

Language and ideology

2. LOCATION OF IDEOLOGY

I want to argue that ideology invests language in various ways at various levels, and that we don't have to choose between different possible 'locations' of ideology, all of which seem partly justified and none of which seems entirely satisfactory. The key issue is whether ideology is a property of structures or a property of events, and the answer is 'both'. And the key problem is to find a satisfactory account of the dialectic of structures and events.

A number of accounts place ideology in some form of system of potential underlying language practice – be it a 'code', 'structure', 'system' or 'formation' (e.g. a set of expressions in specified semantic relations). These structures are defined for various varieties of a language, not for a language *per se*. The 'structure' option, as I shall call it, has the virtue of showing events, actual discursive practice, to be constrained by social conventions, norms, histories. It has the disadvantage of tending to defocus the event on the assumption that events are mere instantiations of structures, whereas the relationship of events to structures would appear to be less neat and less compliant. This privileges the perspective of reproduction rather than that of transformation, and the ideological conventionality and repetitiveness of events. Pêcheux is a case in point, though he represents an advance on Althusser in opening up the possibility of resistance through 'counteridentification' and 'disidentification'. It also tends to postulate entities (codes, formations, etc.) which appear to be more clearly bounded than real entities are, thus privileging the synchronic moment of fixity over historical processes of fixation and dissolution.

An alternative location for ideology would be the discursive event itself. This has the virtue of representing ideology as a process which goes on in events, and it permits transformation and fluidity to be highlighted. But it can lead to an illusory view of discourse as free processes of formation unless there is a simultaneous emphasis on structures. There is a textual variant of this location: ideologies reside in texts. While it is true that the forms and content of texts do bear the imprint of ideological processes and structures, it is not possible to 'read off' ideologies from texts. This is because meanings are produced through interpretations of texts and texts are open to diverse interpretations, and because ideological processes appertain to discourses as whole social events – they are processes between people – not to the texts which are produced, distributed and interpreted as moments of such events. Claims to discover ideological processes solely through

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the theoretical question of what sort of relationships there are between language and ideology, and the methodological question of how such relationships are shown in analysis (which together I refer to as 'language/ideology'). It is an attempt to build from the achievements and limitations of explorations of these questions within Marxism, especially Althusser's contribution to the theory of ideology and its development by Pêcheux into a theory of discourse and a method for discourse analysis (see Althusser 1971; Larrain 1979; Haroche, Henry, Pêcheux 1971; Pêcheux 1975 (1982)). I have found the self-criticism of Pêcheux and his associates in their most recent work a valuable resource for going beyond structuralist accounts of language/ideology (Conein *et al.* 1981; Malidier 1984; Pêcheux 1988).

I discuss the merits of 'locating' ideology in language structures or language events and conclude it is present in both. I outline a conception of discourse and discourse analysis which is compatible with this conclusion, and suggest that a more diverse range of linguistic features and levels may be ideologically invested than is usually assumed, including aspects of linguistic form and style as well as 'content'. I then argue that language/ideology issues ought to figure in the wider framework of theories and analyses of power, for which the Gramscian concept of hegemony is fruitful. This implies a focus in studies of language/ideology upon change in discursive practice and structures, seen as a dimension of change in the balance of social forces. I conclude with a discussion of the limits of ideology and the possibilities for combating ideological discourse.

text analysis run into the problem now familiar in media sociology that text 'consumers' (readers, viewers) appear sometimes to be quite immune to the effects of such ideologies (Morley 1983).

Both the structure and discourse options (as well as the text option) have the limitation of being localized and particular. Ideologies cut across the boundaries of situation types and institutions, and we need to be able to discuss how they transcend particular codes or types of discourse (a simple example would be metaphors of the nation as a family), how ideology relates to the structuring and restructuring of relations between such entities. The concept of 'interdiscourse' is helpful here, so too is Foucault's concept of 'order of discourse' (Foucault 1971) which I shall use. Once again, the structural focus on orders of discourse needs a complementary focus on events, where these restructurings concretely take place.

