A MARX-INFLUENCED APPROACH TO IDEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE: COMMENTS

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1. Introduction

In this discussion of the three papers on Language Ideologies in Institutions of Power I want to first characterize what contemporary Marx-influenced approaches to language and ideology have in common, and then talk about the three papers in light of that characterization.

Like other terms that compete with ideology, notably hegemony and culture, but also consciousness, ideology has fundamentally to do with interpretive perspective, with actors' understandings of what it is that is happening in human social action. That interpretive frame may be implicit, covert or hidden, or it may be relatively explicit and widely disseminated.

In any case, the nature of ideology is understood to be shaped by power relations between dominant and subordinate sectional interests or structural positions. Characteristically ideology is thought to contribute to the maintenance of a given social order in ways that conceal the advantage of that order to dominant interests and the exploitation in that order of subordinate groups.

A continuing role for the student of ideology is the critique of ideology, the making explicit of those hidden implicit dimensions of ideology that characteristically serve dominant interests. A related, but relatively new role for the student of ideology, is the documentation of resistance against dominant ideologies by subordinate groups, and of the attendant emergence of new ideologies in the context of resistance, oppositional politics, conflict, and change.

2. Language and ideology

Language had become relevant in the study of ideology because of its widely recognized involvement both in thought and in social action, and for some because of its concreteness or materiality. Language is central to the creation, promulgation and maintenance of ideologies. We experience the world through human interaction that is constituted by discourse and much of the ideational content of human dealings is expressed and mentally experienced through language. Language is for these reasons relevant to understanding the role of ideology in the maintenance of dominant-subordinate relations in human societies.

There are as I see it two broad traditions within language focused approaches to ideology by contemporary linguists that inform this collection on language

ideologies. First there is a tradition that generally separates ideology from behavior and considers the relation between the two. For example, the important distinction between pragmatics and metapragmatics (Silverstein 1975, 1981; Errington 1985; Shibamoto 1987) or between practice and talk about practice (Philips 1991) separates language use behavior from local accounts of that behavior.

This distinction between behavior and ideology has been characteristic of much twentieth century discussion of human social processes in the social sciences, and has been influenced by the currently discredited Marxist distinction between base and superstructure, although that influence is not always acknowledged or recognized.

In some ways this distinction has also been carried over into the more explicitly Marx-influenced work on the language ideologies of dominant and minority populations within modern nation states by Bourdieu (1977a), Hill (1985), Woolard (1985) and Gal (1988). In this work the political economic positions ("base") of individuals and groups, particularly of ethnic or linguistic minorities, is held to determine their language ideologies ("superstructure"). In this literature ethnic minorities resist the linguistic domination of either the state or linguistic majorities. The specifically sociolinguistic roots for this tradition can be found in Labov's (e.g. 1964) pioneering work in New York city on class based language variation correlated with class based language attitudes.

The second major approach to language and ideology that has emerged within the linguistic sciences as well as outside them conceptualizes ideology as embedded and embodied in practice or discourse, and as itself material (Bakhtin 1981; Volosinov 1973; Foucault 1972, 1980; Bourdieu 1977b; Williams 1977; Willis 1977). In this tradition the behavior-ideology split is explicitly or implicitly rejected.

From a linguistic point of view, there is an unsatisfactory vagueness and oversimplification in Marxist characterizations of the ways that ideologies are constituted or realized in discourse in some of this work. Discourse analysis in linguistics, sociology and anthropology lends specificity about form-meaning relationships to the Marxist tradition. The contributions of these areas to documentation of the linguistic devices and discourse structures that frame or cue or constrain interpretive practices is particularly promising for lending greater specificity and sophistication to Marxist analyses.

The ethnomethodological tradition of phenomenological sociology has been important to the study of ideology in discourse because it emphasizes the constitutive role of language in the co-construction of social realities in discourse. One strand of that tradition particularly influenced by the work of Aaron Cicourel, looks at language use in bureaucratic settings showing how the organization of interaction constructs power relations between bureaucrats and their clients (e.g. Erickson and Schultz 1982; Philips 1983/1993, Todd 1989; West 1984). In this body of work we see how bureaucrats' interpretations of what is going on are made to dominate the interactions, while those of the clients are ignored and suppressed. Similar lines of thought are also evident in the European work on language, power and ideology (Fowler, Hodge & Kress 1979; Fairclough 1989; Kress 1989; Wodak 1989).

