

Introduction

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**Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in political
discourse**

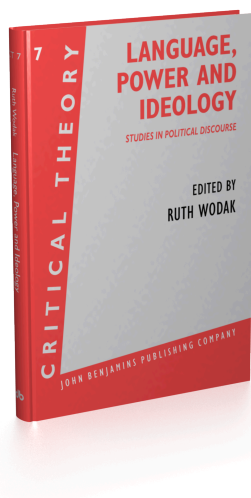
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Introduction

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Questions asked of a sentence

1. What is the use of the sentence?
2. To whom does it pretend to be useful?
3. What is its challenge?
4. What is its practical purpose?
5. Which sentence follows which sentence?
What sentences support it?
6. In which situation is it spoken?
By whom?

(Bertold Brecht, *Darstellung von Sätzen in einer neuen Enzyklopädie*, Werke 20: 174)

1. Language and power¹

These questions posed by Bert Brecht almost seem to present the frame of a “critical socio- and text-linguistic paradigm”: What is the speaker’s intention, what happens afterwards, which other sentences or utterances support the meaning and constitute the illocutionary force? And of specific interest for critical linguists is the question: What are the social and “political practices” involved in or triggered by the sentence? Today, of course, we speak of “discourse” or of “text” (written and oral); we do not accept the sentence as largest unit any longer. But even though Brecht

mentions only sentences, he almost intuitively touches on the concepts of “speech *act*”. “context”, “illocutionary and perlocutionary force”, and especially of *power*: Who takes the floor, who controls, who chooses, who defines what is good or bad (language) behaviour?

All the papers in this volume deal with issues which are investigated in a critical manner similar to the one described above. All authors are concerned with the social practice of language behaviour, with the dialectics between society (including its subsystems), power, values, ideologies, opinions expressed and constituted in and about language.

A critical *analysis* should not remain descriptive and neutral: the interests guiding such an analysis (see Habermas 1971) are aimed at uncovering injustice, inequality, taking sides with the powerless and suppressed. This does not mean, however, that the research is necessarily one-sided, not “scientific” as such. But we all know — at least since the important discussion on subjectivity and objectivity in the social sciences (see Adorno 1969) — that no research is completely objective, i.e. the interests, values and decisions of the researcher always guide the analysis. It is important, therefore, to state these values explicitly, to analyze all aspects, to take into account multiple data and methods before drawing any conclusions or before starting to interpret or explain. A certain *distance from the subject under investigation* is necessary. These very brief and thus incomplete arguments can be summarized in one sentence as the “leitmotif” for this volume: “*diagnosis*” first, *interpretation* and “*therapy*” to follow! (See Wodak *et al.* 1985, 1986a,b; Wodak and Quasthoff (eds.) 1985; Menz, this volume).

What are the aims of critical linguistics? Generally speaking, we want to uncover and de-mystify certain social processes in this and other societies, to make mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, demagoguery, and propaganda explicit and transparent. (This would be the diagnosis.) As the second step, as many indicators, data and knowledge as possible concerning the whole context of these processes have to be examined, to enable us to interpret and understand how and why reality is structured in a certain way (this would, of course, be an interdisciplinary task). Lastly, if possible, practical and political steps should be taken by teams of practitioners, researchers in other fields *and the people who are most involved*:

The only permanent advance in the condition of life in any field occurs when people take their own affairs into their hands. I believe that this is true of the study of Black English as it is true everywhere (Labov 1982: 195-196).

Strategies of defence have to be developed; naturally the hope prevails that changes can be brought about. Language changes always manifest social changes — but language changes (or changes in language behaviour) can also trigger social changes (see Wodak and Schulz 1986; Hellinger, this volume, Pfeiffer, Strouhal and Wodak 1987).

Thus language only gains power in the hands of the powerful; language is not powerful “per se”. Often enough, a specific language even symbolizes the group or person in power (see the papers in part I of this volume), and fights about the status or discrimination of one or the other language symbolize power struggles (see Wodak *et al.* 1986; van Dijk and Quasthoff-Hartmann, this volume).