An issue is what sort of entities are involved in the (re)structuring of orders of discourse. Without attempting a detailed account of the structuring of orders of discourse, I would like to suggest the entities which make them up are (a) more or less clearly defined, (b) variable in scale, and (c) in various relationships to each other, including the relationships of complementarity, inclusion, and contradiction. I remarked above that structures are sometimes conceived of as more clearly bounded than they are; some entities seem to be sharply differentiated, others fuzzy. The entities which are articulated and rearticulated in discourse are not all fully-fledged codes or registers; they may be smaller scale entities such as turn-taking systems, lexicons which incorporate particular classifications, generic scripts for narratives (for instance), sets of politeness conventions, and so forth. Finally, orders of discourse should I suggest be seen as heterogeneous in the sense that they articulate both compatible and complementary entities and contradictory entities – such as contrasting lexicalizations, or turn-taking systems. These suggested properties of orders of discourse accord with thinking in 'second-generation' French discourse analysts. They also, as I shall show, harmonize with the concept of hegemony.

Ideology is located, then, both in structures which constitute the outcome of past events and the conditions for current events, and in events themselves as they reproduce and transform their conditioning structures. In the following two sections I shall present a way of conceptualizing (use of) language and a matrix for conceptualizing ideology in its relation to economic and political relations which harmonize with this position.

3. DISCOURSE AND TEXT

The Saussurean conception of language use or parole sees it in individualistic and asocial terms. In using the term 'discourse' I am claiming language use to be imbricated in social relations and processes which systematically determine variations in its properties, including the linguistic forms which appear in texts. One aspect of this imbrication in the social which is inherent to the notion of discourse is that language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology.

Also inherent to discourse is the dialectical relation of structure/event discussed above: discourse is shaped by structures, but also contributes to shaping and reshaping them, to reproducing and transforming them. These structures are most immediately of a discursive/ideological nature – orders of discourse, codes and their elements such as vocabularies or turn-taking conventions – but they also include in a mediated form political and economic structures, relationships in the market, gender relations, relations within the state and within the institutions of civil society such as education.

The relationship of discourse to such extra-discursive structures and relations is not just representational but constitutive: ideology has material effects, discourse contributes to the creation and constant recreation of the relations, subjects (as recognized in the Althusserian concept of interpellation) and objects which populate the social world. The parent-child relationships of the family, the determination of what positions of 'mother', 'father' and 'child' are socially available as well as the subjection of real individuals to these positions, the nature of the family, or of the home, are all shaped in the ideological processes of discourse. This could easily lead to the idealist inversion referred to earlier whereby the realities of the social world are seen as emanating from ideas. However, there are two provisos which together block this. First, people are always confronted with the family as a real institution (in a limited number of variants) with concrete practices: existing family structures are also partly constituted in ideology and discourse, but reified into institutions and practices. Second, the constitutive work of discourse necessarily takes place within the constraints of the complex of economic, political and discursive/ideological structures referred to above – and I shall argue later in relation to particular hegemonic projects and struggle. The result is that the ideological and discursive shaping of the real is always caught up in the networks of the real.

I see discourse as a complex of three elements: social practice, discursive practice (text production, distribution and consumption), and text, and the analysis of a specific discourse calls for analysis in each of these three dimensions and their interrelations. The hypothesis is that significant connections exist between features of texts, ways in which texts are put together and interpreted, and the nature of the social practice (see paper 5 for details of this framework).

Ideology enters this picture first in the ideological investment of elements which are drawn upon in producing or interpreting a text, and the ways they are articulated together in orders of discourse: and second in the ways in which these elements are articulated together and orders of discourse rearticulated in discursive events (detailed below). In the former connection, it should be noted that the richness of the ideological elements which go into producing and interpreting a text may be sparsely represented in the text. An example might be the way in which scare quotes are used to signal a point of confrontation between ideologies (and discourses) which are not further represented in the text – around the word 'personal' in the expression 'the "personal" problems of young people' in a left-wing newspaper (for which many 'personal' problems will be social).

