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Language Ideologies and Language Criticism: Definitions and Research Perspectives

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Abstract. This foundational article will provide an overview of the concept of (language) ideology as it is used in this Handbook. Language ideologies are firmly embedded in socio-cultural factors and are definitively related to language itself and its function in constructing group identity. Therefore, not every form of ideology that may be encoded in or through language will be addressed in this Handbook, but only those ideologies related to language. In line with Kroskrity (2004), we define language ideology as a cluster concept comprising five separate dimensions, as is found in numerous other definitions of language ideology. In this foundational article, we will also discuss the various research traditions practiced within the philologies, along with the concepts established within these that deal with the study of linguistic knowledge and language attitudes, including an elucidation of how these differ from one another. One of these established concepts is language criticism, which we define here as the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection. We will also address how this relates to language ideologies. Finally, within the framework of the comparison of European languages, we will also selectively address the topic of metaphors as condensed forms of the expression of language ideologies.

Keywords

language ideologies, ideology, linguistic knowledge, language awareness, language attitudes, language reflection, language criticism, the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection

Introduction

Language ideologies, the linguistic and culturally specific shaping of which is the primary focus of this Handbook, are an integral part to the various forms of language criticism. Language criticism, as the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection, draws its evaluative standards from

a continuum, spanning from the habitual to explicitly normative views of correctness, appropriateness and aesthetics, which form or help to form the perspectivised and in this respect, also ideologised, individual and collective linguistic knowledge of a language community.

In the following explication, we will first provide a definition of language ideologies that will meet the needs of language ideology researchers in the various philologies and will also serve as the basis of this volume of the Handbook. Our definition is a composite of various aspects that are also found in numerous other definitions of language ideologies. In addition, other conceptual traditions from the field of linguistics in which evaluative references to language are conceptualised will be included (*language reflection, language awareness, language attitudes, language mentalities*). Finally, we will introduce metaphors as a condensed and commonly conveyed form of language ideologies and will also examine the relationship between language ideologies and language criticism.

Language Ideologies in International Research Discourse

We draw upon the general understanding of language ideologies established by Irvine (1989) and Silverstein (1979). Woolard (2020:1) writes:

[I]deologies of language are morally and politically loaded representations of the nature, structure, and use of languages in a social world (Irvine 1989). Societies of all kinds have language ideologies. In childrearing, everyday interaction, and interpersonal disputes as much as in ritual and political debates, small-scale traditional societies characterized by apparent cultural and linguistic homogeneity are as affected by language ideologies as are multilingual, multiethnic, late capitalist societies.¹

¹ The different terms *language ideologies*, *linguistic ideologies* and *ideologies of language* can be assigned to the same concept and research subject (cf. Woolard 2020: 1).

Busch (2019: 110; translation by C.D.)² finds that language ideology research with its “many bifurcations has become virtually unmanageable”. Yet, even with the varying definitions, it is possible to identify a number of common features, which Kroskrity (2004: 501) includes in his cluster concept. According to Silverstein’s (1979: 193) frequently cited definition, language ideologies are thus “any sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use”. This addresses the **(1) awareness of language ideologies**. Silverstein’s definition makes the point that language ideologies are normally explicitly articulated in metalinguistic utterances (cf. Kroskrity 2004: 505) and therefore represent the “reflected content of consciousness” (Dorostkar 2014: 32f.; translation by C.D.)³. However, Silverstein’s approach also takes into consideration the notion that ideologies are filtered on a less conscious level, as speakers do not possess a comprehensive awareness of linguistic structures and functions (cf. Woolard 2020: 5). Other scholars also emphasise that language ideologies may not only be (re)produced explicitly, in the form of discursive awareness, but also implicitly, in the form of practical awareness (cf. Kroskrity 2004: 505). This is shown, for example, in Woolard’s (1998: 3) definition: “Representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world are what we mean by ‘language ideology.’ [sic!]”. Errington (2001: 110) also shares this view, as language ideology “refers to the situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language” and can therefore also be expressed in communicative practices.

