being structured into codes

such as language. He says:

I assume as a working principle that each particular form of linguistic expression in a text—wording, syntactic option, etc. –has its reason. There are always different ways of saying the same thing, and they are not random, accidental alternatives. Differences in expression carry ideological distinctions (and thus differences in representation). (4)

McGee discussed the rhetorical value of the ideograph, which he identifies as an ordinary term used in a specific way in political discourse, an abstraction representing a political ideal and common goal.

[I]t seems reasonable to suggest that the functions of uniting and separating would be represented by specific vocabularies, actual words or terms. With regard to political union and separation, such vocabularies would consist of ideographs. Such usages as "liberty" define a collectivity, i.e., the outer parameters of a society, because such terms either do not exist in other societies or do not have precisely similar meanings. (8)

Here, McGee is referring to politically charged terms, which is not exactly the same as a grammatical form that can carry an ideological view or judgment. However, the concept is similar in that words or phrases can take on a different meaning when they are used by a particular group to rally support for a specific purpose.

The corpus was searched once for the sole word *poor* only within the confines of data from the MSNBC source, and searched again with the same word from the FOX source. No date restrictions were placed on the search.

3.4 Token classification

In any given token, *poor* was classified as appearing in its adjectival form when the word modifies an explicit noun or pronoun, as in (Det) poor (Adj) + NOUN. Some examples of adjectival *poor* from the corpus are as follows:

(7) Most of the women who are brought into slavery for sexual exploitation like this are very **poor** women who can be easily manipulated because they have few resources and very little power in their lives. (MSNBC Cosby 2005)

(8) Let him punish the janjaweed militias of Sudan, not innocent, **poor**, impoverished Sri Lankans. (MSNBC Scarborough 2005)

This is in contrast to the nominalized version, which is defined as the word *poor* without an overt noun phrase. This usually implies the phrase *the* (Adj) *poor*, as seen in token 4, occasionally appearing with another adjective as in example 5, and on the odd occasion without a determiner as in token 6:

(9) Well, I think the Americans are a very generous people, and I'm—there is one set of issues dealing with the working **poor**, and one of the reasons for our income decline was that a lot of the working **poor**, the people who are doing the right thing, aren't getting the assistance that they're entitled to. (Fox O'Reilly 1999)

(10) It's not luxurious, but it is comfortable. For Baghdad's **poor**, it is transportation from Basra to Baghdad in about 10 hours. (Fox Hume 2004)

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The preference of one of these forms over the other is expected to betray a difference in attitude towards the people represented by this word *poor*. By uncovering a tendency to use one form over the other, it may be possible to demonstrate biases in the news media that have thus far been under the radar. Various studies have illustrated language use as evidence of political bias, although most have focused on the discourse level. Van Der Valk (2003) studied the discourse of immigration and nationality of the French mainstream parties and discovered certain discursive properties, such as a strategy of "negative other-presentation" (83), revealing covert xenophobia. Van Dijk (1997b, 2000) argues that political discourse may occasionally be investigated at the structural level even though few exclusive features are to be found there. He also points out the influential role of political discourse on the public at large.

The initial extraction yielded 67 tokens from the MSNBC source, from the time period of 2004-2006, and 328 tokens from the FOX source, from a much larger period of 1998-2009, with an additional two tokens from 1992.

Meanings of the word *poor* other than the target definition were discarded from the two groups of tokens. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary lists eight different definitions of the word. The first, "lacking material possessions" or "of, relating to, or characterized by poverty", is the target definition for this study.

The second definition, "less than adequate" or "small in worth", could be seen in many tokens, as in:

(11)   Individuals with Prader-Willi syndrome have a period of what we call failure to

         thrive. They tend to have very **poor** growth, first in weight and then in length, for

         a number of weeks or months in infancy. (FOX Zahn 2007)

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Naturally these tokens were not included in the study. A similar but discrete usage of *poor* is the meaning of "inferior in quality or value". Such tokens were also discarded:

(12)   Of course, Senator Burns isn't the only politician whose **poor** jokes are now instant Internet classics (MSNBC Olbermann 2006)

Also frequent was the use of *poor* defined by Merriam-Webster as "exciting pity <you poor thing>":

(13)   In the end, **poor** Al didn't even get to keep his day job (MSNBC Carlson 2006)

The dictionary lists the four additional meanings as "5: lean, emaciated"; "6 : barren, unproductive —used of land"; "7 : indifferent, unfavorable"; "8 : lacking a normal or adequate supply of something specified —often used in combination <oil-poor countries>."

