

(e) Language, linguistics and ideology

How do linguistic theories vary in their conceptions of ideology? There are three possible ways in which relations between language and ideology can be conceived. Each of the three positions necessarily entails distinct views on what language is, and how it works at the junction between the inner and outer worlds of human beings. Figure 1 sets out the three potential ways in which the relationship between language and ideology can be conceptualized.

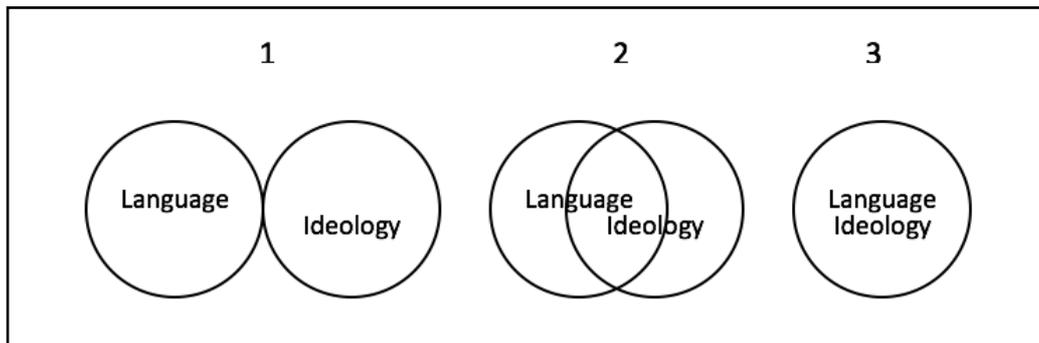


Figure 1: Three options in relating language and ideology

To begin, one could argue that language and ideology are totally distinct phenomena, with no bearing on each other. Such a position entails the view that the world can be seen “as it really is”, without the interference of ideologically charged language. From this view, reality can be directly experienced, and, by extension, it would have to be largely the same for all humans. While ideology can distort the picture one has of the world, this is the "false consciousness" kind of view - an abuse of language which stands apart from it - constituting a veil that can be lifted, so that "reality", in her full glory, is revealed. By extension, thought must be separate from, and precede language. If ideology is totally distinct from language, then language neither shapes reality nor thought.

This view of language and ideology as two entirely distinct phenomena, neither having any bearing on the other, is the view of the 20th century's most visible linguist, Noam Chomsky, well-known for his work on propaganda and the media (Herman & Chomsky 2002b). For Chomsky, language is inert, something best seen as "inorganic" matter, since "the mind's various parts or 'organs' grow or develop in accord with agendas fixed by the human genome and by other constraints on development" (McGilvray 2012: 5). Language "like most

organs" is "non-functional" and "not well-designed for use" (Chomsky, 1991, in Otero, 2004: 729). That people use it for the exchange of meaning is largely incidental, and the acts of communication to which language is recruited constitute "a tiny fraction" of language. For Chomsky, "it doesn't make much sense to say that the function of language is communication"(Chomsky 2012: 12). Language, instead, is defined as innate grammatical structure, hardwired in the brain, and the same for all humans everywhere. Language grows in the human much like finger nails - as simply a pre-ordained unfolding of an already given pre-packaged set of structures. Language is not shaped by communities, but is rather a sudden biological innovation which, unlike the rest of human biology, did not arise under pressures of natural selection (Chomsky 2012: 49). The language system:

represent[s] external stimuli in terms of representations handed on by the processing system ... this aspect of cognition is really of a nature of a computational system with rigidly determined rules yielding representations, all of this predetermined by human biological nature within pretty narrow bounds. Variation is possible, and experience can induce some changes in the system, but the fundamental ways in which it functions are predetermined (Chomsky 2004: 431)

Paradoxically, "the foremost critic of the foreign and domestic policies of the world's number one (and now only) superpower" (Otero 2003: 85), a professor of linguistics, sees no relation between ideology and the nature of language. It is not that Chomsky dismisses the power of ideology. In one of the most celebrated texts in media studies, co-authored with Edward Herman, Chomsky argues the media "manufacture consent"⁴ because they "serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them"; these powerful interests "play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies" Herman and Chomsky, 2002, #343@xi; "the powerful" are able to "fix the premises of discourse", and in so doing they "'manage' public opinion" Herman and Chomsky, 2002, #343@lix. Such forces rule out the possibility of "mass deliberation and expression" Herman and Chomsky, 2002, #343@xli; the media "internalize" "industry's self-legitimizing usage". Despite having made a career in political science as well as the study of language, Chomsky sees no role whatever for linguistics in the study of ideology.

