Language and Ideology

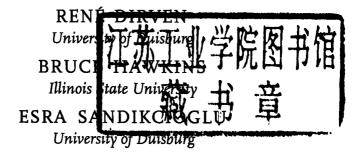## Volume I: Theoretical cognitive approaches

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LANGUAGE
AND IDEOLOGY

VOLUME I: THEORETICAL
COGNITIVE APPROACHES

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Language and Ideology
Volume I: Theoretical cognitive approaches

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Incorporating Tensions

On the Treatment of Ideology in Cognitive Linguistics

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Tension is an inevitable fact of human life. Tensions arise repeatedly in our professional lives as we encounter pragmatic circumstances which interfere with the realisation of our plans, ambitions and dreams. Tensions mount in our social lives as well, when acquaintances, friends and even loved ones fall short of our expectations for them. And in our most private moments, tensions may become almost overwhelming as we reflect on the differences between who we are and who we want to be. No matter where we go or what we do, we are guaranteed to encounter tension because human life is full of tension.

Tension is clearly among the most uncomfortable of human experiences. As a result, the most common response to tension is probably avoidance. The extreme discomfort of tension drives some of us to try to escape from it by ingesting drugs or alcohol or by engaging in some other form of self-abusive behaviour. Some among us are even driven by the tensions inherent in human life to attempt to take, and all too often succeed in taking our own lives. Most of us, however, learn to direct our lives productively in pursuit of acceptable measures of creature comfort while also attending to something we may call happiness or spiritual fulfilment. These are clearly important goals in themselves, but they undoubtedly constitute also viable means of escaping from short-term and long-term tensions.

It is important for us all to recognise that avoidance is not the only way to deal with tension. Tension can be engaged productively in ways that lead not to destructive behaviours but rather to growth. We see this productive

engagement of tension when a unified group of workers negotiates acceptable working arrangements with an employer whose primary concerns are to maximise profits and minimise costs. We see productive engagement of tension when a young woman convinces her boyfriend that she can sincerely love him without expressing her love for him through sexual intimacy. And we experience productive engagement of tension whenever we struggle successfully to make sense of something that has puzzled us, plagued us, or even haunted us.

This introduction highlights the experience of tension, because tension really lies at the heart of any study of ideology and our purpose in this volume is to introduce all researchers and linguists in general, and cognitive linguists in particular, to ideology as a relevant domain of linguistic inquiry. The disciplined study of ideology arises, at least in part, from the human experience of tension. Ideology is one of those human resources which, like language, generally remain outside the scope of human attention or reflection. Like language, an object of inquiry with which linguists are much more familiar, ideology is a phenomenon that humans experience every day, possibly even every waking hour, but generally pay no reflective attention to until problems arise. Most often, the problem is a matter of conflict arising from distinct ideologies having come into contact. Such circumstances lead directly to tensions, which in turn lead to efforts to resolve the tensions. These are the circumstances under which our attention becomes riveted on the phenomenon of ideology itself.

This volume presents a selected set of papers originally drafted for a theme session on "Language and Ideology"[1] at the 6th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference (ICLC 6) in Stockholm, Sweden. In effect, this volume constitutes an invitation to the reader to engage in disciplined reflection on language-related experiences of tension. We want linguists to recognise the practical utility of the disciplinary resources of cognitive linguistics for the study of the relationship between ideology and language. Furthermore, we want to invite cognitive linguists to apply their analytic skills and creativity in the search for useful insights into ideology and into the tensions that arise from ideological differences.

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1. The participants in this theme session are indebted to René Dirven and Esra Sandikcioglu for their efforts in conceptualising, planning and organising the session.

At this initial juncture, it is important to acknowledge that this volume will undoubtedly raise more questions than it answers, and we not only accept this but recognise that it is entirely appropriate for a work of this kind. Our goal is not to close the book on the study of language and ideology. Quite to the contrary, we see our main purpose as being to open a discourse, ultimately cross-disciplinary in nature, on language and ideology. We hope that this discourse will continue productively for years. In our collective experience, cognitive linguistics has always proven to be open to explorations of language-related phenomena that other linguistic theories simply define outside their domain of inquiry.

With this volume, we invite cognitive linguists to welcome the study of ideology into the domain of inquiry for cognitive linguistics. In effect, this is an invitation for cognitive linguists to incorporate tension productively into their vision of language and its relation to human experience. The challenge we pose for cognitive linguists is really that of embracing tension. To respond to our invitation, cognitive linguists must acknowledge the tensions of everyday life, embrace them within the domain of inquiry of cognitive linguistics and, ultimately, seek to contribute to understanding not only the tensions themselves but also productive ways to deal with those tensions.