A further substantive question about ideology is what features or levels of language and discourse may be ideologically invested. A common claim is that it is 'meanings' (sometimes specified as 'content' as opposed to 'form') that are ideological (e.g. Thompson (1984)), and this often means just or mainly lexical meanings. Lexical meanings are of course important, but so too are presuppositions, implicatures, metaphors, and coherence, all aspects of meaning. For instance, coherent interpretations of texts are arrived at by interpreters on the basis of cues in the text, and resources (including internalized ideological and discursive structures) which they bring to text interpretation. Coherence is a key factor in the ideological constitution and reconstitution of subjects in discourse: a text 'postulates' a subject 'capable' of automatically linking together its potentially highly diverse and not explicitly linked elements to make sense of it. In postulating such a subject, a text contributes to constituting such a subject.

The 'form'-'content' opposition is itself misleading, however. If content is to enter the realm of practice, it must do so in formal clothing, in texts or other material forms, though it is possible to study forms as if they were unrelated to content, as linguists sometimes do. In fact, formal features of texts at various levels may be ideologically invested. For example, the representation of slumps and unemployment

as akin to natural disasters may involve a preference for intransitive and attributive rather than transitive sentence structures ('the currency has lost its value', 'millions are out of work', as opposed to 'investors are buying gold', 'firms have sacked millions' – see Fowler *et al.* (1979)). At a different level, crime stories in newspapers are written according to relatively predictable scripts which embody ideological representations of crime (Jordanidou (1990)). Again, the turn-taking system in a classroom or politeness conventions operating between a manager and a secretary imply particular ideological representations of teacher-pupil and manager-secretary relations. Nevertheless, it may be useful to think of ideologies in terms of content-like entities which are manifested in various formal features, and perhaps frame, schema, script and related concepts are of value in this respect (Schank and Abelson (1977)).

Even aspects of the 'style' of a text may be ideologically significant. When for instance public bodies such as government ministries produce public information on their schemes and activities, they select a style of writing (or indeed televising) partly on the basis of the image they thereby construct for themselves. This can be regarded as a special sort of ideological process of subject constitution. A topical case in point is the Department of Trade and Industry's publicity for its 'enterprise' initiatives. The Department seems to be trying to create for itself the image of the entrepreneur of 'enterprise culture', in its efforts to persuade others to adopt the same image and identity. It does this in part stylistically. Its publicity for instance is full of categorical, authoritative and unmitigated statements about business practice aimed at businessmen (e.g. 'It's no good expecting to make the right decisions for your business if you don't start with decent information') which have I think more to do with establishing a categorical and authoritative and decisive image than with giving 'information' (or rather opinions) which addressees must already have.

4. HEGEMONY

The concept of hegemony originates in Lenin but is the centrepiece in an elaborated form of Gramsci's analysis of Western capitalism and revolutionary strategy in Western Europe. I shall make use of it both because it harmonizes with the dialectical conception of structure/event advocated above, and because it provides a framework for theorizing and analysing ideology/discourse which avoids both econo-

mism and idealism. Hegemony cuts across and integrates economy, politics and ideology, yet ascribes an authentic place to each of them within an overall focus upon politics and power, and upon the dialectical relations between classes and class fragments.

Hegemony is leadership as well as domination across the economic, political, cultural and ideological domains of a society. Hegemony is the power over society as a whole of one of the fundamental economically defined classes in alliance (as a bloc) with other social forces, but it is never achieved more than partially and temporarily, as an 'unstable equilibrium'. Hegemony is about constructing alliances, and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate classes, through concessions or through ideological means, to win their consent. Hegemony is a focus of constant struggle around points of greatest instability between classes and blocs, to construct or sustain or fracture alliances and relations of domination/subordination, which takes economic, political and ideological forms. Hegemonic struggle takes place on a broad front which includes the institutions of civil society (education, trade unions, family), with possible unevenness between different levels and domains.

Ideology is understood within this framework in terms which bear the seeds of all Althusser's advances (Buci-Glucksmann (1980): 66), in, for instance, its focusing of the implicit and unconscious materialization of ideologies in practices (which contain them as implicit theoretical 'premises'), ideology being 'a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in the manifestations of individual and collective life' (Gramsci 1971: 328). While the interpellation of subjects is an Althusserian elaboration, there is in Gramsci a conception of subjects as structured by diverse ideologies implicit in their practice which gives them a 'strangely composite' character (1971: 324), and a view of 'common sense' as both a depository of the diverse effects of past ideological struggles, and a constant target for restructuring, in ongoing struggles. In common sense, ideologies become naturalized, or automatized. For Gramsci, ideology is tied to action, and ideologies are judged in terms of their social effects rather than their truth values. Moreover, Gramsci conceived of 'the field of ideologies in terms of conflicting, overlapping, or intersecting currents or formations' (Hall 1988: 55-6), which highlights the question of how the elements of what he calls 'an ideological complex' (Gramsci 1971: 195) come to be structured and restructured, articulated and rearticulated, in processes of ideological struggle. This is a perspective developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), though in