If it was unclear which meaning of *poor* was intended from the given context, the token was also eliminated. An example of a token with an indeterminate meaning is:

(14)   Part of the time you just think about, you know, what these **poor** people have gone through, and part of the time you try to figure out where your next picture is coming from. (FOX O'Reilly 1999)

From this example, it is impossible to tell whether the speaker intends the meaning of *poor* to be financially struggling or eliciting sympathy (or possibly both).

There were also three odd cases in which it was unclear whether the target word was being used as an adjective or as a noun. This appears to be due to either a transcription error, such as the omission of a word, or to a speaker's idiosyncratic speech. These examples, which could not be classified as either adjective or noun, are:

(15) The other one you might want to add to that, John, is that he has been the lone consistent, courageous, moral voice when politicians and governments are flapping in the wings over such things as pro-life and this dignity and respect of life and family and the needs of immigrants and **poor**. (Fox Gibson 2005)

(16) Here you have a woman, all right, whose life is totally chaotic and out of control. There's no doubt about that. You don't have seven children by seven different men, none of whom are there, OK, indigence, **poor**, chaos. Here's this woman, OK. So we all know this. She kills baby because she probably is frazzled, out of control, all right. But nobody can read her mind. (Fox O'Reilly 2005)

(17) Then it would be a regressive tax, and it would hurt **poor** and elderly. (Fox Cavuto 2007)

The first definition of poor, "lacking material possessions" or "of, relating to, or characterized by poverty", is the sole one that is of interest to this study. However, in order to compare nominalized *poor* with adjectival *poor*, it is necessary to identify all of the other constructions of poor, as well. These include mostly instances when the adjective serves a predicative function:

(18)   It was up almost 1000 percent, right? I know you're not **poor** by any means, but that has

to hurt. (FOX Cavuto 2001)

(19)   As first lady, Hillary Clinton would travel to places that were, quote, "too small, too **poor**

or too dangerous" for the president. (Fox Gibson 2008)

This also includes instances where the word *poor* is serving as part of a list or other discursive

function that is not structurally linked to the rest of the sentence in a grammatically definable

way:

(20)   First of all, your division about rich versus **poor** could not be more off. (Fox Hume 2008)

(21)   But there are a lot of, you know, Democratic-leaning independents or Republican-leaning

independents in the middle who sort of have that same demographic characteristic—

working class, **poor**, less-educated, older. Is Obama going to win them? I think it's going

to be tough. (Fox Gibson 2008)

3.5   Data results

After eliminating all of the irrelevant or unclear tokens, 35 tokens from the MSNBC data

and 214 from the FOX data remained. The data were then coded as either N, for nominalized *the*

poor, A for adjectival *poor* (Adj) NOUN, or O for other, such as predicate. The data for *poor*

only as the target definition in the Merriam-Webster dictionary—"lacking material possessions"

or "of, relating to, or characterized by poverty"—breaks down as follows:

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Table 1: Usage of target definition of *poor* in the corpus

	Poor as adjective	*Poor* as noun	*Poor*, any other form	Total tokens
Fox	50% (N=107)	31.78% (N=68)	18.22% (N=39)	214
MSNBC	57.14% (N=20)	28.57% (N=10)	14.29% (N=5)	35

As the table demonstrates, there were 214 instances of the word *poor* with the target meaning in the Fox data. Of those, 107 tokens showed *poor* as an adjective modifying an overt noun, 68 tokens showed *poor* to be nominalized, and 39 used another form (i.e., as a predicate or member of a list). In the MSNBC data, there were far fewer tokens altogether due to the limited time frame available. Of the 35 instances of the target meaning of poor, there were 20 tokens of adjectival poor, 10 tokens of nominalized poor, and five that can be categorized as "other".

The initial prediction was that the MSNBC data would show a preference for the nominalized form of poor because it contains some greater sense of empathy or individualized identity. Contrary to prediction, there is not a large difference between the percentage of instances of *poor* that are used as nouns and as adjectives between the two networks. Fox showed a slightly higher percentage of nominalization out of all usages of the target definition of poor—31.78% compared to MSNBC's 28.57%. This difference is not statistically significant, meaning that it could potentially be attributed to chance, especially taking into account the small number of tokens.