However, while such work addresses the exercise of power through language and in some cases the consequences of that exercise for meaning in social practice, it has not necessarily been done in a way that theoretically orients to Marxist

traditions, in the work of the Americans, but this is changing (e.g. Hill 1985, to appear; Mehan, Nathanson & Skelly 1990). Paul Willis' work (1977) has been important in creating a connection between interactional approaches documenting the construction of reality through discourse and Marxist interests in resistance, struggle and conflict. In *Learning to Labour* Willis locates Marxist-theorized class struggle in the Goffmanesque (Goffman 1956) manipulation of symbols in face-to-face interaction.

Some Marxists (e.g. Eagleton 1991) want to equate semiotic Marxism with the growing interest in looking at discourse using Marx-influenced concepts of ideology. I think this is a mistake, and am trying to show here the ways in which much of this work draws instead on sociolinguistic traditions. It is also not clear why Marxists who are wary of discourse analysis assume that linguists will inevitably argue for the indeterminacy of meaning in the way postmodern characterizations of reader-text interactions do. It is true that language focused ideological analysis in the linguistic sciences builds on the assumption of the polysemy of language form. But the indeterminacy of the meaning of decontextualized forms is seen as constrained by the contexts in which they occur, so that the context is said to overdetermine the underdetermined nature of language as a code. It is true, however, that discourse analysis is often done as if nothing existed outside the discourse itself. This is clearly a weakness of the discourse analysis of ideology if it is done in that way. The fact that the base-superstructure distinction and relationship has been undermined in our contemporary intellectual context should not lead or allow us to ignore the causal relationships that distinction addressed.

3. Ideology, culture and hegemony

In general anthropological linguists who have discussed the way in which interpretive perspectives are constituted in discourse have been more interested in talking about *culture* as that which is being constituted, rather than *ideology*. Relatedly, some students of the language-ideology connection talk about language *hegemonies* rather than language ideologies. There is some impatience among those interested in these concepts with their all being used somewhat interchangeably. Here I will distinguish among them in ways that argue for both the value of all three concepts and for the continuing central relevancy of "ideology" to the discussion at hand.

"Culture" refers to humanly acquired knowledge that provides interpretive frames which allow us to assign meaning to human activity. Generally culture is conceived of as shared, and this sharedness has been emphasized by anthropological linguists working on discourse. Wallace's (1965) idea that by its very nature (and much to our advantage), cultural knowledge is also non-shared and transmitted through speech has been too secondary a concern. But even cognitive anthropologists interested in variation in cultural knowledge conceptualize such variation as individual rather than as socially organized.

In contrast, contemporary Marx-influenced approaches to language and ideology highlight socially systemic ideological diversity, usually along dominant-subordinant lines and in conflict. Thus Marx-influenced approaches to ideology and language offer ways of modelling organized diversity in cultural knowledge.

Another important way in which the concept of culture is different from the concept of ideology is that its use, and the commitment to the development of the concept in no way entail a commitment to address the nature and consequences of power relations or relations of domination and subordination for the nature of culture. In contrast, the use of the term "ideology" typically carries with it the assumption of the relevance of power relations for understanding the nature of ideology.

"Hegemony" is a concept that has been proposed as a replacement for "ideology" (e.g. by Williams 1977) because it is seen as both lacking the negative connotations of "ideology" (see for example Geertz 1973) and as focusing attention on issues neglected in the study of ideology. The key practice theorists Bourdieu, Foucault and Williams, whose work has encouraged linguists to focus on ideology in discourse, all have been influenced by Gramsci (1971) in their development of either the concept of hegemony or other related concepts. All refer to very pervasive and implicit interpretive perspectives that have a naturalness, a taken-for-granted quality, that *are* the lived reality, and that provide the practical consciousness through which social action is experienced. And all three of these scholars have also followed Gramsci in recognizing the state as the purveyor and promulgator of such ideologies.