terms which reject basic Gramscian positions such as the rootedness of hegemony in class (see also Laclau (1979)).

The ideological dimensions of hegemonic struggle can be conceptualized and analysed in terms of the view of discourse I have introduced above. An order of discourse constitutes the discursive/ideological facet of a contradictory and unstable equilibrium (hegemony); notice that the view outlined above of an order of discourse as complex, heterogeneous and contradictory harmonizes with the concept of ideological complex. And discursive practice is a facet of struggle which contributes in varying degrees to the reproduction or transformation of the existing order of discourse, and through that of existing social and power relations. Let us take the political discourse of Thatcherism as an example. Thatcherite discourse can be interpreted as a rearticulation of the existing order of political discourse which has brought traditional conservative, neo-liberal and populist discourse elements into a new mix that has also constituted an unprecedented discourse of political power for a woman leader. This discursive rearticulation materializes an ideological project for the constitution of a new political base, new political subjects, and a new agenda, itself a facet of the political project of restructuring the hegemony of the bloc centred upon the bourgeoisie in new economic and political conditions. Thatcherite discourse has been described along these lines by Hall (1988), and Fairclough (1989) shows how such an analysis can be carried out in terms of the conception of discourse introduced above, in a way which accounts for (as Hall does not) the specific features of the language of Thatcher's political texts. I should add that the rearticulated order of discourse is a contradictory one: authoritarian elements coexist with democratic and egalitarian ones (textually, for instance, inclusive *we* coexists with indefinite *you*), patriarchal elements with feminist elements, but always with the latter member of each pair being contained and constrained by the former. The rearticulation of orders of discourse, however, is achieved not only in productive discursive practice, but also in interpretation: because of the heterogeneous elements which go into their production, texts are open to many ambivalences which are reduced if not eliminated by particular interpretative practices which draw upon particular configurations of discursive elements as parts of their interpretative procedures.

However, most discourse does not bear upon hegemonic struggle in such a direct way as Thatcherite discourse. In most discourse, the protagonists (as it were) are not classes or political forces linked in such relatively direct ways to classes or blocs, but for instance teachers and

pupils, counsellors and clients, police and public, women and men. Hegemony is a process at the societal level, whereas most discourse has a more local character, being located in or on the edges of particular institutions – the family, schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces, courts of law, etc. We have to honour the specificity of such institutional domains. However, hegemony still provides both a model and a matrix. It provides a model: in, let us say, education, the dominant groups also appear to exercise power through constituting alliances, integrating rather than merely dominating subordinate groups, winning their consent, achieving a precarious equilibrium which may be undermined by other groups, and doing so in part through discourse and ideology, through the constitution of and struggle around local orders of discourse, no less heterogeneous and contradictory than their societal counterpart. It provides a matrix: the achievement of hegemony at a societal level requires a degree of integration of local and semi-autonomous institutions and power relations, so that the latter are partially shaped by hegemonic relations. This directs attention to links across institutions, and links and movement between institutional orders of discourse. What is necessary but difficult to accomplish is giving proper weight to integration without thereby playing down the relative autonomy and integrity of non-class struggles: between the sexes, ethnic groups, and the various categories of institutional agent.

From the perspective of hegemony, it is processes which are in focus: local processes of constituting and reconstituting social relations through discourse, global processes of integration and disintegration transcending particular institutions and local orders of discourse. Discourse change, and its relationship to ideological change and to social struggle and change in a broader sense, is where the emphasis must be placed, and where the language/ideology problem should be confronted. And in accordance with the dialectical view of structure/event above, a study of discursive change needs a double focus on the discursive event and on the societal and institutional orders of discourse.