Nevertheless, it makes sense to keep in mind that the MSNBC tokens from the corpus were limited to the time frame of 2004-2006; for purposes of comparison, the FOX tokens from

the same time period numbered 75. A reconstructed chart, similar to the previous but only

comparing data from 2004-2006, shows:

Table 2: *Poor* data from 2004-2006

	Poor as adjective	*Poor* as noun	*Poor*, any other form	Total
Fox	61.54% (N=32)	26.92% (N=14)	11.5% (N=6)	52
MSNBC	57.14% (N=20)	28.57% (N=10)	14.3% (N=5)	35

The data from the limited time frame has a slightly opposite result: this time MSNBC has the

slightly higher instance of nominalization. When the time period is equal, the data more closely

align with the prediction. However, once again the difference is statistically not significant.

These numbers are not very telling about the nature of the differences between the usages of

these outlets. The kinds of situations in which these forms are used are not revealed, and there is

no information about the speakers' intentions in using them. The token numbers are small

enough that specific circumstances may affect their usages, as was a critique of Orpin's study of

the collocates of *corruption*. Fortunately, the small sample size only makes it more feasible to

examine the specific contexts of the tokens.

3.6   Summary

        This preliminary quantitative overview is intended to serve only as a guide for the next

section, in which the data is examined qualitatively. Upon closer examination, it will become

clearer that the token numbers alone cannot tell the full story. It is the role of the researcher to

examine the contexts and instances more carefully in order to determine, for example, whether

each instance of the form is being used in earnest or in jest. Moreover, it is important to account

for the types of discourses that surround each usage. Certain words can invoke various types of

frames and/or discourses, especially in the media, and that has an impact over how each of these

is used.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1   Introduction

From the results in the previous chapter, it would appear that there is not a consequential

difference between the frequency of usage of adjectival *poor* (people) and the nominalized *the*

poor between Fox News and MSNBC. However, as in any usage of a corpus, the numbers alone

do not give a complete picture of what is occurring. The tokens cannot be entirely understood

outside of their contexts, and so it is crucial to utilize discourse analysis to examine the types of

situations in which these instances of *poor* occur, and to at the contexts as well as the numbers.

An analysis using media framing theory adds further insight into the kinds of associations and

schemas triggered by the different forms, implying that each is used to evoke a separate frame.

4.2   Contexts

In only the data that is from 2004-2006, the quotes from MSNBC had a slightly higher

instance of nominalization: 28.57% of all possible cases versus Fox News's 26.92%. During that

time period, Fox used the nominalized form, usually *the poor*, 14 times out of 52 possible

instances of that word with that intended meaning. However, a large number of those 14

instances—six, to be exact—come from one particular utterance. During a discussion about

immigration legislation on the Bill O'Reilly program, an individual identified only as "third

General Motors worker" said the following:

But it's not quite true what you're saying. It has to be knowingly. So if someone
was on the side of the road of an accident, you don't know whether they're illegal
or legal. You're just helping them. OK? But here's—here's the deal. You know,
and I know and anybody in the Christian hierarchy—it's not just Catholics.
Protestants do it, as well. A lot of sympathy for the **poor**. And they don't really
care whether they're citizens or not. If they're **poor**, the mandate is food the **poor**,
help the **poor**, clothe the **poor**, harbor the **poor**, shelter the **poor**. And now, the
government is basically saying, render to Caesar because Caesar says you can't
come here unless it's legal. So you guys are really caught in Christian doctrine, in
the middle. Are you not?

This single utterance accounts for 42.86% of the total instances of *the poor* found on Fox

during the 2004-2006 time period (note that the second instance of *poor* in the quote is

predicative). As has been stated, *the poor* is supposed to be the more sympathetic version of the

term, but its profusion here is misleading for two reasons. Firstly, this excerpt contains a lot of

repetition, specifically the rhetorical device known as epistrophe, the repetition of a word or

phrase at the end of every clause. Once the speaker has chosen his wording the first time, he

deliberately refrains from altering it for each additional iteration. This is similar to the effect of

speech priming (Gries 2006), wherein speakers reiterate syntactic constructions they have

recently heard or used themselves. Therefore, while these are clearly separate instances of *the*

poor, they are not necessarily independent, unrelated instances. Since there are so few tokens of

the poor from this time period to begin with, these linked tokens affect the larger perception of

the total numbers.

Secondly, the tone of the statement is not sympathetic at all. From the context, the

speaker is reading a litany of demands as though he is angry about it: "the mandate is food the

poor, help the **poor**, clothe the **poor**, harbor the **poor**, shelter the **poor**". The speaker sounds

bitter, not sympathetic, despite the construction. This may be a characteristic of other usages of

this construction.