1. The incorporative spirit of cognitive linguistics

There is an incorporative spirit in cognitive linguistics (hereafter, CL) that sets it apart from many other contemporary approaches to linguistic theory. Critics of CL might see in this incorporative spirit a significant problem. Some might claim that it reflects an inability to define the domain of inquiry for linguistic theory in a sufficiently rigorous manner. Others might suggest that this incorporative spirit reflects an imperialist tendency among some of the major proponents of CL. To a certain degree at least, these may be valid concerns and proponents of CL would be wise to keep them in mind as they pursue their research interests within the incorporative (and, therefore, ever-changing) framework of CL. However, it is quite unlikely that many proponents of CL would abandon the framework just because of these concerns. The reason for this is that the incorporative spirit that pervades scholarship in CL reflects, more than anything else, a firmly held professional commitment

to examine, understand, and explain the entirety of the phenomenon we experience as human language.

The incorporative spirit of CL is readily apparent to almost anyone who has attended an International Cognitive Linguistics Conference or who may have surveyed the CL research in some other way. However, seldom (if ever) has the incorporative spirit of CL been articulated as explicitly and succinctly as it is in two brief passages quoted in this volume from two of the leading proponents of CL. When asked by Roberta Pires de Oliveira about the dynamic force unifying scholarship in CL, George Lakoff (Pires de Oliveira, This volume: 27) notes that it is

> a passion for studying all of language from a cognitive perspective, a genuine feeling of mutual respect, a realisation that no one person is going to be able to think about everything or get everything right, and a commitment to building a co-operative and open scientific community.

In responding to Bert Peeters' critique of the self-proclaimed status of CL as a legitimately *cognitive* science, Ron Langacker (Peeters, This volume: 97) notes that

> There has to be a large quantity of work that is specifically linguistic in nature, work that is specifically psychological or neurological, and work that tries to bring these together in one way or another. All are legitimate and important, requiring their own expertise, and they should all be welcomed for their contribution to what is an immense overall investigatory enterprise.

The incorporative spirit of CL is important to those of us who have contributed to this volume (and its companion volume, *Language and Ideology. Volume II: Descriptive Cognitive Approaches*) because it encourages us to believe that we can effect growth in CL such that it can incorporate questions and concerns about how language relates to ideology. Ideology has not been a focal concern for many linguists in recent years, at least in their disciplined reflections on human language. This is as true of proponents of CL, who tend to acknowledge the actual vastness of the domain of linguistic inquiry, as it is of proponents of other theoretical approaches in linguistics which pursue research agendas that may be considerably narrower. But linguists would be comfortable exercising their reflective and analytical skills on ideology if they were to endeavour to do so. After all, there are a number of significant ways in which ideology is akin to language. In this regard, let us turn our attention first to language.

Language is a resource that human beings use every day to make sense of their experiences and to facilitate productive interaction with each other. The average human being seems to be happiest with language when s/he can use it effectively and reasonably effortlessly to accomplish certain personal and/or social goals. For most human beings, stopping to think about language is a rather unpleasant activity that is most often engaged only when there has been some breakdown in the utility of language. As a result, the average human being generally fails to recognise and appreciate the intricacies and complexities of the various systems which human languages comprise. Linguists, on the other hand, study this resource that we call human language with the same fascination that drives an astronomer to gaze almost endlessly into the heavens and with the same passion that results in piles of crumpled up false starts at the feet of the poet in search of ever more powerful expressions of deep human emotions. The fact that most humans appeal regularly to language without stopping to think about it or appreciate it only enhances the linguist's fascination. Indeed, this fact is focal in raising the linguist's suspicion that language is not just a tool that humans use, but that it is, in certain significant ways, an integral part of human nature.

Now, let us consider ideology. As with language, human beings interact with ideology on a daily basis without stopping to think about it. Furthermore, ideology tends to become the focus of human attention only in problematic situations. In the case of ideology, these problems are often a matter of tensions that arise when people working from different ideological systems disagree in their perceptions of and behaviours toward particular experiences. At this point, the most profound similarity between language and ideology begins to come into focus. In considering issues such as Whorf's Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, linguists have grown accustomed to seeing language as an organisational system which mediates the interactions of human beings with the world around them. Most scholars who attempt to study ideology and its effects on people would probably not balk at a characterisation of ideology also as an organisational system which mediates the interactions of human beings with the world around them. Indeed, the following passage (from the introductory chapter in *Language as Ideology*) suggests quite strongly that Hodge and Kress (1993: 6) would agree with this assertion:

> ... language, typically, is immersed in the ongoing life of a society, as the
> practical consciousness of that society. This consciousness is inevitably a
> partial and false consciousness. We can call it ideology, defining 'ideology' as
> a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view. Ideology
> is thus a subsuming category which includes sciences and metaphysics, as well
> as political ideologies of various kinds, without implying anything about their
> status and reliability as guides to reality.

