

Language and Ideology

Eric Swanson
ericsw@umich.edu

What can theorizing in terms of ideology offer to philosophers of language? What can the methods and tools of philosophy of language and linguistics offer to our understanding of ideology? I survey and develop some answers here, through examples of language use that are thoroughly intertwined with ideology. These examples include “gay implicature” (Liang, 1999), the “exit moves” of “genocidal language games” (Tirrell, 2012), and ideologically freighted uses of language like (1), (2), and (3).

- (1) Hasta la vista, baby. (Cameron & Wisner, 2003 discussed in Hill, 2008)
- (2) White people are cowards. (Harriot, 2018)
- (3) I didn’t mean it in a racist way. (van Dijk, 1992)

Because of the broad variation in understandings of just what ‘ideology’ refers to—a variation that has contributed to a significant worry that ‘ideology’ is too easily co-opted for theorists’ idiosyncratic political agendas—I start, in §1, by surveying the history of ‘ideology.’ I argue that certain elements of prior understandings are optional, and that certain elements are commonly misunderstood.

To abstract away from the relationships between language and ideology is to risk thinking of language solely “as an object of contemplation rather than as an instrument of action and power,” in Pierre Bourdieu’s words. Such abstraction risks neglecting the fact that using language helps us communicate but “also [instantiates] relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized” (1991 [1982], p. 37). Bolder theorists of language and ideology, like Valentin Voloshinov, reject the nod toward “contemplative” approaches conveyed by Bourdieu’s “also.” Voloshinov claims that to abstract away from particular uses is to “project” a “false notion of *passive understanding*” onto language (1986 [1929], p. 73). Because principled work on the relationships between language and ideology should not, indeed, be *too* abstract, §2 discusses some illuminating work that focuses on particular uses of language in particular ideological settings. But §3 argues that we do need help from (somewhat abstract) tools from philosophy of language and linguistics. These tools help us ask and answer questions about how language *could* affect the strength and nature of ideologies, about how ideologies *could* imbue language with special kinds of force, and about how we can

Thanks to Samia Hesni, Sarah Moss, and Rachel Sterken for helpful comments on earlier drafts, and to Sarah Moss for extensive discussion.

discern the relationships between particular uses of language and particular ideologies.

1. Conceptions of ideology

Antoine Destutt de Tracy coined ‘ideology,’ in 1796, to refer to the “science of ideas.” Tracy’s aims were bold. He intended for ideology to be the “basis of grammar, logic, education, morality, and ‘finally the greatest of arts, for whose success all the others must cooperate, that of regulating society’” (Kennedy, 1979, p. 355). Tracy’s conception of ideology did not make it a purely descriptive science, but a “political and social ideology” in its own right—an ideology “of a group of propertied intellectuals ... who hoped to use it to transform and stabilize post-Revolutionary France” (p. 358). In response Napoléon Bonaparte branded Tracy and his sympathizers “idéologues,” including in an 1812 speech before the Conseil d’Etat:

It is to the doctrine of the ideologues—to this diffuse metaphysics, which in a contrived manner seeks to find the primary causes and on this foundation would erect the legislation of peoples, instead of adapting the laws to a knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history—to which one must attribute all the misfortunes which have befallen our beautiful France. (Williams, 2015, p. 108)

Napoléon thus imbued the word with pejorative connotations that resonated for 19th century conservatives like Sir Walter Scott (Williams, 2015, p. 108), and that have persisted ever since.

An important thread of the conservative critique of ideology and belief in or consent to ideologies is that ideologies oversimplify. As Russell Kirk puts it, “the ideologue resorts to the anaesthetic of social utopianism, escaping the tragedy and grandeur of true human existence by giving his adherence to a perfect dream-world of the future” (2007, p. 351; see also Shils, 1958). Similarly, Lewis Feuer writes that “Ideology exacerbates political fanaticism; for the ideologist presumes that he has the warrant of a world-destiny...He has a complete world-system with prefabricated answers to every question, and he is impervious to disconfirming evidence” (2017 [1975], pp. 192–3).¹ To call something an ‘ideology,’ on this kind of view, is to disparage it as being at least an oversimplification. To believe in an ideology, in this sense, is to believe in something that is too simple: it is to trust a guide who has little experience, an impressionistic sense of the terrain, and an overinflated sense of themselves. I return to critiques in this vein soon.

¹See also Aron, 1957; Arendt, 1958, pp. 348–349 and pp. 468–474; and Elias, 1978, chapter 2.

Karl Marx and (especially) Friedrich Engels further strengthened the pejorative connotations of ‘ideology.’ In influential work they suggest that ideologies must *misrepresent* or *obscure*—though not exactly from oversimplification. As they put it in *The German Ideology*: “in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*” (1978 [1846], p. 154). On many readings of Marx, ideology obscures the operations and nature of capitalism and of the people living under capitalism. But Marx also uses ‘ideology’ in a more neutral way in other famous passages:

...the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. (2015 [1859], p. 11)

Many later Marxist theorists, like Lenin and Lukács, follow suit.² Suffice it to say that there is likely not a unique, determinate Marxian use of ‘ideology,’ and that many theorists in the broadly Marxian tradition use ‘ideology’ without any pejorative connotation.

All agree, by contrast, that Marx’s thought about ideology contributes the thesis that “The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is ... directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life” (1978 [1846], p. 154). Such interweaving makes ideology critique more than just a matter of arguing that some ideas are false, for at least two reasons. First, an idea, conception, or consciousness may be problematic without being *false*—the role of ideology may be “obscured,” for example, by claims that are true but “systematically misleading” (Haslanger, 2011, p. 179). So ideology critique can target true claims. Second, in some circumstances it may be naïve for a critic to rest content with arguing that an idea, concept, or consciousness misrepresents or obscures. This is because if one does not do enough to address the material conditions that give rise to the relevant idea—and that perpetuate it—such argumentation may do no more than scratch the surface, failing to make a significant or lasting impact.