Given the time frame of the tokens that both networks have in common, 2004-2006, and the keyword *poor*, there are many tokens that deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans in 2005. The networks show some differences in the constructions they used to talk about the storm, its consequences and the questions it raised about poverty in the United States. To describe the citizens most affected by the hurricane, MSNBC used *poor neighborhoods* twice, *poor souls* twice, *the poor* twice, *poor people* thrice and *poor city* once.

(22)   All of the areas in New Orleans that were below sea level did not sustain flooding and did not hold the water as long as the lower Ninth Ward. And as far as the concern for **poor** people who can't necessarily get out, I think you just have to make provisions for them beforehand. (MSNBC Abrams 2005)

(23)   If they cared so much, they being the Clinton administration and FEMA, why didn't New Orleans ever work out a feasible way to evacuate **poor** people? That's a great question. (MSNBC Carlson 2005)

(24)   Those who got out were people with SUVs and automobiles and air fares who could get out. Those who could not get out were the **poor** who rely on public buses to get out. (MSNBC Meet the Press 2005)

(25)   Is there any evidence that more care, more effort was given to certain levees in affluent neighborhoods than those in **poor** neighborhoods? (MSNBC Meet the Press 2005)

With respect to the same situation, Fox used *poor people* nine times, four of those co-occurring with the descriptor *black*. It also described New Orleans as a *poor city* once and as

being *cash-poor* once. The phrase *the poor* never came up in the discussions surrounding Katrina.

(26)   Those people didn't have a—a property to come back to. They don't have property to put

a FEMA trailer on. So, I think the capacity to build affordable housing for **poor** people to

come back, and they will come back. As the jobs come back, people will come back. As

industries stand up, jobs will come in, and it will create growth in housing. (Fox Cavuto

2006)

(27)   And the poverty rate in the Crescent City is about 25 percent. Many **poor** people didn't

have anywhere to go as Katrina approached, and that has caused some others to inject

racism into this story. (Fox O'Reilly 2005)

(28)   You know, I mean, a lot of people are saying that because there's such a split in the

public opinion, black and white, as to whether or not the government's poor response was

due to the fact that so many of the faces on T.V. in New Orleans were faces of **poor**

black people, some people are saying oh, you know, this is essentially like Jesse Jackson

playing the race card. (Fox Sunday 2005)

This dichotomy demonstrates that although the strict numbers for the differences in the instances of *poor* versus *poor people* for the two networks do not show any discernable trends, examining the data at a closer level, in this case by topic, can show patterns in themselves. Hurricane Katrina revealed aspects of the poverty situation in the U.S. that many were previously unaware of, and the tendencies of Fox and MSNBC to use language differently to talk about this indicates divergent ways of interpreting the same controversial situation.

Additionally, although neither network officially affiliates itself with a political party, the studies presented in the previous chapter make it clear that the networks are at the very least perceived to lean a certain way. Some differences are found regarding how these networks refer to their aligned party's actions and views in reference to the target group *poor*, and how they view their opponents' stance. Specifically, when the speaker appears to take a positive, admiring or optimistic view of what the party is doing towards or about this group of people, the preferred term seems to be *the poor*. Of course, the sense of approval is subjective on the part of the researcher, but this tendency supports the claim that *the poor* is used in more sympathetic contexts than *poor people* is. This is best illustrated by examples, as in the following, where the networks use *the poor* when adopting a stance of approval regarding the actions being discussed; in the latter two, Fox uses the phrase to discuss actions of the Republican Party:

(29) But I think he has to go with his heart. And the best part of George Bush has always been a sense of being a Republican who cares about the **poor** and has an actual instinct about it and a compassion about it. (MSNBC Meet the Press 2005)

(30) I don't know, and I think the Republicans have sort of let them get away with it. I don't allow that to happen in Wisconsin. I think you got to go out there and tell them that the Republican Party is really the party of the **poor** and the party of the people and the party of the working man and woman in America, and they got to go out and tell them that this is what we're going to do. (Fox Hume 1998)

(31) Liberals go ballistic when anyone points out that they're not as patriotic as Republicans. They feel free that Republicans aren't as good as Democrats on civil rights, aren't as good on the **poor**, aren't as good on women's issues. Why is this the one issue on which we are

not allowed to compare the relative patriotism of the two parties? (Fox Hannity and Colmes 2003)