The importance attached by the Frankfurt school to popular culture and the public domain as important sites for the maintenance of opiating ideologies (Bronner & Kellner 1989) has also been influential in shaping contemporary uses of the concept of hegemony.

But there are many problems with this concept. In actual analysis the ideologies conceptualized as hegemonic are often hardly totally implicit, and often far from pervasive. Most importantly here, however, is the point that while the concept of hegemony is needed to highlight certain ideological processes, it can hardly replace the concept of ideology. Above all we need to be able to talk explicitly about the degrees of explicitness and implicitness of ideologies (e.g. Giddens 1979), a distinction which the concept of hegemony or the way it has been used obscures and takes attention from. And relatedly we need to be able to talk about the critique of ideology that is part of the concept of ideology, an endeavor both associated with and obscured in discussions of hegemony.

4. Discussion of the papers

The three papers I consider here all deal with language ideologies in bureaucratic settings of institutions of the sort argued by Marx-influenced scholars such as Adorno (1989) and Gramsci (1971), Foucault (1980) and Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977a; Woolard 1985) to be associated with the promulgation, indeed enforcement, of nation-state cultural hegemonies. Institutional domains of this kind addressed in these three papers include the media, represented by both newspapers and radio, and the law school classroom, representing the reproduction of both educational and legal hegemonies. All three papers use as ultimate sources of data naturally-occurring forms of speech that as part of their nature involve talk about talk, or metapragmatic analyses. In all three papers we are made aware that it is a struggle to maintain a dominant ideology and, so to speak, hold a hegemony together. Each

paper can be seen as a critique of ideology in that each sheds light on the nature of nation-state hegemonies by making explicit hidden aspects of a dominant ideology expressed through language or about language. The papers differ, however, in important ways, in the contribution they make to our understanding of the language-ideology connection.

In "The Role of Language in European Nationalist Ideologies", Jan Blommaert and Jef Verschueren document a Western European belief expressed in newspaper articles that linguistically and culturally homogeneous groups are the only social units that can be seen as potentially successful and legitimate bases for nation-states.

Blommaert and Verschueren do not use the term hegemony, and they seem to be more influenced by the Frankfurt school's views on the importance of the public sphere in the promulgation of ideologies than by other Marxian traditions relevant to the collection as a whole. However, they characterize this ideology as implicit and pervasive, which sounds like hegemony to me. And, while they document some fascinating variation from nation to nation in the form this linguistic "homogeneity" ideology takes, they do not talk about there being other views held or in evidence in their data base.

However, their own writing implicitly raises the possibility that a political unit can contain linguistic diversity and still function effectively. In other words, the paper itself can be seen as counter-hegemonic to the hegemony they document. And it is relevant that these authors are writing out of a national context in which Belgium is the designated location for the capital of the collection of linguistically heterogeneous nations in western Europe that is trying to make itself into a new kind of political unit. Presumably their political experience has helped them to write against the assumption of the desirability of nation-state linguistic homogeneity.

This paper contributes to the destabilization of the assumption of the power, permanency and cultural hegemony of the nation state that is a defining feature of the Gramscian tradition. The paper can be related to the challenge to the nation state going on all over Europe. And ultimately the paper is about the culturally constructed nature of the state itself. It reveals the way in which "language" as a construct is used ideologically to create a European view of what it takes to make a state.

I am reminded by this paper also of the way in which the one language-one nation ideology was raised in anthropological and linguistic (language planning) discussions of emerging new nations in the post-colonial era of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly for African nations. In European-American eyes, multi-tribal and multi-lingual African states were seen as inherently unstable. They were also seen as burdened by their multilingualism in any efforts to take what were assumed to be unintegrated and oppositionally arranged units and create a socially integrated and economically developed nation state in the image of the European normative (as opposed to actual) model.