Irvine (1989: 255) defines language ideology as “the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests”. Her definition underscores that language ideologies are linked to the **(2) interests of specific actors**. This is also made clear in Errington’s (2001: 110) above-quoted definition, as well as, although somewhat less directly, by Heath (1989: 53), who defines language ideology as “self-evident ideas and objectives a

2 Busch (2019: 110): [die Sprachideologieforschung in ihren] “Verästelungen schier unüberschaubar geworden ist”.

3 Dorostkar (2014: 32f.): “reflektierte Bewusstseinsinhalte”.

group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group”.

The definitions of Irvine (1989: 255), Heath (1989: 53) and Woolard (1998: 3) also make clear that **(3) language ideologies mediate between social structures and language structures or usage**. Woolard/Schieffelin (1994: 55), too, speak of “language ideology as a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk”, and Irvine/Gal (2000: 35, 37) define them as “the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them” or, put more concisely, “the way people conceive of links between linguistic forms and social phenomena”.

Rumsey (1990: 346) describes language ideologies as “shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world”. Kroskrity (2004: 496) has criticised this definition as not sufficiently accounting for the **(4) diversity of language ideologies** within a cultural group (according to age, gender, social class, etc.). In the other definitions mentioned (Silverstein 1979: 193; Heath 1989: 53; Irvine 1989: 255; Woolard/Schieffelin 1994: 55; Woolard 1998: 3; Irvine/Gal 2000: 35, 37; Errington 2001: 110), this aspect is more or less implied.

Finally, we will elucidate the **(5) role of language ideologies in the construction of identity**. This aspect may not be explicit in the definitions mentioned above but is indirectly highlighted in their mention of the mediating function of language ideologies between social structures and language structures or usage (Irvine 1989: 255; Heath 1989: 53; Woolard/Schieffelin 1994: 55; Woolard 1998: 3; Irvine/Gal 2000: 35, 37). Irvine/Gal (2000: 37) clarify this connection in another passage in their article:

It has become a commonplace in sociolinguistics that linguistic forms, including whole languages, can index social groups. As part of everyday behaviour, the use of a linguistic form can become a pointer to (index of) the social identities and the typical activities of speakers.

Additionally, Rosa/Burdick (2017: 108) provide a general overview of more recent studies in the field of language ideology research, in which the research is focussed on the examination of language and identity.

In addition to the academic debate on *language ideologies* outlined above, within various research discourses, positions have been established asserting that language, its usage, knowledge about it (explicit and implicit) and both the public and academic debates surrounding language are always ideological, because our speech and actions are never neutral, but always emerge from our own particular point of view and are, therefore, perspectivised.

Excursus: Research Traditions in the Various Philologies in the Area of Perspectivised Linguistic Knowledge

In sociolinguistics, influenced as it is by Romance Studies, the term **language awareness** was first introduced by Brigitte Schlieben-Lange (1971). This eventually evolved as the most significant concept in the operationalisation of thinking about language and its usage (cf., for example, the writings of Scherfer 1983; Berkenbusch 1988; Cichon 1988; Fischer 1988; Stroh 1993). The cognitive entity identified in the sociolinguistic concept of language awareness has a number of different functions for speakers. It enables them to identify a language or variant as being fairly uniform and to recognise themselves and others as speakers of that language or variant. Because language awareness allows speakers to be assigned to a language community or language group, it contributes to the construction of psychological and social identity for persons in those communities and groups (cf. Scherfer 1983: 40). Language awareness also plays a role in social orientation. It aids in the categorisation of persons, situations and social institutions by correlating linguistic and socio-situational characteristics and thereby providing action-oriented knowledge. Thus, the concept of language awareness is also rooted in the sociology of knowledge. The heuristic potential of the concept of language awareness therefore goes beyond the reconstruction of meta-linguistic knowledge at every level of cognition. The analysis of language awareness can also contribute to the analysis of social identities and thereby also to the analysis of the perception of social structures.