On the opposing side, both networks tended to use *poor people* when they are either mocking the opposition's stance or sarcastically referring to their perceived idealism. The tone is derisive or disapproving:

(32)   You've got Democrats. They are supposed to be poor. Don't the Democrats traditionally represent the **poor people**? They are paying $500 an hour. They are cruising airport bathrooms try to go get it for free. What's going on? (Fox Watch 2008, [about Gov. Spitzer])

(33)   But why are some people who want aggressive action in Darfur, people like Nancy Pelosi and George Clooney, condemning the attempt to bring a humane government to Iraq? Didn't Saddam murder hundreds of thousands of innocent people? Things are so confusing in the world of protests. Now some answers. The pro-amnesty people largely believe the U.S.A. has a moral obligation to accept millions of **poor people** as citizens. The reasoning varies. Hardcore democrats like Howard Dean and Ted Kennedy see future votes. (Fox O'Reilly 2006)

(34)   The position appears to be not only is the Republican Party the party that is against **poor people**, against black people. It's also the party that is anti-Semitic. Why not just criticize the policies of the party you oppose, rather than calling them names, especially, you know, absurd names like this? (MSNBC Carlson 2006)

In the examples above, the speakers from both sides tend to call on the adjectival form when they wish to highlight something that they view as unreasonable or satiric about the ideology of the opposing group. This is not the same as a straightforward usage of the phrase, and so counting it as such may have led to a skewed ratio on the tallies between the networks, which is another way in which the token numbers are insufficient in providing an accurate picture of how these phrases are used.

4.3   Media frames

The tendency for *poor people* to invoke a sense of negativity or lack of sympathy can be viewed as being a factor of media framing. In general, a semantic frame according to Fillmore (1982), is "a system of categories structured in accordance with some motivating context" (381), meaning that to understand any one concept, it is necessary to understand the context as well as all related concepts. However, media framing in particular illustrates which aspects of a situation or topic are highlighted as being the most salient. It shows how the media can choose to emphasize specific aspects of an event, which calls the audience's attention to these most prominent elements, regardless of their actual significance.

Media framing demonstrates and explains how a communicative text exerts influence and power over its audience, as Entman (1993) explains:

> To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe (52; emphasis in the original)

According to Entman, the four actions of framing are defining problems, identifying causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting solutions (1993:52). Defining problems consists of determining what a causal agent is doing and with what cultural costs and benefits. To diagnose causes is to identify the forces creating the problem. Making moral judgments involves evaluating causal agents and their effects, and suggesting remedies is offering and justifying treatments for the problems and predict any effects. As an example, Entman offers the "cold war" frame. He claims that, particularly during the 1980s, the media used a cold war frame that highlighted civil wars as a problem, identified a source as communist rebels, offered aggression as a moral judgment, and commended a particular solution: U.S. support for the other side.[7]

While the use of media framing analysis here is somewhat limited because of the minute level of focus, it can be insightful if *the poor* triggers a different frame than *poor people*, implying a separate set of causes, judgments and suggestions for solutions. Entman (1993:53) acknowledges that "[t]exts can make bits of information more salient by placement or repetition… even a single illustrated appearance of a notion in an obscure part of the text can be highly salient, if it comports with the existing schemata in a receiver's belief systems." So even a phrase as tiny as *the poor* can trigger an association with a particular frame, if this phrase is already embedded in the audience's consciousness as being linked with a certain attitude. Scheufele (2000) bases his concept of framing theory on "prospect theory", which says that "subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation might affect how audience members interpret this situation" (309) and that framing tends to be based on "subtle nuances in

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[7] There are, of course, other models of media framing. In particular, Iyengar (1991:14) distinguishes between "episodic" framing, which uses a case study or singular event report to highlight a particular issue, and "thematic" framing, which places the issue in a more abstract context. However, given that the current study is looking at short excerpts surrounding the two targeted structures of the word *poor* and not the sense of news stories in their entireties, Entman's model works better here.

wording and syntax" (309). The noun/adjective distinction of *poor*, then, certainly qualifies as a feature that could be evoked in media framing.

In fact, the data show that *the poor* on both networks tends to evoke senses of victimization and of taking advantage. With regard to Entman's four-part process of framing, the problem is obviously poverty (and the resulting hunger/poor health care, etc.); the causes tend to be shown as abuse or mishandling by public figures or business leaders; and moral judgment about those situations is blaming the politicians who are enacting the victimization. Remedies were not emphasized.