Although Marx and Engels emphasize economic factors, many theorists have expanded on their notion of ideology. Antonio Gramsci, for example, distinguishes between “historically organic ideologies” and “ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or ‘willed’” (1971 [1929–1935], pp. 376–377). Historically organic ideologies are capacious: “they have a validity which is ‘psychological’; they ‘organize’ human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their

²For discussion and references see Larrain (1983), pp. 65–66; 69–73..

position, struggle, etc.” (p. 377). Such an ideology is “a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life” (p. 328); it is a “unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct” (p. 327). Gramsci further argues that “all men are ‘philosophers’” where

This philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. “common sense” and “good sense”; 3. popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of ‘folklore.’ (p. 323)

Recall the critique sketched earlier according to which all ideologies oversimplify. That critique doesn’t get purchase here, because Gramsci is very, very far from holding that ideologies are simple or easily codifiable. Karl Mannheim concurs, writing that

The task of a study of ideology ... is to understand the narrowness of each individual point of view and the interplay between these distinctive attitudes in the total social process. We are here confronted with an inexhaustible theme. The problem is to show how, in the whole history of thought, certain intellectual standpoints are connected with certain frames of experience, and to trace the intimate interaction between the two in the course of social and intellectual change. (1936 [1929], p. 72)

W. E. B. Du Bois makes a similar point in terms of “codes.” Discussing those who believe in the codes of the “Christian,” “Gentleman,” “American” and “White Man,” he shows how the ideologies we believe in can be complex, riven with tensions, difficult to discern and still more difficult to describe (2007 [1940], pp. 78–85).

Given such nuanced and inclusive views on the constitution of ideologies, I don’t think we should in fact worry that the study of ideologies *must* be the study of oversimple moral or political doctrines. To evade that worry we just need a sense of ‘ideology’ that looks back to theorists like Du Bois, Gramsci, and Mannheim, rather than to Engels, Marx, or Napoléon. Sally Haslanger articulates one such sense: “...we can think of ideology as an element in a social system that contributes to its survival and yet that is susceptible to change through some form of cognitive critique” (2007, p. 75). Not all philosophers use ‘ideology’ in this way. For example, Tommie Shelby uses ‘ideology’ in a way closer to the pejorative sense discussed earlier; he uses “form of consciousness” for a non-pejorative correlate (2003, p. 160). And Rebecca Kukla adds elements from Louis Althusser (2014 [c. 1969–1970]), holding that “Ideologies

and subjects with particular social identities are co-constituting” and that “Interpellation is the key mechanism by which ideologies reproduce themselves” (2018, p. 4). But provisionally adopting a non-pejorative and non-Althusserian sense for ‘ideology,’ like Haslanger’s, will be helpful for the time being.

2. Language use and ideologies: Focusing on the particular

This section samples from important work on that focuses on the connections between particular uses of language and particular ideologies. As I suggested in the introduction, this focus is in part politically motivated. Suppose, for example, that in our theorizing we abstract away from the respects in which “language variation ... express[es] different and layered identities” (Dirven & Pütz, 2007, p. 304). We might, for example, neglect linguistic and cultural variation that makes a difference to broadly Gricean pragmatic inference, and come to a “remarkably ethnocentric (anglocentric)” (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 454) account of such inference.³ We might thus wrongly see linguistic behavior that is readily interpretable as somehow marginal or deviant. We might even come to endorse—whether explicitly or implicitly—the homogenization and standardization of language “so as not to hinder the spread of new ways and ideas” (Dirven & Pütz, 2007, p. 314). If we do not want our theorizing put to such ends, we would do well not to make it too abstract.

Much work in linguistic anthropology is concerned with *misconceptions* of language, and with contested conceptions of language—that is, with “linguistic ideologies.” Linguistic ideologies include at least “beliefs about language articulated ... as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, 1979, p. 193). On a more expansive notion they are “[r]epresentations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (Woolard, 1998, p. 3). Linguistic ideologies are often bound up with “profound questions of representations and legitimacy” (Schieffelin & Doucet, 1992, p. 436) that are easy to overlook from high levels of abstraction. Such questions about Haitian Kreyòl, for example, include

Which variety of the language should be standardized and codified? This technical question has its counterpart in the sociopolitical arena. It has been answered by another question: Which variety constitutes the “real,” “authentic” Kreyòl? Consequently, who is the real Haitian, and whose interests must be taken into account and served? Not surprising to anyone, these questions refer to the struggles for power that have gone on between Noirs ... and Mulâtres ... since colonial times and the struggles

³See also (e.g.) Ochs Keenan (1976) and Matsumoto (1988).

for upward social mobility by the masses. (Schieffelin & Doucet, 1992, p. 436)

As this passage suggests, disputes over language that look to some to be relatively superficial can be intimately intertwined with ideological disputes that are clearly socially, historically, and politically important. Linguistic categories “are culturally constructed within social groups; they change through history and are systematically related to other areas of cultural discourse such as the nature of persons, of power, and of a desirable moral order” (Gal, 1995, p. 171).⁴ Many linguistic anthropologists aim to uncover and reveal such connections between language and ideology.

