

Ideology

Language ideology refers to the situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language. It covers a wide range of concerns: the differential openness of language structure for metalinguistic objectification; the ways metalinguistic discourses can mediate social interests; the "naturalization" of social differences through construals of language as embodying identity and community. In these and other ways, "language ideology" is a rubric for dealing with ideas about language structure and use relative to social contexts.

I sketch here some intellectual trends and empirical issues in linguistic anthropology for which notions of language ideology have recently become salient. I discuss the notion first as part of linguistic anthropologists' responses to various critiques of received scholarly objectifications of "Language" and "languages." Then I sketch its role in the framing of language use as social practice, engaged in and construed from different perspectives in different contexts.

"Ideology" has become a central notion in critical studies of scholarly discourses on language, often ambiguous and conflicted, which have emerged in broader intellectual and political projects. In this regard it suggests self-reflexive awareness of the underlying comparability of "folk" and "expert" conceptions of language, and of the ways that covert interests can inform both. Both concerns can be read from influential critiques of post-Enlightenment conceptions of "language."

V. N. Volosinov, for instance, traced the "abstract objectivist" tendencies of Saussurean linguistics, and its eighteenth-century Romanticist antecedents, to Europe's early encounters with the rest of the world. In this way, he saw structural linguistics as having originated in and subserving a larger intellectual and political encounter with linguistic and cultural otherness. In broadly similar manner, Edward Said's influential critique of Orientalist colonial scholarship focused on the premises and effects of early comparative Semitic linguistics. The result is a powerful argument by example for

recognizing covert political grounds of a scholarly tradition that, in one form or other, continues to be practiced throughout the formerly colonialized world.

Recognizing the interested partialness of such linguistic projects does not require the jettisoning of core descriptive notions as "discursive effects." Rather, it means explicating the sociohistorical grounds of their uses. One upshot has been the exploration of political and cultural contingencies that shaped the promotion of "dialects" into "languages" in parts of the world as different as Subsaharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Contemporary "facts" of linguistic and social difference are in this way understood as politically salient, invented linguistic traditions.

Concern for the ways social interests are inscribed in linguistic descriptions has also been stimulated by studies of Western societies, like Pierre Bourdieu's sociological account of academic institutions in France. He developed an influential critique of ambiguously descriptive "models of" and prescriptive "models for" the French language. He also assimilated language to a broad notion of "symbolic capital" in ways that resonate with assumptions and findings of variationist sociolinguistics. But it has been cogently questioned on empirical and theoretical grounds by anthropological linguists working in societies as close to France as Spanish Catalonia.

Increased interest in nationalism has similarly led linguistic anthropologists to study the rise and ideological grounds of secular, print-mediated national languages. In otherwise very different accounts, Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson have foregrounded the origins and effects of hegemonically standard languages. These comparative and theoretical issues have been recently recast within fine-grained work on language-linked enactments and conceptions of national and subnational identities (ethnic, class, gender, etc.).

Language ideology is relevant in these and other empirical studies that link verbal particulars to institutional contexts and interactional processes. In this regard, ideology stands in useful contrast to framings of talk as social practice to deal with situated interactional perspectives and social values, which can tacitly vary and shift between contexts and communities. This is a particularly important issue in scenes of social and linguistic contact, conflict, and change, where unrecognized and misrecognized differences in modes of interactional engagement arise.

Bilingualism and code-switching, language shift and language death, interference and borrowing, are all phenomena arising at such points of sociolinguistic encounter, and all require the social framing of patterned verbal particulars. Thought of as plural, often tacit, and sometimes conflictual, ideologically grounded perceptions of language use can be related to broader constellations of institutional forces, historical processes, and interests. Framed in these multiple ways, talk can be seen as a point of convergence between the immediacies of social life and the longer-term shaping of community, sameness, and difference.

In conclusion, the two spheres of research just sketched can be brought together under a still more abstract, semiotically keyed sense of language ideology. This is part of Michael Silverstein's explication of reflexive relations

between languages as vehicles of structured semantic content, and objects of metadiscourse. By adducing the focal place of semantico-referential meaning in metadiscourse, he throws into relief the multiple indexical links between tokens and contexts of language use. This multiple spatiotemporal and social situatedness, and perceptions of such situatedness, can thus be brought under the semiotic profile inspired by Charles Peirce. The upshot is a concept of language ideology broad enough to speak to the foundational role of language in human life, and specifiable enough to help capture the perspectival complexities of languages in social contexts.

(See also *body, codes, contact, crossing, gender, grammar, identity, indexicality, names, power, socialization, syncretism, truth*)

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