(35)   Always, always these preachers that he wants to attack are preying on the **poor** and the old. And you can't equate gullibility and stupidity with age and poverty. (MSNBC Scarb 2004)

(36)   Now, here is a man who was given 50 turkeys over the holidays, so his office could distribute them to the **poor** and needy. Instead, Conyers and staff reportedly gave a handful of the basted birds to political cronies as flavorful favors. (MSNBC Scarb 2005)

(37)   What you just said would do tremendous damage to the poor because each one of these industries that you're talking about exact a regressive tax on the **poor** because they have to buy those products. (Fox Hannity and Colmes 2008)

(38)   Only the rich and beautiful need apply. Is that discrimination against the **poor** and plain? (Fox Zahn 2007)

All of the examples above use a lot of victim language, particularly 35, which uses *poor* as the object of *preying* and 36 which equates *poor* and *needy*. Tokens 36 and 37 emphasize blame, with a great deal of moral judgment in 36, using clearly negative language such as *favors* and *cronies*. The last example is a little different, but sets up a juxtaposition between those who have and those who do not, emphasizing the unfairness of targeting these victims.

In contrast, adjectival *poor (people)* appears to be associated with more of the legislative aspect of poverty, which is characterized as a problem that needs to be solved. There were few notions of the subjects as victims or even individuals, and more as a puzzle that requires a solution. Like the data from *the poor*, the tokens frequently assign blame to political leaders or policies as a cause and administer moral judgment. Unlike the nominal group, remedies were suggested or at least implied to be a change of administration or policy. As was noted earlier, adjectival *poor* also appears more frequently with minority racial groups, which carries the connotation of repression and possible discrimination.

(39)   All of the areas in New Orleans that were below sea level did not sustain flooding and did not hold the water as long as the lower Ninth Ward. And as far as the concern for **poor** people who can't necessarily get out, I think you just have to make provisions for them beforehand. (MSNBC 2004 Abrams)

(40)   Well, they will be shocked when they learn that al-Qaeda has more rights than a **poor** Mexican landscaper picked up on a sweep of illegal aliens in America. (Fox Hume 2008)

(41)   The Congress has yet to get an S-Chip bill to help fund **poor** children's health insurance to the president's desk that he can sign, although he was asked

repeatedly that they work with his administration to find common ground on this important issue. (Fox 2007 Gibson)

(42) James Mfume, a very well known radio announcer and artist, asked Senator Clinton in her segment of our program why the Democrats haven't gotten more done for **poor** people, for people of color. (Fox O'Reilly 2006)

(43) Angela Alioto complained that **poor** Mexicans must come to the USA because of the corrupt government in that country. (Fox O'Reilly 2006)

(44) I think because our society is so overdetermined by scarcity, there are people who are afraid that they're not going to have what they need and in that context, who gets scapegoated are blacks, Jews, gay people, **poor** people, people who are on welfare because this country doesn't provide them with jobs and the only thing that's going to change that is a change in the economy and I believe the only thing that's going to change the economy is if there's more democracy in America, more participation. (Fox Crier 1992)

In these examples, there is clearly less "victim" language than in the previous examples, and the people to whom *poor* is assigned do not seem to be taken advantage of as much. Example 39 diminishes the sense of these people as victims: "necessarily" mitigates the circumstances, i.e. the fact that there were many who actually could not leave the city, and does not use any sympathetic language, but instead makes a vague suggestion that someone should have thought of them before, essentially relegating them to afterthought status. Example 40 also does not display any victimization or unsympathetic language. Both tokens 41 and 42 are assign blame and judgment on current policymakers and leaders. Tokens 40, 42 and 43 co-occur with

minority populations, essentially equating the poor with minorities, and a sense of discrimination. The last token, 44, is an excellent example of how the focus is less on the victims themselves and more on why the problem exists, who is at fault, and how a solution should be found.

The concept of media framing is very similar to the studies of semantic prosody referenced in chapter 2. Recall that, for example, Mautner argued that *elderly* acquired some of the negative connotations of words such as *frail* and *infirm*. Aaron attributed some of the more abstract usages of *lame* to denote something generally negative to its prior associations with being disabled and weak. Here, *the poor* co-occurs with situations of victimhood, sympathy, and concern for the lower economic strata. Therefore, its usage may imply a feeling of sympathy on the part of the speaker, or evoke such a reaction from listeners. In contrast, the adjective *poor* usually links to a more distant and unemotional response from the speaker about the topic, and thus, it may come to take on a similar nuance.