And so, we reach a point at which we are faced with the fundamental
question "What is the relationship between language and ideology?".

In a way, this question is a driving influence behind each paper in this
volume. However, the reader must not expect this set of papers to answer the
question as I have posed it. Indeed, one thing that the reader will definitely
find in this volume is evidence that the question I have posed is actually
somewhat ill-formed. That is, the question above suggests that there is a
single, unitary relationship between language and ideology to be discovered
and explained. However, the papers presented here indicate clearly that
language and ideology interact in a number of different ways.

2.   Tension and ideology

With the purpose of this volume being to encourage other linguists to join us
in the pursuit of knowledge about the varied relationships that language
bears to ideology, it is not sufficient for us simply to pique the reader's
interest in this particular domain of linguistic inquiry. Precisely because this
particular domain of inquiry is largely unfamiliar to most contemporary
linguists, it is also incumbent upon us to provide interested readers with at
least two key resources needed to begin engaging ideology as an object of
linguistic inquiry. Minimally, we must suggest how the reader can go about
looking for this unfamiliar object of study and how to recognise it once it
has been encountered. In other words, we need to introduce a reasonably
reliable discovery procedure for ideology and a reasonably satisfactory
preliminary characterisation of ideology.

Let us begin with the less challenging of the two tasks: introducing a
practical discovery procedure for ideology. It isn't easy to go looking for
ideologies, but the problem is not really that ideologies are hard to find.
Indeed, the problem is quite the opposite. That is, ideologies are so ubiquitous,

so omnipresent that they are incredibly easy to overlook. There may be a number of useful ways to resolve the problem of overlooking ideologies, but at this juncture, I can suggest only one. The key to the approach I will suggest lies in the co-occurrence relationship that we have already recognised between tension and ideology. While we may not perceive the ideological systems that impact on our daily lives, it is generally quite difficult to ignore the tensions brought on by the impact of ideology. Thus, the perception of tension can be considered a reasonably viable candidate for the discovery procedure we need.

Before we can be satisfied with perception of tension as our discovery procedure for ideology, however, we must seriously consider how reliable tension is as an indicator of ideological differences. It is undoubtedly true that not all tensions arise as a result of ideological differences. Some tensions may arise from imminent danger brought on by a natural disaster, as would be the case if a person were to find him/herself directly in the path of a rapidly moving tornado. Other tensions can arise from chemical imbalances in the brain, as in cases of abnormally high seratonin re-uptake. I suggest, however, that it is reasonably safe to conclude that many (if not most or all) of the tensions that arise in interpersonal and social settings are the result of ideological differences. Furthermore, it is probably also true that most circumstances involving ideological differences will result in some perceivable experience of tension. Thus, while perception of tension is not, by any means, a failsafe indicator of ideologies at work, it can definitely be considered reasonably reliable. In other words, when our intention is to study ideology in any way, we can set out in search of the human experience of tension. Especially if the perceived tension appears to be attributable to interpersonal or social variables in the particular situation, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the tensions perceived arise from ideological differences.

At this point, we can begin developing the preliminary characterisation of ideology that any scholar will need in order to successfully identify this focal phenomenon. Given the observation that tensions can arise as the overt manifestation of ideological differences, it seems reasonable to begin our quest for a satisfactory working characterisation of "ideology" by considering what it is about ideology that can give rise to tensions. We have seen that tension can arise from imminent danger or from chemical imbalances. Tensions can also arise whenever an experience is not consistent with a person's expectation for that experience. I suggest that such tensions are

quite often (but not always) the result of ideological differences. When a person's expectations for the experience are driven by one ideological system and the actual nature of the experience is shaped, controlled or otherwise determined by a different ideological system, the experience is almost guaranteed to cause tension for the person whose expectations are violated. We can begin, then, with the characterisation of ideology as a system of ideas that shape experiences and/or expectations for experiences.

While this may appear to be a quick and dirty characterisation of "ideology", the unfortunate fact is that there appears to be no clear consensus on exactly what ideology is. In this regard, the introductory section of E. F. K. Koerner's contribution to this volume ("Linguistics and ideology in the study of language") provides a brief but useful overview of the problem. Koerner notes that the term "ideology" seems to have become quite fashionable in linguistics, but few of the scholars who invoke the term seem to take the trouble to clarify what they intend the word to mean. Koerner informs us that the French term 'idéologie' originally referred to "nothing more than a theory of ideas." In contemporary discourses, the most common application of the term "ideology" appeals to the Marxist sense, which Koerner characterises as "a false consciousness that is contradicted by the reality found in everyday material life" (p. 254).