Some linguistic ideologies focus on issues that are more abstract than orthography, but no less embroiled in controversy. For example, Jane H. Hill characterizes “the linguistic ideology of ‘personalism’” as holding “that the meanings of utterances are determined by the intentions of speakers” (2008, p. 64). What is gained by thinking of personalism as an *ideology*, rather than a mere set of explicit commitments? Part of the ideology of personalism is a way of interpreting language, language use, language users, and the world: one that discredits and undercuts information about language use that goes beyond the speaker’s intentions.⁵ As a way of seeing the relationship between language and intention, Hill argues, personalism underwrites the thought that “if the word ‘squaw’ can be shown to be a slur that has ugly and pejorative meanings, then a person who uses it must be a racist who believes that the targets of the slur are ugly and deserving of the label and intends to communicate this fact” (p. 65). This sort of ideology can underwrite a *modus tollens* argument to the effect that a use of a word *must not* have offensive meanings, because if it *did* have such meanings, anyone who used it must have offensive intentions. Linguistic ideologies like personalism thus impede serious discussion of offensive uses of language.

Influential thinkers in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis pursue related issues in their work on racist discourse and on discourse about racist discourse. Put at a high level of abstraction, Critical Discourse Analysis “combines *critique* of discourse and *explanation* of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality, as a basis for *action* to change that existing reality in particular respects” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 6). In that spirit, Teun van Dijk argues in particular, and in detail, that white speakers use denials of racism as a “part of a strategy of personal, institutional, or social impression management and ideological self-defence” (1992, p. 97; cf. Saul, 2017b). Such denials, on van Dijk’s view, are ideologically laden insofar as

⁴Cameron, 1995 is a fascinating exploration of the relationships between linguistic and moral/political ideologies; see especially chapter 3.

⁵For further discussion of personalism as an ideology, see Saul, 2017b. As Saul writes, “since intentions and beliefs of the speaker are the most important thing according to the Ideology of Personalism, this means that [a speech act may] come to seem not-racist, or at least not-clearly-racist” (p. 112).

they are “a form of sociopolitical management” which “helps control resistance, and at the same time makes political problems of an ethnically or racially pluralist society more manageable” (1992, p. 97). What van Dijk calls “intention-denials” (including ‘I did not mean that’ and ‘You got me wrong,’ (p. 92))—are easier to understand in light of Hill’s diagnosis of certain pervasive linguistic ideologies as “personalist.” This is because, as van Dijk notes, “the accuser has few ways to actually prove negative intentions” (p. 91). In effect, a philosophical ideology according to which intentions are luminous internal states to which the intender has privileged and authoritative epistemic access combines with personalist linguistic ideologies to underwrite the discourse tactic of denying that one is racist.

One orientation that moves decisively away from speaker intentions, but stays close to Critical Discourse Analysis in other respects, is Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak’s “discourse-historical approach.” On their view, our notion of discourse context should include “the broader sociopolitical and historical context which ... discursive practices are embedded in and related to; that is to say, the fields of action and the history of the discursive event as well as the history to which the discourse topics are related” (2001, p. 41). For example, consider an advertisement saying

(4) Austrians! Buy in Austrian shops. Thank you!

As Reisigl and Wodak observe, “This imperative appeal reminds the viewers and readers of the Nazi slogan ‘Do not buy in Jewish shops’ and ‘Buy in German shops’. ... To an historically informed reader, the association with many pictures of the Nazi time is close and evident” (p. 165). The narrowly construed psychological state and intentions of the advertiser are not relevant, on their view, to whether the advertisement draws on “broader sociopolitical and historical context” to generate discourse effects. Less historically oriented approaches, too, reach beyond speaker intentions. Critical Discourse Analysis, for example, uses ‘ideology’ in the traditions of Gramsci, Mannheim, and Du Bois discussed in §1. Critical Discourse Analysts thus attend not only to the “explicit commitments” of discourse participants but also to tacit “assumptions which are built into practices ... which sustain relations of domination, usually in a covert way” (Fairclough, 1996, p. 52).

One important criticism of approaches within Critical Discourse Analysis, broadly construed, is that such approaches can overgenerate. Deborah Cameron argues, for example, that “Analysts construct stories about other people’s behaviour, with a view to making it exemplify certain patterns of gender difference” (1997, p. 48). Or, from Henry Widdowson—whom I quote at length to give the flavor of some skepticism about Critical Discourse Analysis:

The interpretations that CDA proposes, based on selective attention to certain textual features, are often very appealing. But the appeal, I

have suggested, lies in the justness of the cause they espouse rather than in the analytic precision of the case made in support of it. And the appeal is all the harder to resist when the interpretations are presented as underwritten by impressive theoretical authority. CDA work is indeed imposing. But that, I would argue, is just the problem with it. One can admire the ingenuity of its practitioners, and acknowledge the inspirational insights they provide about possible meanings, even agree that they have identified in a text something significant that we were hitherto unaware of. In this respect what critical discourse analysts have to say about texts has very much the same effect, and the same value, as the similarly imposing interpretations of literary critics. In both cases, we may be inspired to follow their example, and their lead, by replicating their procedures to confirm their findings, or to conduct work of a comparable kind on other texts.