Thus, Fox and MSNBC use frames to communicate to audiences that the nominal form *the poor* means victim, caused by mismanagement of public policy or politicians, often of the opposing political party. Meanwhile, adjectival *poor*, particularly *poor people*, links more closely with discourses of problems and solutions. This also connects to blame, which is a commonality between the two forms. Adjectival *poor* also often co-occurs with racial and ethnic descriptors such as *black* and *Mexican*, invoking a frame of a minority or oppressed group. In her framing analysis of news coverage on burn injuries, Smith (2005:7) says that media frames can be so subtle that journalists may not know they are using them. It is quite possible that unintentional presentation of frames is occurring in this case study.

4.4   Summary

While the frequency data did not betray a bias between the two news networks (perhaps due to the limited sample of tokens), a closer examination of the contexts surrounding the instances of *poor* did show MSNBC to have a preference for *the poor* in a specific context, indicating that there is a possibility that this trend could replicate if all of the tokens could be examined on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, not all of the instances of Fox using *the poor* were used sympathetically, and some can even be assumed to have a sarcastic tone. An analysis using media frames revealed that even across the networks, *the poor* evoked instances of victimhood on the part of the subjects, whereas adjectival *poor* triggered a frame of political problems and solutions. Both networks and both forms of the word were found with sense of blaming, usually directed at the opposition's leaders and policies. Since each form calls to mind a separate mental schema, the framing analysis shows that even when a form appears to be used in a certain way, its context and lexical correlates are able to demonstrate attitudes that are not easily detectable on the part of the audience or in some cases, even the speaker.

5. Conclusion

There are two critical aspects of the proposal developed in this analysis. First, it was argued that the intended interpretations of the different examples of *poor* could not solely be attributed to the differences between the adjective and nominal forms. Second, to determine the pragmatic effect of any given token, it was necessary to consider a number of contextual factors, which were revealed through a detailed analysis of discourse context. In the preliminary quantitative comparison of data from the two news networks, it was expected that the basic token numbers for *the poor* would prove to be higher on MSNBC because the term was more sympathetic than *poor people* and could thus be found in more sympathetic and less distant-sounding contexts. This was possibly due to Wierzbicka's notion of a noun describing a "kind"—therefore *the poor* was more completely describing a "kind" than the attributive *poor people*. The results from this initial survey of the corpus data, however, did not suggest any significant patterns in the use of these two structures between the two networks. Upon a closer, discourse-analysis examination of specific instances, for example, the Hurricane Katrina situation, the numbers of the target structures were more indicative of the anticipated preference. Moreover, several of the tokens of *the poor* used on Fox appeared to have a critical or sarcastic tone. After the application of a frame analysis to the data, the two structures appeared to evoke somewhat separate media frames. Whereas *the poor* was often connected to concepts of oppression and tended to focus on the individuals as victims, adjectival *poor* triggered a frame of political problems and solutions. However, both networks and both forms of the word were

found with discourses of blaming and accusations, usually directed at the opposition's leaders and policies.

In sum, the picture that has emerged is much more complex than either Mautner's or Wierzbicka's respective analyses might have predicted. Looking back at what the issues that were uncovered, various factors came into play: semantic prosody, connotations, framing, politics, speakers' tone and intentions. The noun/adjective dichotomy links to many of these differences, but is only one factor that affects how the speakers' attitudes are conveyed. The speakers on these two networks used the contrastive forms as parts of their rhetorical strategy, but only in conjunction with other methods. The words and forms alone are not strong enough to convey significant semantic judgment, positive or negative.

The language choices and subsequent attitudes conveyed that are seen in this study are significant because it has been demonstrated many times that the media can influence their audience's view. From the perspective of media frames, Smith said (2005:3): "Agenda-setting theory purports that the media do not tell us what to think, but rather what to think about. Some researchers argue that as a second level of agenda-setting, how the media *frame* issues impacts the public agenda." She invokes McCombs and Bell, 1996:

> The news media do not just passively transmit information, repeating verbatim the words of a public official or conveying exactly the incidents at an event. Nor do they select and reject the day's news in proportion to reality. Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus attention and influence the public's perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day. Our attention is further focused—and our pictures of the world shaped and refined—by the way journalists frame their news stories. (93)

Therefore, what an audience may deem to be "important" at any given time is highly susceptible to their viewing habits and the media's use of language and framing.