Social scientists, then, have contributed to the problematization of multilingualism for post colonial states. In these nation states multilingualism is in turn problematized by local elites with control over state-linked institutions that disseminate cultural ideologies in the public sphere. Such a pattern is evident in Debra Spitulnik's paper on "Radio Time Sharing in Zambia: National Ideology and Democratic versus Hierarchical Linguistic Pluralism". Spitulnik describes the relation

between Zambian ideology about the nation state and the allocation of state controlled radio time to different languages associated with different tribal groupings within Zambia.

The national unity ideology in Zambia stresses the idea that all of the 73 tribal groupings are equally different and avoids mention of inequalities among those groups. Relatedly, 7 of the 20 indigenous languages are considered official languages, an unusually pluralistic language policy in which linguistic relativism parallels the tribal relativism.

In practice, however, these 7 languages are allocated very different amounts of time on the radio, creating what Spitulnik refers to as a hierarchical ranking of the languages behind a rhetoric of egalitarianism.

The talk about practice, then, is egalitarian, while the practice itself is hierarchical, and members of the different tribes are in conflict as each group tries to increase its own amount of language time on the radio.

Such a situation makes it difficult to determine what could be called a culturally hegemonic ideology in Zambia, and indeed raises questions about how well such a concept even "travels" if one tries to apply it to non-European nation-state contexts. In other words, even though on the face of it, the same concerns with linking language and ethnicity to nation states seem to be at issue ideologically in the papers about both Zambia and Europe, the status of the ideologies is quite different in the two situations. The official Zambian ideology of the value of linguistic and tribal pluralism seems created for no other reason than to hold the state together, and expresses a position that must be taken publicly to keep a fragile state intact. In this context state-promulgated ideologies emerge as obviously motivated and desperately tenuous rather than as insinuated and fiercely all-controlling as they are sometimes held to be for European contexts.

In spite of these differences, the two papers I have discussed so far have a great deal in common when they are contrasted with the third paper by Beth Mertz, "Linguistic Ideology and Praxis in U.S. Law School Classrooms".

The first two papers are both tied to the initial language-ideology connection above in which behavior and ideology are treated as analytically separable. The paper by Mertz in contrast is more closely linked theoretically to the second tradition I discussed as connecting language and ideology, in which ideologies are understood to be constituted in practice, or in sociolinguistic terms through face-to-face interaction or discourse. In keeping with the work of Bourdieu and Foucault, the focus is on practice in a bureaucratic setting, namely instruction in the law school classroom. In the Gramscian tradition of state hegemony such an activity is viewed as the activity of an ideological state apparatus maintaining cultural hegemony.

Mertz shows how the law school professor is able to sustain the dominant interpretive perspective associated with the legal system in the face of lack of cooperation or resistance from law students. The professor does this by taking on the resistant student's voice, and modeling a legally acceptable dialogue within his own speech. Mertz characterizes such efforts on the part of the professors as metapragmatic. In so doing she reflects an apparently developing tendency to extend the meaning of metapragmatic to include aspects of linguistic structuring heretofore conceptualized as framing, contextualization, or cuing devices (Goffman 1974; Gumperz 1982). This suggests an increasing merging of the two approaches to

language and ideology that I identified as separate traditions earlier in this discussion.

In the Mertz paper domination and subordination are more evident than in the other papers. We see resistance. We know there is more than one view, more than one interpretive or ideological stance being taken in this discourse, even when the views of the student are not articulated.

Mertz, like the authors of the other two papers in this section, makes the implicit explicit, revealing to us in this case the effort that must be made to maintain the domination and authority of a single interpretive framework.

5. Conclusion

All three of these papers contribute to a Marx-influenced approach to ideology by critiquing ideologies that involve language. They reveal or make explicit hidden or implicit aspects of ideologies which dominate activity in the domains studied, either by virtue of their pervasiveness or by virtue of their institutionalization by people in positions of power in nation state supporting institutions.

In each case dimensions of domination are revealed that are hidden in more explicit ideological formations. While the revelation of concealed domination can be disconcerting to say the least, in these cases the revelations are oddly reassuring. Each in a different way suggests a fragility, vulnerability and penetrability of hegemonizing institutions that is not normally attributed to them. And these accounts attest to the continuing power of Marx-influenced approaches to ideology that stress resistance, conflict and struggle through language practices.

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