Variationist sociolinguistics, which is influenced by English Studies, prefers to employ the concept of **language attitude**. As Colin Baker (1992: 8)

determined, however, the socio-psychological connotation of this term was initially ignored:

The tendency of research on language attitudes [...] is to appear to ignore or be unaware of the strong tradition in social psychology that concerns the definition, structure and measurement of attitudes, the relationship of attitudes to external behaviour and the central topic of attitude change.

In social psychology research, *attitudes* are defined as latent variables that intervene as dependent variables between triggering stimuli (such as persons, situations or social matters) and the various ways in which an individual may react (verbal utterances, feelings, perceptual judgements or other observable behaviour) (cf. Fischer/Wiswede 1997: 206). Here, the basic function of the attitudinal concept is to explain human behaviour – in sociolinguistics, for example, the choice of a specific variant. Accordingly, in sociolinguistic attitude research, language behaviour is viewed as an attitude object, towards which individuals, as carriers of attitude, can express themselves or act. Linguistic characteristics become triggers for social perception and categorisation processes, which have an effect on the individual language behaviour of these carriers. The social or even political dimension of language attitudes plays little to no role here.

In Germanist Linguistics, the term subjective **metalinguistic reflection**⁴ has been coined, which, in practice, is a form of language criticism (for more on language criticism, see Niehr/Killian/Schiewe 2020). This concept refers to “the conscious reflection of speakers or writers 1) on their own use of language or 2) on that of a communications partner, 3) on language usage in general, 4) on individual languages or variants, and finally, 5) on the ‘potential and limits of human language capabilities overall’” (Bär 1999: 58; translation by C.D.; cf. also Reichmann 1998: 24; and Gardt et al. 1991: 17)⁵. The concept of language reflection encompasses an explicit and therefore conscious intellectual examination of language

4 “die wertende Sprachreflexion”.

5 Bär (1999: 58): “die bewusste Reflexion von Sprechenden oder Schreibenden 1) über ihre eigene Sprachverwendung oder 2) die eines Kommunikationspartners, 3) über den Sprachgebrauch im Allgemeinen, 4) über die Einzelspra-

itself and addresses the implications of thinking on language as they relate to ideological-metaphysical issues (cf. Bär 1999: 58f.). The high level of consciousness involved in thinking on language as it is postulated in the language reflection concept is, in practice, in alignment with hermeneutical methods.

As Foucauldian discourse analysis gained acceptance in the field of linguistics, research on linguistic knowledge was expanded to include the dimension of the history of mentality (cf. Hermanns 1995). Mentalities are basic perception and evaluation patterns, in the form of collective everyday secular knowledge. Accordingly, **language mentality** research (cf. Scharloth 2005; Havinga/Lindner-Bornemann 2022) is not the study of explicit language reflection but examines habitual thoughts that do not necessarily require explanation – that is, that fundamental portion of the taken-for-granted knowledge reservoir related to language in which the language of the message is assumed to be understood by the addressee.

The label *Folk Linguistics* (sometimes more narrowly termed *perceptual dialectology*) refers to a vibrant and methodologically innovative research tradition that studies the expectations, opinions and convictions about language held by linguistic ‘lay-persons’ (cf. Niedzielski/Preston 2000). It is based on a socio-cognitive concept of knowledge (cf. Hoffmeister 2021: 104) in which linguistic knowledge is always socially constructed and therefore also always perspectivised (cf. Hoffmeister 2021: 61–104).