By change in discursive events I mean innovation or creativity which in some way goes against conventions and expectations. Change involves forms of transgression, crossing boundaries, such as putting together existing codes or elements in new combinations, or drawing upon orders of discourse or their elements in situations which conventionally preclude them in a way which gives a sense of a struggle between different ways of signifying a particular domain of experience. Change leaves traces in texts in the form of the co-occurrence of

contradictory or inconsistent elements – mixtures of formal and informal styles, technical and non-technical vocabularies, markers of authority and familiarity, more typically written and more typically spoken syntactic forms, and so forth. The immediate origins and motivations of change lie in contradictions which may problematize conventions in a variety of ways. For example, contradictions which occur in the positioning of subjects, such as those involving gender-relations, where gender-linked discursive and other practices have been problematized and changed under the impact of contradictions between traditional gendered subject positions which many of us were socialized into, and new gender relations. People are faced with what Billig *et al.* (1988) call 'ideological dilemmas', which they attempt to resolve or contain through discursive forms of struggle. On a rather different plane, Thatcher's political discourse can be seen to arise out of the problematization of traditional rightwing discursive practices in circumstances where contradictions become apparent between the social relations, subject positions and political practices they are based in and a changing world. Such subjective apprehensions of problems in concrete situations have their social conditions in structural contradictions at the institutional and societal levels, upon which discursive events have cumulative effects. In terms of the framework for discourse analysis introduced in the previous section, social conditions and effects are analysed in the dimension of social practice, 'ideological dilemmas' and attempts to resolve them in the dimension of discourse practice, and textual traces in the dimension of text.

In respect of structural change, changes which appear to move across boundaries between institutional orders of discourse are of particular interest in their possible links to wider hegemonic projects. Let me refer to two changes of this sort. One is an apparent democratization of discourse which involves the reduction of overt markers of power asymmetry between people of unequal institutional power – teachers and pupils, academics and students, employers/managers and workers, parents and children, doctors and patients. This tendency is manifested in a great many different institutional domains. Although there are variations between them, it appears to be generally interpretable not as the elimination of power asymmetry but its transformation into covert forms. For example, teachers may exercise control in discourse with pupils less through direct orders and overt constraints on their rights to speak than through indirect requests and suggestions and the way they react and respond (facially and physically as well as verbally) to pupils' contributions. Such discourse can be seen in terms

of contradictory mixtures of discourses of equality and power. The second example is what I have called 'synthetic personalisation' (Fairclough (1989)). This is the simulation of private, face-to-face, person-to-person discourse in public mass-audience discourse – print, radio, television. Both examples are I think interpretable in hegemonic terms, though to do so properly would require more space than I have here. Discourse democratization is of course linked to political democratization, and to the broad shift from coercion to consent, incorporation and pluralism in the exercise of power. Synthetic personalization is I think a facet of a concomitant process of the breaking down of divisions between public and private, political society and civil society, as the state and its mechanisms (especially ideological) of generating consent expand into private domains. Although both cases can perhaps be seen in pessimistic terms as illusions of democracy, informality and so forth being projected for ulterior motives, the fact that orders of discourse do incorporate these elements if only in ways limited and constrained by others renders them open, if we adopt a hegemonic model, to discursive struggle directed at promoting these elements, as it were. In this sense democratization and personalization as strategies are high risk.

Are discursive changes of this order necessarily ideologically invested, and what are their implications for the language/ideology problem? It is quite conceivable that changes in discursive practices and restructuring of orders of discourse could come about for purely rational reasons. For example, it could well be that doctors are more likely to arrive at sound medical judgements if they talk with their patients conversationally on a roughly (at least apparently) equal footing than if they merely subject them to batteries of preconstructed verbal and physical examinations. But the rational motivations for such a change are virtually bound to attract an ideological overlay by the fact that the change takes places within existing power relations inside and outside medicine. Let me spell this out: in so far as changes in practices and restructurings can be said to embody representations, propositions or assumptions which affect (sustain, undermine) relations of power, they can be said to be ideological. This is broadly similar to Thompson's view of ideology as meaning in the service of relations of domination (though I would add resistance to domination), or Frow's view of ideology as a 'political functionalization of speech' (Thompson (1984): 4, Frow (1985): 204). For discourse, being ideological does not therefore preclude being other things as well.