The difficulty is that there is so little in the way of explicit procedures for us to follow. Given a text, how do we set about analysing it? How do we know which features to focus on and which not? Context is crucial, we are told, but how is it crucial? Which aspects of context are relevant to which features of text? If it is the case that textual, contextual and pre-textual factors are interdependently activated in interpretation, then a change in one of these factors will necessarily affect the significance of the others. So we surely need some procedures for identifying these factors and demonstrating their interdependency by proposing alternative interpretations, and alternative texts. (2004, p. 166)

Without explicit analytic procedures, Widdowson suggests, the analyst is in danger of finding only what they are looking for, overlooking what they aren't prepared to see, and preaching only to the converted.⁶

3. Language use and ideologies: Focusing on the mechanisms

Paying sufficient attention to the *mechanisms* that connect language and ideology helps respond to some instances of this worry. In that spirit, this section discusses work on the relationship between language and ideologies that carefully considers the mechanisms through which language can strengthen ideologies, and through which ideologies can imbue language with special force. Three notes. First, because not all of this work refers to ideologies under that mode of presentation, I make connections

⁶For Fairclough's response to some of Widdowson's critiques, see especially his 1996. For a representative sample of methodological critique and debate within Critical Discourse Analysis, see Billig, 2008a and 2008b; Fairclough, 2008a and 2008b; Martin, 2008; and van Dijk, 2008.

explicit where appropriate. Second, much of this work looks back to earlier work in philosophy of language and pragmatics. While I briefly explain relevant aspects of that earlier work as necessary, I also encourage readers to consult the original sources and secondary literature.⁷ Third, that earlier work is often politically and socially naïve and parochial, constrained by linguistic ideologies that are “richly redolent of the white masculine professional middle-class culture of the past hundred-odd years in England and the U.S.” (Robinson, 2003, p. 128; see also McElhinny, 1997). I think that adapting and updating such work can prove helpful nevertheless, and proceed under that hypothesis. But some of the updates may look fairly radical.

Extending work by Robert Stalnaker (1974) and David Lewis (1979), Rae Langton and Caroline West (1999) argue that some pornography conveys pragmatic presuppositions—content “whose truth [the speaker] takes for granted, or seems to take for granted, in making his statement” (Stalnaker, 1970, p. 48). In particular, Langton and West argue that “for the hearer to make best sense of what is said” *by* a given piece of pornography, they must presuppose a content like “that women are inferior” or “that sexual violence is normal or legitimate” (p. 311). If the hearer does not presuppose such a content, they will often be under pressure to *accommodate* it: to change the “conversational scoreboard” (Lewis, 1979) so that they can make “best sense” of otherwise nonsensical content (see also McGowan, 2003 and 2004, and , and for further development 2009 and 2019 and). For example, they will be under pressure to accommodate the cogency and permissibility of so-called “‘favourable’ rape depiction” (Langton & West, 1999, p. 311).

These presuppositions are required in order to make sense of what is explicitly said and illustrated—or at any rate they are required for one way, perhaps the most natural and obvious way, of making sense of it. One needs presuppositions like these to make sense of the way in which the initially reluctant young waitress gives in to immediate ecstasy upon being gang-raped.... In short, the story presupposes certain rape myths ...[P]ornography can say such things [by presupposing them], even if it does not explicitly say them. (pp. 311–312)

This hypothesis is explanatorily powerful, connecting any phenomena to which it in fact applies to a broad array of *other* instances of pragmatic presupposition and presupposition accommodation, as Langton and West observe (p. 313). To *exactly* which phenomena does it apply? This is a complex empirical and philosophical question.⁸ But Langton and West choose persuasive examples, making it clear that (whatever the precise bounds of application) the *mechanism* of accommodation, working in

⁷Two helpful resources: Russell and Fara, 2012, and Birner, 2013.

⁸For an excellent discussion, see Bauer, 2015.

“surreptitious ways ... [and] not by offering explicit political argument” can play an important role in explanations of and critique of ideologies (p. 318; see also Langton, 2018a and 2018b).

Much of the work discussed in §2 could make good further use of the same tools. The denials of racism that van Dijk documents can be construed as attempts to negotiate how we should use terms connected to ‘racist’—to negotiate what conditions help determine what actions, behavior, beliefs, and the like count as racist in a particular conversational context. This negotiation matters practically because the definition of ‘racism’ is “extremely important for what we take to be morally objectionable in the domain of race” (Urquidez, 2016, p. 138; see also his 2018). And much work on linguistic ideologies could be seen as disputes about the rules that govern or that should govern the “kinematics of conversational score” (Lewis, 1979, p. 346). As Langton and West observe, when such disputes are negotiated in part via presupposition accommodation, the “comparative powerlessness” of some parties “undermines their attempts to alter the conversational score” (p. 313).

For example, consider the use of Mock Spanish, which Jane Hill characterizes as

...a set of tactics that speakers of American English use to appropriate symbolic resources from Spanish. In Mock Spanish, Spanish loan words like *macho* “male,” *cerveza* “beer,” and *mañana* “morning, tomorrow,” expressions like *hasta la vista* “until we meet again,” and even a few morphological elements such as the Spanish definite article *el* and the masculine singular suffix *-o* are assigned new pronunciations, new meanings, and new kinds of cultural value (Agha 2003) in American (and even international) English.

Mock Spanish works to create a particular kind of “American” identity, a desirable colloquial persona that is informal and easy going, with an all-important sense of humor and a hint—not too much, but just the right non-threatening amount—of cosmopolitanism, acquaintance with another language and culture. (2008, pp. 128–129)

Suppose that Alex recognizes that use of Mock Spanish also “covertly reproduces negative stereotypes of the Spanish language and Spanish-language-heritage populations,” (p. 142) as Hill argues in detail, and that it “assigns Spanish and its speakers to a zone of foreignness and disorder, richly fleshed out with denigrating stereotypes” (Hill, 2008, p. 129). Alex will often encounter white people who presuppose the correctness of the linguistic ideology of “personalism” (Hill, 2008, p. 64, p. 150, pp. 153–155), discussed in §2. If Alex is comparatively powerless then—and here I echo Langton and West—that comparative powerlessness further “undermines their attempts to alter the conversational score,” for example by critiquing personalism.