In the Slavic countries, conceptualisation of the relationship between language and socio-cultural identity can be observed as far back as in the earliest modern-era vernacular texts. In the theoretical domain, it was the Prague School of the 1920s and 30s that developed theories on the dynamics of linguistic structures, communicative functions and the purposefulness of language. The Prague School theorised language communication as a complex system comprised of messages from the speaker, including the contact medium, the chosen code and both general and context-specific knowledge. In Roman Jakobson’s (1960) theory of linguistic functions, he underscores the active roles of both/all speakers and analyses how linguistic intentions are implemented with the aid

chen bzw. Sprachvarietäten, schließlich 5) über die ‚Möglichkeiten und Grenzen menschlichen Sprachvermögens überhaupt‘.

of referential, poetic, emotive, appellative/conative, phatic and meta-linguistic language functions.

Central to this Slavic tradition is a teleological concept of language, in which it is purposefully employed for communicative purposes and therefore also takes into account the linguistic knowledge and social environment of the participants in the communication. The significance of these concepts from the Prague School has also been explicitly identified by Silverstein (1979), Woolard/Schieffelin (1994), Kroskrity (2004) and Gal (2011), among others. According to Gal (2011: 356), the research conducted by the Prague School would, today, be termed language ideology research. In the Czech Republic and other Slavic countries, ongoing developments in the areas of language management, normativistics and language policy can be observed. This socio-communicative, dynamically oriented language research tradition forms the basis of the currently dominant lines of research in the field of language ideology, beginning with Silverstein (1979).

The concepts developed by the Prague School and their subsequent evolution into language ideology research largely coincide with the theories of Brigitte Schlieben-Lange. Even in one of her earlier works, *Traditionen des Sprechens* ('Speech Traditions') (1983), she pointed to the concrete positions and roles the speaking individual takes on in society, which function in differing discursive ways. This line of research was also represented from a language comparison perspective by the Leibniz Institute for the German Language (*Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache*, IDS) in Mannheim in the DFG research group FOR 380 Language Variation as Communicative Practice: Formal and Functional Parameters (*Sprachvariation als kommunikative Praxis: Formale und funktionale Parameter*). This research group demonstrated the relationship between (ideology-driven) language choice and negotiation processes and social negotiation processes as well as the ways in which these are formally and functionally reflected in language dynamics.

This foundational concept of language ideology, which serves as the basis for this Handbook, also draws upon the traditions described above. In this respect, it goes beyond the narrower concepts, as we, together with researchers in the areas of lay linguistics, language awareness and language mentality, assume that every form of knowledge is either inherently or potentially ideological – including all linguistic knowledge.

For example, a speaker's linguistic knowledge regarding the formal characteristics of the language is not in and of itself ideological. It becomes ideological only if a formal feature of the language is used to identify a social group or a variant, thereby achieving indexicality. The broader definition, in which we view language ideologies as a continuum ranging from descriptive positions that strive for neutrality to explicitly subjective or disparaging positions, has the advantage that we can 'capture' the different forms of perspectivised linguistic knowledge and analyse these for a European comparison. This broader definition of language ideologies is also in keeping with our broader definition of language criticism, which we define as the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection.

As a collection of linguistic knowledge, language ideologies are, therefore, socio-culturally embedded and can, over time, be assigned to specific groups. Here, however, we will not focus on the traditional differences between expert knowledge and lay knowledge. In this Handbook, we assert that, on the continuum between academic discourse and 'lay discourse', the language reflection and language criticism in which each group engages is rooted in language ideologies or has developed and shaped these within the medium of language reflection (for more on linguistic knowledge in everyday life, cf. Lehr 2002). Consequently, we recognise different forms of perspectivised, and thus ideological, knowledge: from habitual and praxeological language-related knowledge to knowledge generated in the paradigm of description and to prescriptive and normative language knowledge, which has always been suspected of being ideological.⁶ We therefore assume, for example, that in the standardisation processes of national languages, not only are issues of language prestige shaped by language ideologies, nor do these language-reflective and language-critical discourses alone produce language ideologies, but also that seemingly neutral scientific descriptions of syntactic knowledge are perspectivised in the form of models and are thus ideological.⁷

6 In this respect, we supplement Mannheim's (1929) concept of ideology from the sociology of knowledge (cf. also Felder 2010).