The only paper in this volume which explicitly appeals to Marxist theory is Peter E. Jones' "Cognitive linguistics and the Marxist approach to ideology." Therein, Jones characterises the Marxist perspective on ideology as:

> the reflection in ideas of the material interests of a ruling class, a reflection in which the outward appearances of the economic forms expressing those interests are seen and presented in mystified fashion as naturalised, as the product of 'human nature' (in our genes, perhaps), as eternally valid, universal 'civilised values' (p. 236).

Jones also tells us that "[a]n ideological view, such as bourgeois ideology, is a view of society from the standpoint of a particular social class acting in accordance with its own interests" (p. 235).

Undoubtedly, this Marxist perspective on ideology will seem rather foreign to most cognitive linguists. More easily comprehended will be a pair of characterisations offered by George Lakoff in the interview conducted by Roberta Pires de Oliveira. First, Lakoff notes that "[i]deologies tell you what is right and wrong and hence are comprised to a

considerable extent by moral conceptual systems. Moral systems do not arise from ideologies; they are a part of what constitutes ideologies" (p. 34). Later, Lakoff offers a more direct characterisation of "ideology" from the perspective of a cognitive scientist:

> Any ideology is a conceptual system of a particular kind, including a moral system. However, ideologies have both conscious and unconscious aspects. If you ask someone with a political ideology what she believes, she will give a list of beliefs and perhaps some generalisations. A cognitive linguist, looking at what she says, will most likely pick out unconscious frames and metaphors lying behind her conscious beliefs. To me, that is the interesting part of ideologies — the hidden, unconscious part. It is there that cognitive linguists have a contribution to make (p. 37).

At this point, some might be inclined to begin weighing each characterisation presented above against the others. Our analytic instincts might lead us to examine the differences between these characterisations so as to determine whether they are reconcilable. I want to caution the reader against falling into such a trap at this preliminary point. It is unnecessary for our present purposes. Recall that our sole purpose for considering characterisations of ideology at this preliminary juncture is to help the reader recognise the phenomenon when s/he encounters it. From this perspective, it is not necessary for us to diagnose or reconcile any significant differences that might exist between the variant characterisations of "ideology." It is only necessary that these characterisation be available and possibly useful to us in our attempts to recognise ideologies at work.

Recall also that our ultimate goal in this volume is to open a cross-disciplinary discourse on the varied relationships that language bears to ideology. Given this goal, disciplinary differences of perspective are to be expected and must be respected. Consequently, we must remember to control all discipline-based instincts to dismiss perspectives which may seem difficult to reconcile within systems of understanding with which we have become comfortable. The problem we face, in this regard, is indeed an ideological problem. We must not allow ideological differences (in the form of distinct disciplinary approaches or understandings) to obscure our attempts to understand ideology itself. Indeed, we must celebrate such differences and reflect carefully on them.

3. Tensions abound

In discussing the conventionalised metaphorical concept ARGUMENT IS WAR, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 4–5) briefly entertain an alternative that merits our serious consideration in trying to establish a viable frame for cross-disciplinary discourse on language and ideology.

> Imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, the participants are seen as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way. In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, and talk about them differently.

In effect, our objective in this volume is to acknowledge discursive tensions and engage them productively in a co-operative dynamic like that of a dance rather than in the combative, oppositional manner of war. Such a tone is effectively set for this volume in Roberta Pires de Oliveira's interview with George Lakoff. The interview is really a careful, polite textual dance between two scholars who manifest different ideological commitments in the scholarly perspectives on language and ideology. Pires de Oliveira and Lakoff really view language differently, and they seem to view ideology differently, as well. These differences are, at least in part, a function of their different disciplinary perspectives on these phenomena. In this regard, this paper provides a perfect point of entrance into this volume. It demonstrates the value of engaging in serious, disciplinary reflection on tensions and incorporating those reflections in a linguistic theory. There are numerous junctures throughout the interview where Lakoff and Pires de Oliveira are at odds. They engage this tension by engaging each other respectfully and they ultimately arrive at a very important consensus. They agree that "describing our common metaphors is not only a way of making ourselves aware of ideologies, but also a way of combating them." (p. 42)

There is a significant tension deriving from basing oneself firmly in a particular disciplinary tradition while engaging in discourse with a scholar from a different disciplinary tradition. Lakoff repeatedly feels compelled to remind Pires de Oliveira of his commitment to science and to linguistics as a cognitive science. Lakoff makes it clear that he views language as a cognitive system, while Pires de Oliveira repeatedly reveals her commitment to seeing language as a social institution. Pires de Oliveira's perspective may be unfamiliar to many cognitive linguists, but it is quite familiar to contemporary