This does not mean however that the specific ideological import of a

particular element is fixed. Consider for example the apparently non-discriminative, nonjudgemental, empathizing way of talking to people one-to-one about themselves and their problems which we call 'counselling'. Counselling has its origins in therapy, but it now circulates as a technique across many institutional domains. It is highly ambivalent ideologically. Most counsellors see themselves as giving space to people as individuals in a world which increasingly treats them as ciphers, which makes counselling look like a counter-hegemonic practice. However, counselling is now used in preference to practices of an overtly disciplinary nature in various institutions, which makes it look like a hegemonic technique for subtly drawing aspects of people's private lives into the domain of power. Hegemonic struggle of an ideological order is partly through counselling and partly over counselling.

The picture of language/ideology which emerges from this discussion is moving towards Frow's view of ideology as 'a state of discourse ... in relation to the class struggle' (1985: 204). That is, rather than attributing specific and fixed ideological 'contents' to elements, ideology is seen more dynamically as the shifting relationship of discursive practices to hegemonic (and more local-institutional) struggle. Clearly some elements are more ideologically fixed than others – think for instance of vocabularies it would be difficult not to regard as sexist or racist. The point is however that many discursive elements at least which may manifest a degree of ideological fixity may nevertheless be turned around. Foucault makes the same point in referring to the 'tactical polyvalence of discourses':

Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (Foucault 1981: 101)

This suggests a homology between discursive 'strategies' and hegemonic political strategies for constructing alliances and incorporating subordinate groups, which underscores the value of the hegemony concept for exploring discursive change and language/ideology. It also suggests that perhaps the relationship between discourse and hegemony is a matter of the latter limiting the potential of the former: there is no specifically discursive reason why there should not be an unlimited articulation and rearticulation of elements. It is hegemony – history – that curtails this discursive potential and constrains which

articulations actually come about, their durability, and so forth. I should add that the view I have set out of changes in the structure of orders of discourse as facets of an evolving hegemonic struggle will hopefully evoke Foucault's explorations of discourse and the technologies of power (Foucault 1972, Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982).

5. LIMITS OF IDEOLOGY

I have suggested that discursive practices are ideologically invested in so far as they contribute to sustaining or undermining power relations. Relations of power may in principle be affected by discursive practices in any type of discourse, even in scientific and theoretical discourse. This precludes a categorical opposition between ideology on the one hand and science or theory on the other which some writers on language/ideology have suggested (Pêcheux 1982, Zima 1981). This does not however imply that all discourse is irredeemably ideological. Ideologies arise in class societies characterized by relations of domination, and in so far as human beings are capable of transcending such societies they are capable of transcending ideology. I do not therefore accept the view of 'ideology in general' as a form of social cement which is inseparable from society itself.

On a less Utopian level, it is also quite possible to combat ideology now. The fact that all types of discourse are open in principle and no doubt to some extent in fact in our society to ideological investment does not mean that all types of discourse are ideologically invested to the same degree. It should not be too difficult to show that advertising is in broad terms more heavily invested than the physical sciences, though the thrust of Foucault's work (even if he resists the concept of ideology) is to show that the social sciences have a heavy ideological investment. There are structural determinants of degrees of ideological investment, but that does not mean that ideology cannot be effectively combated in any circumstances. Ideology works, as Althusser reminds us, by disguising its ideological nature. It becomes naturalized, automatized – 'common sense' in Gramsci's terms. Subjects are ideologically positioned as independent of ideological determination. Yet subjects are also contradictorily positioned, and when contradictory positions overlap they provide a basis for awareness and reflexivity, just as they lead to problematization and change. A critically orientated discourse analysis can systematize awareness and critique of ideology (which does not of course mean it is itself automatically immune from it).

From awareness and critique arise possibilities of empowerment and change (Fairclough (1989), chapter 9). Since all such movements take place within the matrix of hegemonic struggle, however, they are liable not only to be resisted but also to be incorporated. A critical discourse analysis must aim for constant vigilance about who is using its results for what, and about whether its critique of certain practices is not helping to naturalize other equally but differently ideological practices.

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