Naturally, many issues mentioned here have also been dealt with in other scientific fields (sociology, communication studies, political sciences, sociopsychology etc.). But often enough, the function and status of language have been neglected. And although the study of the relationship between “language and power” or “language and politics” began a long time ago (rhetoric, stylistics), the detailed and subtle approach from a critical point of view (“critical linguistics”, or “critical discourse analysis”) is certainly new (see Chilton 1985; Kress 1985; Seidel 1985).

This volume has a place in the new tradition: it draws together diverse theoretical and methodological concepts in analyzing issues of social relevance. The aims and goals can be summarized as follows:

Beyond description or superficial application, critical science in each domain asks further questions, such as those of responsibility, interests, and ideology. Instead of focussing on purely academic or theoretical problems, it starts from prevailing social problems, and thereby chooses the perspective of those who suffer most and critically analyzes those in power, those who are responsible, and those who have the means and the opportunity to solve such problems. As simple as that (van Dijk 1986: 4).

2. Critical linguistics

The most important characteristics of critical research are²:

- a. *Research interest*: Uncovering inequality and injustice.
- b. *Object under investigation*: Language behaviour in natural speech situations of *social relevance* (institutions, media, minority problems, racism etc.) is to be investigated. All situations which are threatening or involve a power play between individuals are of interest.

- c. *Interdisciplinary research*: Social phenomena are too complex to be dealt with adequately in only one field.
- d. *Empirical research*: Data from natural speech situations are to be analyzed. Nevertheless, theory and methodology, values and aims are to be discussed explicitly.
- e. Inclusion of the *historical perspective*: Social processes are dynamic, not static. This has to be reflected in the theory and in the methodology.
- f. "*Leitmotif*" of critical research: "Diagnosis" first, interpretation and "therapy" to follow!
- g. *Researchers are forced to take sides*: Especially in empirical research, the "subjects under investigation" cannot be treated as objects any longer. Research includes the "researched" and, eventually, ought to help them (if possible).
- h. *Social and political practice is aimed at*: Results of research not only imply success in the academic field, but they should also include proposals for practical implementation.
- i. Necessity for new notions and extensions of traditional concepts of "*language behaviour*" and "*meaning*": Social phenomena are very complex, irrational and rational. Many different and ambivalent, conscious and subconscious motives are relevant. Thus *multiple methods*, *manifest* and *latent* meanings, *cognitive* and *affective aspects* are important. Finally, the *historical* and *social* context should not be neglected.

3. Language, power and ideology

The papers collected in this volume try to cover aspects of critical linguistics, as mentioned above. Each author defines his/her notions, interests, tools, and concepts. Some papers include large samples and multiple analysis; other articles present qualitative case studies. The volume is divided into three parts: I. Language and totalitarianism; II. Language of politicians and of politics and III. Institutions and control. Papers with similar topics are collected in one part; thus, the reader can compare different approaches and procedures of analysis.

Let us start with Part I, *Language and totalitarianism*. Christoph Sauer is concerned with "Nazi language policy" in the occupied Netherlands. His concept of "multidimensionality" of meanings makes transparent in what

way ideology was transmitted via newspapers. He analyzes the whole "textworld, textuality" of the print-media; he succeeds finally in showing how reality was constructed and manipulated, a reality in contradiction to the experience of the population under occupation.

Gabrielle Klein and Rosita Rindler Schjerve both analyze the language under the Mussolini-regime. These papers are of particular interest because of the severe neglect this historical period has suffered from up to now. Klein is concerned with language politics on the macrolevel (e.g. in schools), Rindler Schjerve, on the other hand, with the microanalysis of speeches and programmatic statements. Thus, these first three papers allow for a comparison of methodologies, but, above all, they supply a deeper insight into the power mechanisms of the fascist period.