The second possible way of relating language and ideology is to see only some forms of language use as ideological. In other words, one could argue that language plays a role in the construction of ideology, but only under some conditions. This position must hold that in some forms of language use, or in some structures in language there is a kind of default setting, where language is merely annotating experience, but not refracting it in any way. This

4. A term that belongs originally to Harold Lasswell.

is the basis for being able to claim that language is ideological in some sense, but that one can act outside of ideology - that is, that some ways of seeing the world are not polluted by ideology. What is implied by this view? For linguists holding this view, "reality" must partly be knowable without going via a semiotic code. By extension, language must be, under certain circumstances, simple mirroring reality. By extension, part of the mind must be the same for all humans, regardless of experience; and some aspects of human experience must be imposed on us by the nature of the world.

If one rejects the total separation of language and ideology as untenable, is it viable to argue for a partial overlap between these phenomena? Is there coherence in the argument that language is very much ideological - but that parts of it are not, or that in part it is not? What does a position like this mean for how one conceives of language? George Lakoff is an example of a linguist who accords some power to language to shape how we see the world, at the same time that he rejects what he calls "total relativism". Lakoff considers the mind able to be shaped by language, and, therefore, he sees language as something capable of shaping the mind. At the same time, Lakoff argues that the mind is, with respect to "basic-level categories", "defined by the convergence of our gestalt perception, our capacity for bodily movement, and our ability to form rich mental images" (Lakoff 1987: 267). For Lakoff, there are parts of the world to which humans have direct, unmediated connection. Thus, humans have "pre-conceptual experiences". He rejects "the objectivist approach", while arguing we must maintain "basic realism" defined as acknowledging:

(a) the reality of a world existing independent of human beings, (b) constraints on our conceptual systems due to the nature of that reality, (c) a conception of truth that goes beyond mere internal coherence, (d) a commitment to objectivity, and (e) an account of how scientific knowledge can be stable (Lakoff 1987: 266).

For Lakoff, our "basic-level" categories give us "the real discontinuities in nature ... say the differences between elephants and giraffes", as well as "basic human artifacts", like "chairs, tables, houses, books, lamps, coats, cars". There are also "basic-level" actions ("running, walking, eating, drinking etc") and properties ("tall, short, hard, soft, heavy, light, hot, cold, etc") as well (Lakoff 1987: 270- 271). Moreover, humans have various "schema" that derive directly from "bodily experience" - like part-whole schema, the link scheme, the center-periphery schema, the source-path-goal schema, etc. (Lakoff 1987: 275). Some things about the world, and some things about humans are non-negotiable; thus "some kinds of experiences are structured preconceptually because of the way the world is and the way we are" (Lakoff 1987: 30).

This view entails the assumptions that 1. language must somehow in part function as

mere expression; 2. parts of the mind must be pre-set prior to experience; and 3. aspects of human experience must be the same for all people everyone, regardless of place or epoch. Lakoff takes this view to "avoid[] subjectivism" and to rule out "total relativism" (Lakoff 1987: 268). But, at the same time, Lakoff wants an account of language that is partly relativist, what he refers to as a "mixed view" since "Human beings do not function with internally consistent, monolithic conceptual systems" (Lakoff 1987: 305). Under some conditions (which are not entirely clearly set out by Lakoff), language imposes categories on thought. He concedes to Whorf that "concepts that have been made part of the grammar of a language are used *in* thought, not just as objects of thought" (Lakoff 1987: 335). Thus, he argues for "the independence of a system of thought from its expression in words and syntax", but also argues "words themselves constitute a form of conceptual categorization" (Lakoff 1987: 317- 318).