7 Cf. Woolard (2020: 3): "There is still not complete agreement, but for most linguistic anthropologists, ideology is not contrasted to some more truthful

Language Ideologies and Language Criticism

The focus of this Handbook is the comparison of European language ideologies. We would, however, like to additionally present an examination of perspectivised linguistic knowledge in relationship to the forms of expression it takes, that is, forms of language criticism.

The concepts of language criticism and language ideology share a common association with language reflection. What distinguishes the two is that the concept of language criticism involves the description and/or assessment of a practice of expression. In this Handbook, we have defined language criticism as the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection, and so we refer back to this passage from the first volume of the Handbook (Felder et al. 2017: 13):

[Language criticism] spans a continuum ranging from neutral to decidedly evaluative metalinguistic utterances reflecting about language use and language norms. So, language criticism covers a spectrum of observations about language that range from relatively neutral ones to those taking a clearly determined position. Language criticism is thus understood as an umbrella term for a wide spectrum of descriptive and evaluative language criticism. This definition is an extension of that of the term *Sprachkritik* (language criticism) in German linguistics, which refers only to the evaluation of language. Descriptive language criticism is interested in linguistic expressions and possibilities for communicative actions. It can be illustrated with a prototypical question like, “Which functional, cognitive and social consequences does the elimination of a case category (such as the German genitive case) have for language and thought in a speech community?” This type of language criticism describes and discusses the implications on the language system and on language use based on linguistic criteria in form-function analyses. In contrast, statements of the following type exemplify a mostly evaluative form of language criticism: “The language use in the social media is harmful to the

form of knowledge such as science. Expert models are understood to figure among alternate ideological regimes of truth. This means that a commitment to the study of language ideologies entails a reflexive commitment to examine our own suppositions about language in this same light. Whether language ideology research always lives up to this commitment might be questioned.”

language as a whole due to its preference for abbreviations and shortenings". The continuum between these forms of language criticism is here investigated in a comparative perspective. The *Online Handbook of Language Criticism in a European Perspective* describes all of these forms and puts them in relation to one another.

We have therefore defined language criticism as the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection in order to distance ourselves from the established Germanist term and concept of language criticism (which has been elaborated by numerous authors, cf., *inter alia*, Schiewe 1998; Niehr/Kilian/Schiewe 2020) and to provide a broader basis that allows variants to be included in the comparison of European languages.

Language-reflective and language-critical discourses are closely aligned with language ideologies. On the one hand, language ideologies are both cause and consequence of language reflection and/or language criticism. On the other hand, language ideologies function to create a framework wherein language reflection and language criticism are based on existing language ideologies, which, in turn, through this process, are reproduced or modified. Consequently, the relationship between the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection and language ideologies can be characterised as reciprocal and co-constructive (cf. Spitzmüller 2019: 22). Language ideologies particularly sharply illuminate the intertwining of language, knowledge and society.

Figurative Language as Language Ideologically Influenced Representations

Language ideologies manifest themselves differently in different languages. In this Handbook, we have identified these different forms of expression based on the philological research traditions found in specific linguistic sources (frequently also in the prefaces to dictionaries and grammar textbooks as forms of the written manifestation of language standardisation processes) and from documentation of language reflection or language criticism discourses. However, we also remain within the research traditions of our own individual philologies, identifying and citing the relevant research literature found within them.

A particular form in which language ideologies manifest themselves, which should not be left unmentioned, is figurative language. We define this here as linguistic metaphors.⁸ Existing studies have shown that a comparative analysis of language ideologies can be made on the basis of such metaphors (cf. Gal 2005). Spitzmüller (2005) and Neusius (2021) also highlight the relationship between language attitude research, metaphor analysis and discourse analysis. Spitzmüller (2005: 191; translation by C. D.)⁹ writes:¹⁰

Linguistic discourse analysis also recognised very early on the analytical value of *metaphor* and *collective symbol systems*. Under the linguistic discourse approach, metaphors are seen as sediments of collective knowledge that make the discourse structures literally visible to the linguist. Since meta-linguistic discourse is highly metaphorical, it is evident that metaphor analysis is highly useful in the study of language attitudes and argumentation patterns.