Not only can media frames and opinions influence public perception, they also can demonstrate truths about current societal values:

> Through selection, emphasis, and omission, journalists direct the attention of their audience toward the aspects of daily life that consistently warrant—and do not warrant—consideration. This selective emphasis is not random or transient. Rather, the frames employed by journalists are durable reflections of internalized professional values and social norms. (Lester and Ross 2003:32)

The language and framings of the media are not just impacting the way the audience thinks and what they think about; they are simultaneously shaping and reflecting what is important. These actions can perhaps be imagined as a self-perpetuating cycle, with existing values being display and thus intensified, leading them to be featured again.

The audience's ability to be influenced by language and framing includes the reception of stereotypes of people with disabilities. In Auslander and Gold's (1999) contrastive study of how people with disabilities were presented in the print media in Canada and Israel, they found that the results suggested that the tendencies were for physical disabilities to receive the most media attention and positive treatment, followed by psychiatric and then developmental disabilities, and that this trend seemed to cross national boundaries. The authors concluded that "[t]he press has an important role in reflecting and shaping public attitudes. In many ways media coverage reinforces negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, particularly those with psychiatric and developmental disabilities" (1999:420).

While poverty is not identical to a disability, many Americans may view it in a similar light. The social model of disability referenced earlier posited that society's reactions to individuals with disabilities are more responsible for their place in society than is the disability itself. And although poverty is probably a primary factor in establishing one's role in society, it

is not unreasonable to assert that reactions to the situation of poverty can also have an immobilizing effect. Since the linguistic factors displayed in this analysis are argued to reveal underlying attitudes; these attitudes can both reflect and affect how poor persons in society are seen. And because disability discourse affects how people view disabled people, the same can be said for discourse about poverty. In addition, it has been shown that the media have considerable influence on the public's positive and negative stereotypes of minority groups (Greenberg & Brand 1994; Lester & Ross 2003). Regardless of the median income in the U.S., since poor is a relative term, this can be considered a minority group of sorts. Besides, as has been shown, it is often mentioned with minority and marginalized groups, and the media frames showed an association between poor people and certain minority groups. Therefore, similar media effects may be found.

Iyengar & Kinder (1987) showed evidence of priming in the news media. Not to be confused with speech priming, in the context of media,

> Priming is a psychological process whereby media emphasis on particular issues not only increases the salience of those issues, but it activates in people's memories previously acquired information about those issues. That information is then used in *forming opinions about persons, groups, or institutions* linked to the issues." (Mccombs & Bell 1996:106; emphasis added.)

The persons or group mentioned above could easily be poor Americans.

Initially, this study mentioned factoring in speaker motivation in choosing their language forms. However, media frame analysis suggests that framing does not have to be intentional (Smith 2005) or even that it is strictly unintentional (Lester & Ross 2003). In truth, it appears that the motivation could be at any level of consciousness, although as was stated, frames reflect concepts and situations that already exist in society, and while they may perpetuate tropes, they

do not invent them. So while the motivation for choosing *the poor* over *poor people* may not be a conscious decision, it still reflects an ongoing, pre-existing idea about societal roles—in Durkheimiam terms, the social fact of a group constituting a separate part of society. The choice might reflect a tendency of a group to view these people in a certain way, not one speaker's decision to reflect his or her personal opinion. Additionally, the present study's arguments are not based solely upon media framing; there does seem to be a tendency in the data for one ideology to prefer one form, especially when looking at specific situations such as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The conclusion of this study is that if the motivation is not at the conscious, individual level, it may be a subconscious reflection of societal mores.

With more tokens, a future study could replicate the example of the Katrina situation by isolating specific instances and comparing the counts of each form from the opposing sources. Since the tokens here did not particularly lend themselves to clear topics, it would be ideal to examine particular situations or issues (e.g., healthcare, immigration) and compare each on a one-to-one basis from the sources.

This study represents a convergence of mass communication and linguistics theories. While there might not be a clear-cut, universal difference in connotation between using the noun and adjective forms, the case is certainly not what Mautner argues, which is that it should be straightforward that nouns behave one way and adjectives another. It appears that by examining the token numbers and factoring in contexts and media frames, one form does have a more negative connotation, but while it may be the adjective form in this instance, that need not always be the case. Additionally, the multitude of factors at work here suggests that the change in form may not even be the most important factor. The application of insights from theories of

mass communication contributes to this hybrid approach that only enhances understanding of

how messages can be encoded in linguistic forms.

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