This partial relation between language to ideology can also be seen the work of Norman Fairclough. Fairclough argues that CDA is "a 'moderate' or 'contingent' form of social constructivism", based on "a realist approach which claims that there is a real world, including the social world, which exists irrespective of whether or how well we know and understand it" (Fairclough 2010a: 4,5). Only "certain uses of language and other 'symbolic forms' are ideological"; he argues "discursive practices are ideologically invested in so far as they incorporate significations which contribute to sustaining or restructuring power relations" (Fairclough 1992: 91). These forms of discourse do have "inherent political or ideological values" for Fairclough; rather "different types of discourse in different social domains of institutional settings may come to be politically or ideologically 'invested'" (Fairclough 1992: 67). As such, if these types of discourses can be ideologically invested, Fairclough claims they can "come to be invested in different ways - they may come to be 'reinvested'" (Fairclough 1992: 67). Fairclough rejects the view that all discourse is "irredeemably" ideological:

Ideologies arise in class societies characterised by relations of domination, and in so far as human beings are capable of transcending such societies they are capable of transcending ideology. I do not therefore accept the view of 'ideology in general' as a form of social cement which is inseparable from society itself" (Fairclough 2010b: 67)

The third possible way of relating language to ideology is to propose that ideology and language are inextricably intertwined. This position asserts that "reality" is only accessible via semiosis. It sees consciousness, in all its variations, as contingent on experience and culture, and language as a "reality-generator" - as having agency in the construal of reality. If humans can see the world differently, then language must, by

extension, provide the resources for variant construals of experience. In this paradigm, language must be both inside and outside of humans, and, to borrow a term from biology, language and ideology must be "homologous". In other words, ideology depends on the properties of language because in some sense these two phenomena have a shared ancestry. And, if all language use involves ideology, then ideology must be pervasive – it must be in the mundane, as much as in the business of the struggle for power within and between nation states. And it must also feature in linguistic theory.

The first exponent of this view in the 20th century was Vološinov, whose *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is described as “the first semiotic theory of ideology” (Eagleton 1991: 194). Vološinov treated the problem of the study of ideology as intimately linked to understanding the nature of language:

A sign does not simply exist as a part of a reality — it reflects and refracts another reality. Therefore, it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view, and so forth. Every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation (i.e., whether it is true, false, correct, fair, good, etc.). The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present, too. Everything ideological possesses semiotic value (Vološinov 1973: 10) (emphasis original)⁵.

We might, for a kind of short hand, refer to this as a "totalizing" view of ideology, on the basis that once language and ideology are conflated, ideology is inescapable. For Vološinov, ideology is quintessentially semiotic. This does not mean it is not psychological. But "signs emerge ... only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another"; "and the individual consciousness itself is filled with signs. Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction" (Vološinov 1973: 11). Vološinov contrasts his view with those which "localiz[e] ideology in the consciousness" and "transform the study of ideologies into a study of consciousness and its laws" (Vološinov 1973: 12). For Vološinov, it "makes no difference whether this is done in transcendental or in empirical-psychological terms". The error is the same, because "ideological creativity ... is forced into the framework of the individual consciousness". The result? For idealism, the locus of consciousness - this "sovereign of the universe" - is "somewhere above existence". For

5. This broad conception of ideology, according to Morris, can be derived from the meaning of the Russian word *ideologiya*: "The Russian *ideologiya* is less politically colored than the English word “ideology”: It is not necessarily a consciously held political belief system; rather it can refer in a more general sense to the way in which members of a given social group view the world" (Morris 2009).

"psychological positivism", consciousness is "nothing ... just a conglomeration of fortuitous, psychophysiological reactions which, by some miracle, results in meaningful and unified ideological creativity" (Vološinov 1973: 12). Once ideological creativity is "miscontrued" as "a conformity with the laws of individual consciousness" it "must inevitably forfeit its real place in existence and depart either up into the superexistential empyrean of transcendentalism or down into the presocial recesses of the psychophysical, biological organism" (Vološinov 1973: 12).

For Vološinov, "the only possible objective definition of consciousness is a sociological one". Consciousness "takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse". The individual is "nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws". Individual consciousness is "not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but only a tenant lodging in the social edifice of ideological signs" (Vološinov 1973: 13)⁶. Table 3 groups a selection of 20th century linguists according to which of these three positions are stated in, or implied by, their linguistic theory.