Alex's attempts to push back on the use of Mock Spanish may be especially futile to the extent that the truth of personalism is *presupposed* because, as Langton and West argue, "presupposition itself ... is inherently more difficult to challenge than outright assertion" (1999, p. 313).

Somewhat surprisingly, Hill seems to suggest that presupposition can't help explain how uses of Mock Spanish can "create or entail" negative stereotypes (2008, p. 150). But Langton and West's appeal to presupposition accommodation in fact helps show how such creation is possible. Whether or not uses of Mock Spanish are intentionally derogatory, they "make best sense" (Langton & West, p. 311) against particular ideological backgrounds pertaining to native speakers of Spanish in the United States. And we have reason to think that pragmatic presupposition in particular helps underwrite the connection between uses of Mock Spanish and ideology, because of behavior analogous to non-controversial cases of pragmatic presupposition. For example, presuppositions can be filtered by the antecedent of a conditional, as brought out by contrasting (5) and (6):

- (5) He would have washed his face in the basin.
- (6) If the girl Zizi had brought a basin, he would have washed his face in the basin. (Birner, 2013, p. 156; see chapters 5 and 9 of Birner, 2013 for more discussion and references.)

Uses of (5) typically convey the presupposition that a particular basin is salient; uses of (6) don't, thanks to the filtering behavior of the conditional's antecedent. Similarly, some connections to ideology can be filtered by the antecedent of a conditional. There are some cases, that is, where a use of

- (7) *Hasta la vista.*

would constitute a use of Mock Spanish, whereas

- (8) If this is the right way to say it, *hasta la vista.*

would not. This linguistic behavior helps demonstrate why it can be valuable to pay attention to the *mechanisms* through which language and ideology are connected. By putting attention to such mechanisms together with Langton and West's work on the insidiousness and tenacity of presupposition, we get a better understanding of Alex's predicament. We notice phenomena that we might otherwise miss, connect phenomena that might otherwise look distant from each other, and better understand the ethics and dynamics of those phenomena.

The examples that we have considered so far involve ideologies that are problematic twice over: they misrepresent the world and they are morally objectionable. As

Sally Haslanger (2007) has argued, however, these aspects of problematic ideology can come apart. It's possible, that is, for an ideology to make morally objectionable things true in part by *representing them as true*. As she puts it, "in the social domain" our practices "can generate facts to be known, and even if a practice is truth-conducive, it may be problematic" (p. 87). Haslanger takes very seriously the thought that ideologies have real, material effects on the world: they are not just lenses to see through. Here is a concrete example:

...suppose in the seventh grade milieu there is a norm that everyone should agree with Hannah (e.g., about what's cute, dorky, fun, boring ...). If this norm is followed, there will be a coordination of beliefs and responses that constitute social facts which can be effectively known by following the Hannah-agreement norm. (p. 87)

Coordination on Hannah's views *makes* some coordinated-on views true. Thus it's not clear exactly how we should understand the negative connotations of 'ideology' in the pejorative sense. If 'bad' ideologies are the ones that misdescribe, for example, then an ideology that makes objectionable things *true* but doesn't misdescribe wouldn't be bad. For this reason ideology critique should not be merely epistemic.

If ideology partly constitutes the social world, then it seems that a description of the ideological formations will be true, and it is unclear what is, epistemically speaking, wrong with them. The material world reinforces our tutored dispositions—qwerty keyboards reinforce our qwerty dispositions which reinforce the use of qwerty keyboards; racial classification reinforces racial segregation, which reinforces racial identity, which reinforces racial classification. (Haslanger, 2011, p. 198)

To underscore that last point: racial classification—realized in no small part through the use of language—reinforces racializing ideologies, which in turn imbue the use of racially classifying language with many kinds of force, including the very force through which they influence ideologies. To understand the mechanisms underlying racializing ideologies, then, we need to understand the mechanisms underlying uses of racially classifying language.

One influential line of thought holds that generic claims like (9)–(12) are an especially important such mechanism.

- (9) Sagging pants are cool.
- (10) Cows are food.
- (11) Women are submissive (nurturing, cooperative).

(12) Blacks are violent (criminal, dangerous). (Haslanger, 2011, p. 191)

Indeed, Rae Langton, Sally Haslanger, and Luvell Anderson argue that we should reject racial generics—even the true ones, if there are any—because they mislead through the mechanism of conversational implicature (2012, p. 765). Suppose, for example, that a particular utterance of (13) is true:

(2) White people are cowards. (Harriot, 2018)

Suppose that utterance of (2) is true because most white people are cowards, and suppose moreover that it's false that white people are cowards due to their essence or nature. If the utterance of (2) nevertheless *conversationally implicates* that white people are cowards due to their essence or nature, Langton, Haslanger, and Anderson argue, it should be rejected because of that implicature.⁹ Why think that some utterances of (2) convey such an implicature? Haslanger does not give a fleshed out Gricean derivation of this sort of putative implicature (2011, p. 190), and even many Griceans and neo-Griceans—let alone those skeptical of the Gricean program—might be skeptical about the prospects. The relevant considerations are subtle and I don't aspire to have the last word here.¹⁰ But on Haslanger's behalf, I note that the putative implicature does pass standard heuristic tests for conversational implicature, insofar as it is both felicitously cancellable (as in (13)) and felicitously reinforceable (as in (14)):

(13) White people are cowards. But I don't mean to suggest that they're cowards by their nature. They are cowards largely because of white ignorance—"a cognitive tendency—an inclination, a doxastic disposition—which is not insuperable." (Mills, 2007, p. 23)

(14) White people are cowards. And it's in their nature.

