Introducing Basic Linguistic Concepts in E4PS

English vocabulary has a remarkable range, flexibility, and adaptability. Thanks to historical periods of contact with foreign languages (such as Old Norse, French, and Latin) and its readiness to coin new words, English possesses an exceptionally rich core vocabulary compared to many other languages.

In political discourse and international relations, subtle nuances in word choice can change the tone, formality, and rhetorical impact of a message.

1. Etymological Triplets & Shades of Meaning

English often has sets of words (triplets) derived from Anglo-Saxon, French, and Latin/Greek that express similar ideas with different levels of formality, style, and connotation:

Source	Tone / Level of Style	Example 1 (Ruler / Authority)	Example 2 (Asking / Demanding)	Example 3 (Gathering / Assembly)
Anglo-Saxon	Plain, direct, emotional	*Kingly / Queenly*	*Ask*	*Gathering*
French	Formal, elevated, diplomatic	*Royal*	*Question*	*Assembly*
Latin/Greek	Technical, legal, highly formal	*Regal / Majestic*	*Interrogate*	*Congregation / Conference*

Contextual Examples in Political Science:

- *Kingly / Queenly / Royal / Regal / Majestic*:
  - ✧A symbol of ***kingly*** authority.
  - ✧They paid a ***kingly*** price for their new house.
  - ✧She maintained her ***queenly*** dignity during the press conference.

  - ✧The ***royal*** family attended the opening of Parliament.
  - ✧By ***royal*** appointment (an official mark used by companies supplying

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goods to the royal family).

✧The President exercised ***regal*** power during the emergency.
✧Her tall stature gave her an almost ***regal*** appearance.

✧The Dolomites are ***majestic*** in size.
✧This ***majestic*** treaty represents a landmark moment for global environmental protection.
✧This ***majestic*** creature has been rescued from the brink of extinction.

2. Synonyms & Collocations in Political Contexts

Sets of lexical units that have identical, or near-identical, meanings are referred to as **synonyms**. Theoretically, they can replace each other in context, but in practice, there are always stylistic, contextual, or collocational differences.

Example 1: Periods of Work Inactivity & Political Breaks

Words referring to a period when regular work or proceedings stop. Note how they differ in the words they occur with (their **collocations**):

- **Leave**: frequently occurs in two-word expressions nouns such as *sick leave*, *maternity / paternity leave*, *unpaid leave*, or *study leave*.
- **Break**: refers to a brief pause (*lunch break*, *coffee break*) or a short holiday (*winter break*, a *two-night break*).
- **Vacation**: used in American English similarly to the British English **holiday**(s), and in both BrE and AmE for periods when university teaching is suspended.
- **Time off**: free time away from work or studies.
- **Recess**: a formal period during the year when members of a Parliament, Congress, or Committee do not meet (e.g., the *summer recess* of Parliament).
- **Adjournment**: a temporary suspension of a parliamentary sitting or trial until another specified time.

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Example 2: Political Dwellings & Institutional Terms

Synonyms for places of residence and official seats:

- *Home*, *house*, *apartment*, *flat*, *penthouse*, *cottage*, *hut*, *mansion*, *villa*, *castle*.
- **In political contexts:**
    - **The White House / 10 Downing Street**: Institutional residences with symbolic authority.
    - **Embassy vs. Residency**: The official diplomatic mission and the official headquarters of an ambassador versus the ambassador's private home.

3. Denotation vs. Connotation

Understanding the distinction between denotation and connotation is essential for critical discourse analysis (CDA) and media literacy.

- **Denotation**: The context-independent, objective, basic, and explicit meaning (also called descriptive meaning).
- **Connotation**: The variable, subjective, implicit, emotive, or ideological associations attached to a word.

Political Examples of Connotative Shifts:

Denotation (Objective Concept)	Positive / Neutral Connotation	Negative / Pejorative Connotation
A person who changes political sides	*Reformer / Independent / Whistleblower*	*Turncoat / Traitor / Renegade*
A person dedicated to a cause	*Activist / Advocate / Campaigner*	*Radical / Extremist / Zealot*
Unlawful entry into a nation's territory	*Asylum seeker / Migrant*	*Illegal alien / Infiltrator*
Government expenditure	*Investment / Public funding*	*Debt-to-GDP ratio / Tax burden*

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