- 8 Ample literature already exists on metaphor research in general, beginning with the pioneering study conducted by Lakoff/Johnson (1980). For an overview and further substantiation, see, *inter alia*, Spieß (2016).
- 9 Spitzmüller (2005: 191): "Auch die linguistische Diskursanalyse hatte den analytischen Wert der *Metaphern-* bzw. *kollektiven Symbolsysteme* sehr früh erkannt. Metaphern, so der diskurslinguistische Ansatz, sind Sedimente kollektiven Wissens, die dem Linguisten die Strukturen des Diskurses wahrhaft bildlich vor Augen führen. Da der metasprachliche Diskurs hochgradig metaphorisch ist, drängt sich daher die Metaphernanalyse als Zugriff auf Spracheinstellungen und Argumentationsmuster geradezu auf."
- 10 Spitzmüller (2005: 191) views metaphor analysis as belonging to language attitudes research and not to language ideology research. He explains that although there is some overlap between the two fields, they also diverge in specific aspects, including the following point: "While language attitude research usually focuses on (cognitive, affective and conative) predispositions and attempts to 'reveal' these, aided by a raft of social science methods, most language ideology researchers are not interested in the 'hidden' attitudes, but really 'only' with the opinions and values that have been *articulated*" (Spitzmüller 2013: 283; translation by C. D.). However, as explained above, this Handbook is based on a definition of language ideology that covers a broad range of analytical possibilities, so that, unlike Spitzmüller, we nonetheless include in language ideology research, "metaphorical [...] language use as way of tracking of mental processes" (Spieß 2016: 75; translation by C. D.).

For example, in his *Sinnbilder für Sprache* ('Symbols for Language'), Köller (2012) uses metaphors to explore the question of how, from a cultural-anthropological perspective, the German language is conceptualised. He examines the concepts of the snake, the tool, the dress, the building, the organism, the path, the river, the storeroom, the money, the mirror, the window and the game, and illustrates how the properties of the language can be cognitively captured through these forms of image transfer.

Spitzmüller's (2005) decidedly empirical analysis of anglicisms overlaps in its categorisations with Köller's symbols: 1. *Language as substance*, 2. *Language as container*, 3. *Language as organism* and 4. *Language as artefact*. Spitzmüller (2005: 207; translation by C.D.)¹¹ writes of these categories:

The common feature in all of these four categories is the representation of language as a *delimitable unit*. This hypostatisation helps those participating in the discourse to separate what is their own from what is foreign, because it appears to enable a clear comparison of different languages and provide an unambiguous answer to the question of what should count as belonging to a (national/collective) language. Each of the categories focusses, however, on one specific concept of language.

These types of metaphors also play a significant role in the debates over anglicisms being carried out in France (cf. Neusius 2021). Figurative language may selectively move to the forefront as a condensed form of the expression of language ideologies. However – and this is reflected in the comparative article as well as in the articles on the individual languages – figurative language does not always lend itself to an exhaustive examination or the European comparison of language ideologies.

11 Spitzmüller (2005: 207): "Gemeinsam ist diesen vier Klassen die Darstellung von Sprache als *abgrenzbarer Einheit*. Diese Hypostasierung hilft den Diskurs-Teilnehmern dabei, das Eigene vom Fremden zu trennen, denn sie scheint einen klaren Vergleich verschiedener Sprachen zu ermöglichen und die Frage, was zu einer (nationalen/kollektiven) Sprache gezählt werden soll, eindeutig zu beantworten. Im Detail fokussiert aber jede der Klassen eine spezifische Vorstellung von Sprache."

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