As far as I can see a Gricean explanation of the putative implicature has to move beyond appeals to traditional Gricean maxims. But such an explanation might follow Swanson (2017) and argue that by *omitting* readily available alternatives like (15) and (16), someone who says (2) conversationally implicates that (15) and (16) are false.

(15) Most white people *happen* to be cowards.

(16) Most white people are cowards *because of* white ignorance.

If typical uses of (2) really do merely conversationally implicate that white people are cowards due to their essence or nature, we should expect that speakers can add nu-

⁹For more on racializing generics, see in addition McConnell-Ginet, 2012 (especially section 9); Leslie, 2017; Saul, 2017a; Wodak & Leslie, 2018; Ritchie, 2019; and the references therein.

¹⁰Thanks to Rachel Sterken for helpful questions here.

ance to the connections between their use of (2) and racist ideologies. And near the end of his article “White People Are Cowards” Michael Harriot does just this. He writes “Until *all* white people do and say something, people in power will always be able to point to the silent majority and say that no one cares about racism or inequality.” He thus presupposes that it’s (in principle) possible for “all white people to do and say something”—something that would be impossible if they were cowards by nature—and thereby in effect cancels any prior implicatures of racial essentialism.

A. C. Liang argues for another important connection between language and ideology through the mechanism of conversational implicature. Consider a dialogue in which “A lesbian speaker (A) is conversing with her naive heterosexual female co-worker (B), to whom she has not disclosed her sexuality” (1999, p. 302). Through “the avoidance of gendered terms” A can conversationally implicate that she is not heterosexual, but in a way that is manifest only “for those who can bring the correct assumptions to bear in an interaction.” In this way she can avoid indicating her sexuality to listeners who make a “default assumption of heterosexuality” (p. 301).

- A: I’m looking forward to the weekend.
B: You doing anything special?
A: Well, I’m having a visitor.
B: Ooh ... that kind of visitor? Does he come in often?
A: Actually, yes ...
B: Is this someone special?
A: I think so ... we’ll see. (p. 302)

“Gay implicature” is so effective here because A is able to use it to accomplish several things, some of them very nuanced and adaptable to dynamic situations. A says only true (or at least defensible) things to B; she sustains privacy about her sexuality in her interactions *with* B; she makes information about her sexuality available to appropriately attuned audiences;¹¹ and finally she conveys that information in a way that is cancellable, should the need arise. The relationships between ideologies and her uses of language are complicated by her double-voicing *what* she says for different audiences.¹² But such double-voicing is often an effective “conversational strategem” (Weiser, 1974, 1975a, and 1975b) when one is negotiating multiple ideologies.

The mechanisms connecting uses of language and ideology that I have discussed so far are all propositional in nature—*propositions* are presupposed, accommodated,

¹¹For further discussion, see Queen, 2007 and the references therein.

¹²For more on double-voicing, see Bakhtin, 1984 [1929, revised 1963], especially chapter 5, and Gates, 1998.

implicated, and so on. Much other work on language and ideology is in this vein. In his 2015, for example, Jason Stanley uses Sarah Murray's work on not-at-issue content (2014) to argue that certain kinds of propaganda work by "directly add[ing]" propositional content "to the common ground" (p. 134). But non-propositional mechanisms have garnered significant attention as well.¹³ For example, Lynne Tirrell uses an inferentialist framework¹⁴ to frame her thesis that some language uses are "action-engendering" (2012, p. 215). In one case she details, "Calling out prisoners' names, directing them to the side of the latrine pit (often a prelude to death), and telling the Tutsi to raise their hands" constituted "language-exit moves, engendering actions from either the Tutsis or the guards" (p. 215). Elisabeth Camp argues that "by employing a slur in a relevant context and with a relevant tone of voice, a speaker not only manifests her own contempt, but also evokes all those other people who feel contempt for [those targeted with the slur], which feeling they are prepared to enforce in a range of reprehensible ways" (2013). In Swanson, 2015 I argue that these sorts of connections—indeed, connections between certain uses of language and ideologies with nearly *any* kind of content—arise because speakers typically conversationally implicate that it's acceptable for them to use the words that they do, in the ways that they do, and thus implicate that they consent to ideologies according to which such uses *are* acceptable. Rebecca Kukla in turn argues that a broadly Althusserian way of thinking about ideology can enrich the tools to which we appeal in explaining the connections between language and ideology, allowing us to appeal not just to presupposition, conversational scoreboards, and implicature, but to interpellation as well (2018). Other ways in which we might enrich our tools include Mary Kate McGowan's view that some utterances "enact permissibility facts" (2012, p. 127), and Rae Langton's suggestion that the conversational scoreboard and common ground should "track whatever attitudes—whether beliefs, or desires, or feelings—are central to the kind of speech" we need to theorize about (2012, p. 90).

New tools like these may be helpful and even necessary for an adequate understanding of the mechanisms connecting language and ideology. But it's important to recall concerns about Critical Discourse Analysis—namely, that without explicit analytic procedures we may 'find' connections between language and ideology that aren't really there. As Widdowson puts it, "If you have the conviction and commitment, you will always find your witch" (1998, p. 150). And even the *apparent* legitimacy of concerns like this contributes to skepticism, diminishes one's audience, and undercuts the force of one's arguments. My hope is that these sorts of concerns can be forestalled by drawing fairly tight analogies between the linguistic mechanisms at work in uncontroversial cases and those at work in more controversial cases.¹⁵ (Undrawn

¹³For related criticism of Stanley's view, see Swanson, 2017.

¹⁴See Sellars, 1954. It's illuminating and productive to compare McConnell-Ginet, 2008 and 2011.