Language and ideology/ "reality" utterly distinct	Partial overlap between language and ideology/ "reality"	Language agentive in the construction of "realities"
Chomsky	Lakoff Fairclough Eagleton Chilton van Dijk??	Vološinov Malinowski Hjelmslev Wittgenstein Whorf Firth Saussure Halliday Hasan

Table 3: Language and ideology relations in various linguistic theory

The logical extension of Vološinov's⁷ "totalizing" view of language and ideology is

6. It is ironic that in setting out to reconcile a theory of language and ideology with Marxism, Vološinov rejected both Marx's conception of ideology and of language.

7. Note Vološinov reconciling the distinction between *langue* and *parole* of Saussure with the following:

What then is the true center of linguistic reality: the individual speech act - the utterance - or the system of language? And what is the real mode of existence of language: unceasing creative generation or inert immutability of self-identical norms?... if we were to look at language in a truly objective way - from the side, so to speak, or more accurately, from above it, we would discover no inert system of self-identical norms. Instead, we would find ourselves witnessing the ceaseless generation of language norms. From a truly objective

that the individual's consciousness derives from society (viz. Marx's famous utterance, "Life determines consciousness, not consciousness life"), via a person's interactions with those around him or her. This commitment to the essentially social foundation for one's ability to function as an individual" (Hasan 2005a: 18) can be seen as a characteristic of those linguistics for whom language and ideology are largely inseparable characterizes the work of a number of 20th century scholars, such as Sapir, Saussure, Firth, Whorf, Wittgenstein and Malinowski for instance. Interestingly, they are some of 20th century's most mis-read or ignored scholars on language Ellis, 1993, #758; Hasan, 2005, #44555; Joseph, 1990, #415. Each of these scholars make unique contributions, but share an ideology about what language is, and how it might best be understood. Among these scholars we find an orientation to language that is essential to a study of ideology. For instance, they reject any conception of language as mere expression. They reject the view of language as a "countersign" to thought. They give agency to language in the construction of human realities. They theorise the individual in relation to society and culture. All see the individual mind as an artefact of culture.

Sapir, for instance, argued "the 'real world' is to large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group" and that "we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation". Whorf built on this view^{8,9} arguing:

We are inclined to think of language simply as a technique of expression, and not to realize that language first of all is a classification and arrangement of the stream of sensory experience which results in a certain world-order, a certain segment of the world that is easily expressible by the type of symbolic means that language employs. In other words, language does in a cruder but also in a broader and more versatile way the same thing that science does (Whorf 1956j: 55)

Whorf talked of the "Hopi Weltanschauung" - a conflation of language with world view, a view which, as we will see, harmonises with the conception of ideology coming from sociology around the same time (see Chapter 2 Section f B.L. Whorf (1897-1941)). He

viewpoint, one that attempts to see language in a way completely apart from how it appears to any given individual at any given moment in time, language presents the picture of a ceaseless flow of becoming. (Vološinov 1973: 63, 66)

8. For a critique of the mis-readings of Whorf, see Ellis, 1993, #758; Lee, 1996, #10077.

9. Whorf uses a Jungian conception of psychic functions: sensation, feeling, thinking and intuition. Of these he argues that thinking is "the function which is to a large extent linguistic"; while "feeling is mainly nonlinguistic, though it may use the vehicle of language, albeit in a way quite different from thinking" (Whorf 1956l: 66)

maintained that "the Hopi language and culture conceals a metaphysics, such as our so-called naive view of space and time does, or as the relativity theory does; yet it is a different metaphysics" (Whorf 1956a: 58). Whorf notes that the inner life of a Hopi is conceived of as "heart" not "mind". Whorf's views are in harmony with some of the work in psychology in the early part of the century, such as Vygotsky.

In this linguistic tradition, language and culture are intertwined and co-evolving, and this explains the efficacy of language. Language is deeply part of human experience, and the development of mind, because it the means by which we "semioticize" - organize, give salience to, share - our interactions with our eco-social environment. The process begins with, but then extends, the form/content of sign relations described by Saussure at the beginning of the 20th century. This process creates an inseparable intertwining of matter and meaning, through which language creates the richly human realities in which ideology is pervasively implicated.