Herbert Brekle traces the meaning of "important words" throughout the newspapers (e.g. "Krieg"), right through World War I up to now. This is important because the roots of fascist propaganda and ideology become manifest.

The second part of the volume is concerned with the "*Language of politics and of politicians*". Karl Sornig differentiates the complex phenomenon of "persuasion". He succeeds in deriving a new and interesting taxonomy.

The paper by Werner Holly is also of a more general nature. He looks at persuasion mechanisms, at strategies used by politicians when they attempt to appear and sound "credible". He is able to point to a few very important contradictions between "what is said" and "what is meant".

My own paper deals with the political jargon used by the student movement of 1968. How do group languages grow, how does jargon create reality, what is the relationship between political jargon and specific ideologies? A talk show on TV with two well-known student leaders is analyzed and their jargon compared with the language of the "green movement" of the 1980s.

Sylvia Moosmüller analyzes the language of politicians. She combines socio-phonological methods with discourse analysis. Speeches in parliament, from male and female politicians, were tape-recorded, transcribed and coded. Moosmüller also succeeds in pointing out very important and significant sex-specific differences. Thus, her analysis included two levels: political language and strategies; sex-specific behaviour and difficulties of women in a "male profession".

The paper by Uta Quasthoff-Hartmann includes a general analysis.

She is concerned with “the nature of stereotypes and prejudices”. She goes into great detail in both analyzing and defining their functions on several levels. She poses the important questions: why and how do stereotypes suddenly become dangerous and menacing? What really happens in the society investigated? These questions naturally imply interdisciplinary research; otherwise, each individual answer would be too simplistic.

The third part of this volume deals with *Institutions, control and discourse in specific settings*.

Teun van Dijk presents a thorough and impressive analysis of the way racism is transmitted through the media in the Netherlands. It is not only important how much is said about foreigners (classical content-analysis), but even more so what and how it is put, and this is precisely the very productive type of contribution critical linguistics can make.

Florian Menz presents an analysis of the Austrian newspaper with the largest circulation, called *Kronenzeitung*. This newspaper frequently creates opinions and manipulates the “masses” to a great extent. He presents several recent examples.

The paper by Ernst Strouhal is very innovative: he compares three texts and three textual worlds with each other. All texts are concerned with the same topic: a woman is declared insane by psychiatric institutions and the court, and her child is taken away from her. Strouhal interviewed the woman, the psychiatrist and also obtained the written statement presented at court. How do the stories and accounts differ? Is the woman really insane? What are the criteria used? This paper is extremely important for political and socio-practical purposes. It is both fascinating and appalling to follow the way the woman was discriminated against. Here, too, as soon as we know about these latent mechanisms, we shall be able to build strategies and defences against such blatant injustice.

Marlis Hellinger points to yet another source of discrimination: she compares sexist language behaviour in several languages and analyzes the arguments which are often used to fight against attempted changes. It is all a question of “strategies”. She succeeds in showing very clearly that the language systems themselves allow for many changes; the norms and values of patriarchal societies, on the other hand, prevent progress.

Let me thank Iris Zavala and Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz for making the publication of this volume in their series possible. The friendship and help of these two extraordinary women have impressed me very much. I would also like to thank Ms. Barbara Seidlhofer for her comments on the English

translation and Ms. Elisabeth Andraschko for her help in the editing process and with the correspondence.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my friends and my son, Jacob Engel, for their patience with me in difficult stages of the publishing and editing process. Without their warmth and support, academic work would become senseless and aimless.

NOTES

1. Many thoughts expressed in this short introduction took shape at a conference on "Language and Ideology" in Utrecht, June 1986. It is also there that I met Iris and Myriam, as well as Teun for the first time. What a wonderful experience and what a stimulating discussion!
2. N.B.: We are naturally aware that many criteria have been formulated before and also in different contexts. We are not seeking to redefine a paradigm or to do so contrary to existing research. All research aiming in this direction — wherever it comes from — should be termed critical (as opposed to purely descriptive, static or pseudo-objective).

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