¹⁵Robin Queen argues that empirical work might help address similar concerns in her 2007; these

analogies in the cases discussed here are left to the reader!) What should we do when such analogies aren't there, or are strained? We might take it as an indication that there was no witch there in the first place. Or, under sufficient theoretical pressure, we might take it as the beginning of a case for enriching our tools.

References

- Agha, A. (2003). The social life of cultural value. *Language & Communication*, 23, 231–273.
- Althusser, L. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses* (G. M. Goshgarian, Trans.). New York: Verso.
- Arendt, H. (1958). *The origins of totalitarianism* (2nd ed. ed.). The World Publishing Company.
- Aron, R. (1957). *The opium of the intellectuals* (T. Kilmartin, Trans.). Garden City, NJ: Doubleday.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bauer, N. (2015). *How to do things with pornography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Billig, M. (2008a). The language of critical discourse analysis: The case of nominalization. *Discourse & Society*, 19(6), 783–800.
- Billig, M. (2008b). Nominalizing and de-nominalizing: A reply. *Discourse & Society*, 19(6), 829–841.
- Birner, B. (2013). *Introduction to pragmatics*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. B. Thompson, Ed. & G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cameron, D. (1995). *Verbal hygiene*. New York: Routledge.
- Cameron, D. (1997). Performing gender identity: Young men's talk and the construction of heterosexual identity. In S. Johnson & U. H. Meinhof (Eds.), *Language and masculinity* (pp. 47–64). New York: Blackwell.
- Cameron, J., & Wisner, W. (2003). *Terminator 2: Judgment day*. Artisan Home Entertainment.
- Camp, E. (2013). Slurring perspectives. *Analytic Philosophy*, 54(3), 330–349.
- Dirven, R., & Pütz, M. (2007). Language conflict seen from the perspective of the rationalist and romantic models: New developments. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 25(3), 303–317.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (2007). *Dusk of dawn* (J. Henry Louis Gates, Ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

projects can be pursued in complementary ways.

- Elias, N. (1978). *What is sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1996). A reply to Henry Widdowson's 'Discourse analysis: A critical view'. *Language and Literature*, 5(1), 49–56.
- Fairclough, N. (2008a). A brief response to Billig. *Discourse & Society*, 19(6), 843–844.
- Fairclough, N. (2008b). The language of critical discourse analysis: Reply to Michael Billig. *Discourse & Society*, 19(6), 811–819.
- Fairclough, N. (2015). *Language and power* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Feuer, L. S. (2017). *Ideology and the ideologists*. New York: Routledge.
- Gal, S. (1995). Language, gender and power: An anthropological review. In K. Hall & M. Bucholtz (Eds.), *Gender articulated: Language and the socially constructed self* (pp. 169–182). New York: Routledge.
- Gates, H. L., Jr. (1988). *The signifying monkey: A theory of African American literary criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds.). New York: International Publishers.
- Harriot, M. (2018). White people are cowards. Retrieved from <https://www.theroot.com/white-people-are-cowards-1826958780>
- Haslanger, S. (2007). 'But Mom, crop-tops are cute!': Social knowledge, social structure and ideology critique. *Philosophical Issues*, 17, 70–91.
- Haslanger, S. (2011). Ideology, generics, and common ground. In C. Witt (Ed.), *Feminist metaphysics: Explorations in the ontology of sex, gender and the self* (pp. 179–207). New York: Springer.
- Hill, J. H. (2008). *The everyday language of White racism*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kennedy, E. (1979). 'ideology' from Destutt de Tracy to Marx. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40(3), 353–368.
- Kirk, R. (2007). *The essential Russell Kirk: Selected essays* (G. A. Panichas, Ed.). Wilmington: ISI Books.
- Kukla, R. (2018). Slurs, interpellation, and ideology. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 56, *Spindel Supplement*, 1–26.
- Langton, R. (2012). Beyond belief. In I. Maitra & M. K. McGowan (Eds.), *Speech and harm: Controversies over free speech*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Langton, R. (2018a). The authority of hate speech. *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Law*, 3, 123–152.
- Langton, R. (2018b). Blocking as counter-speech. In D. Fogal, D. W. Harris, & M. Moss (Eds.), (pp. 144–164). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Langton, R., Haslanger, S., & Anderson, L. (2012). Language and race. In G. Russell & D. G. Fara (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to philosophy of language* (pp. 753–767). New York: Routledge.

- Langton, R., & West, C. (1999). Scorekeeping in a pornographic language game. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 77(3), 303–319.
- Larrain, J. (1983). *Marxism and ideology*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Leslie, S.-J. (2017). The original sin of cognition: Fear, prejudice and generalization. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 114(8), 1–29.
- Lewis, D. K. (1979). Scorekeeping in a language game. In *Philosophical papers* (Vol. 1, pp. 233–249). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liang, A. C. (1999). Conversationally implicating lesbian and gay identity. In M. Bucholtz, A. C. Liang, & L. A. Sutton (Eds.), (pp. 293–310). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maitra, I., & McGowan, M. K. (Eds.). (2012). *Speech and harm: Controversies over free speech*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mannheim, K. (1936). *Ideology and utopia: An introduction to the sociology of knowledge* (L. Wirth & E. Shils, Trans.). Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Martin, J. R. (2008). Incongruent and proud: De-vilifying ‘nominalization’. *Discourse & Society*, 19(6), 801–810.
- Marx, K. (2015). *A contribution to the critique of political economy*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1978). *The Marx-Engels reader (second edition)* (R. Tucker, Ed.). New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Matsumoto, Y. (1988). Reexamination of the universality of face: Politeness phenomena in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 12, 403–426.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. (2008). Words in the world: How and why meanings can matter. *Language*, 84(3), 497–527.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. (2011). Gender, sexuality, and meaning: An overview. In *Gender, sexuality, and meaning: An overview* (pp. 5–31). New York: Oxford University Press.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. (2012). Generic predicates and interest relativity. *The Canadian Journal of Linguistics / La revue canadienne de linguistique*, 57(2), 261–287.
- McElhinny, B. (1997). Ideologies of public and private language in sociolinguistics. In R. Wodak (Ed.), *Gender and discourse* (pp. 106–139). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- McGowan, M. K. (2003). Conversational exercitives and the force of pornography. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 31(2), 155–189.
- McGowan, M. K. (2004). Conversational exercitives: Something else we do with our words. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 27, 93–111.
- McGowan, M. K. (2009). Oppressive speech. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 87(3), 389–407.
- McGowan, M. K. (2012). On ‘Whites only’ signs and racist hate speech. In I. Maitra & M. K. McGowan (Eds.), *Speech and harm: Controversies over free speech* (pp.

- 121–147). New York: Oxford University Press.
- McGowan, M. K. (2019). *Just words: On speech and hidden harm*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mills, C. (2007). White ignorance. In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and epistemologies of ignorance* (pp. 11–38). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Murray, S. (2014). Varieties of update. *Semantics and Pragmatics*, 7(2), 1–53.
- Ochs Keenan, E. (1976). The universality of conversational postulates. *Language in Society*, 5, 67–80.
- Queen, R. (2007). Sociolinguistic horizons: Language and sexuality. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 1(4), 314–330.
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and discrimination: Rhetorics of racism and antisemitism*. New York: Routledge.
- Ritchie, K. (2019). Should we use racial and gender generics? *Thought*.
- Robinson, D. (2003). *Performative linguistics: Speaking and translating as doing things with words*. New York: Routledge.
- Russell, G., & Fara, D. G. (Eds.). (2012). *The Routledge companion to philosophy of language*. New York: Routledge.
- Saul, J. (2017). Are generics especially pernicious? *Inquiry*.
- Saul, J. M. (2017). Racial figleaves, the shifting boundaries of the permissible, and the rise of Donald Trump. *Philosophical Topics*, 45(2), 97–116.
- Schieffelin, B. B., & Doucet, R. C. (1992). The ‘real’ Haitian Creole: Metalinguistics and orthographic choice. *Pragmatics*, 2(3), 427–443.
- Sellars, W. (1954). Some reflections on language games. *Philosophy of Science*, 21(3), 204–228.
- Shelby, T. (2003). Ideology, racism, and critical social theory. *The Philosophical Forum*, 34(2), 153–188.
- Shils, E. (1958). Ideology and civility: On the politics of the intellectual. *The Sewanee Review*, 66, 450–480.
- Silverstein, M. (1979). Language structure and linguistic ideology. In P. R. Clyne, W. F. Hanks, & C. L. Hofbauer (Eds.), *The elements: A parasession on linguistic units and levels* (pp. 193–247). Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Stalnaker, R. C. (1970). Pragmatics. In *Context and content* (pp. 31–46). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stalnaker, R. C. (1974). Pragmatic presuppositions. In *Context and content* (pp. 47–62). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stalnaker, R. C. (1999). *Context and content*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stanley, J. (2015). *How propaganda works*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Swanson, E. (2015). *Slurs and ideologies*. (Forthcoming in *Analyzing ideology*, edited by Robin Celikates, Sally Haslanger and Jason Stanley)

- Swanson, E. (2017a). Critical notice of Jason Stanley's *How Propaganda Works*. *Mind*, 126, 937–947.
- Swanson, E. (2017b). Omissive implicature. *Philosophical Topics*, 45(2), 117–137.
- Tirrell, L. (2012). Genocidal language games. In I. Maitra & M. K. McGowan (Eds.), *Speech and harm: Controversies over free speech* (pp. 174–221). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Urquidez, A. G. (2016). *Racism and conceptual analysis: A defense of the Wittgensteinian approach* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Purdue University.
- Urquidez, A. G. (2018). What accounts of 'racism' do. *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 52, 437–455.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse & Society*, 3(1), 87–118.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2008). Critical discourse analysis and nominalization: Problem or pseudo-problem? *Discourse & Society*, 19(6), 821–828.
- Vološinov, V. N. (1986). *Marxism and the philosophy of language* (L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik, Trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weiser, A. (1974). Deliberate ambiguity. In M. W. LaGaly, R. A. Fox, & A. Bruck (Eds.), *Papers from the tenth regional meeting* (pp. 723–731). Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Weiser, A. (1975a). *Conversational strategems: A study in the pragmatics of language* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Chicago.
- Weiser, A. (1975b). How to not answer a question: Purposive devices in conversational strategy. In R. E. Grossman, L. J. San, & T. J. Vance (Eds.), *Papers from the eleventh regional meeting* (pp. 649–660). Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1998). The theory and practice of critical discourse analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(1), 136–151.
- Widdowson, H. G. (2004). *Text, context, pretext: Critical issues in discourse analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction* (2nd ed.). New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Williams, R. (2015). *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (New Edition ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wodak, D., & Leslie, S.-J. (2018). The mark of the plural: Generic generalizations and race. In P. C. Taylor, L. M. Alcoff, & L. Anderson (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to philosophy of race*. New York: Routledge.
- Woolard, K. A. (1998). Introduction: Language ideology as a field of inquiry. In B. B. Schieffelin, K. A. Woolard, & P. V. Kroskrity (Eds.), *Language ideologies: Practice and theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.