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TIDYING UP: A CMS SPECIAL ISSUE ON LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

Language ideologies have been moved more and more in the focus of the attention of linguists working on topics other than those firmly established in sociolinguistics. This at times produced critical perspectives and comments, based on the insights from language documentation, typology, and applied linguistics, for example. In a much referred to article the anthropological linguist Bernard C. Perley commented on what he called ‘zombie linguistics’ – a highly successful field of the past decade, where linguists as experts set out to document and eventually save and revitalize ‘endangered languages’ across the globe. This did not, Perley argues, produce anything like an archive of living voices but collections of “zombie voices—undead voices that are disembodied and techno-mechanized” (Perley 2012: 133). The practices of linguists and the responses of people they worked with (the ‘speakers’) were both, he suggests, rationalized in complex ways. In the Maliseet community on which Perley’s analysis focuses, there is a general awareness of the ‘endangered’ state of the Maliseet language. Some measures are in place to avert language death, such as an elementary school language program, as well as the formation of a Maliseet language curriculum

committee” (Perley 2012: 142). Language is ideologically conceptualized as a kind of living object (albeit in a state of passing), and whose “emergent vitality” (ibid.) relies upon its integration in Northern institutions and epistemes.

The different expectations of community members, linguists and language planners discussed in Perley’s paper, however, reveal a less trivial picture. There are multiple, sometimes contradictory ideological concepts of language, endangerment, ownership, expertise and speaker identity – for example language-as-archive contrasting with language-as-interpersonal-performance. The ways in which language practices get lost (or, turn into undead matter), and in which this is reacted to and rationalized by different people, reveal how much we can be at odds with language, how much it might fail us at times, and how we saliently refer, in one way or another, to ideological concepts to come to terms with this.

Research on language ideologies focusing on precisely this – on the seeming messiness inherent in encounters and the ways language is practiced and performed in diverse ways – has contributed significantly to a better understanding of the sociocultural foundations of language. In this respect a fairly large number of definitions of what ‘language ideologies’ might be have been brought forward. Michael Silverstein suggested that they basically are “sets of belief about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979: 193), whereby he emphasized the notion of linguistic awareness, an important aspect that helped to frame ‘speakers’ as agentive and experts. Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin (1994) emphasized the semiotic complexity of language ideologies, which they saw as being linked to epistemology, identity, aesthetics, and not only to language. Several other approaches to language ideologies coming from anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics supported this perspective, by looking at honorifics and performativity (e.g. Irvine 1998, Briggs 1996), gender, sexuality and emotion (e.g. Kulick & Cameron 2003), power and institutions (e.g. Goffman 1981, Errington 2000), among others, rather than focusing on language structure. The intriguing essence of many of these – partly very influential studies – is that the context of language as the main field of enquiry is often portrayed as highly complex and diverse. Language ideologies therefore often appear to have a ‘regulating’ function, turning disorder into order, and providing a framework in which control over language and ownership can be claimed. ‘Speakers’ can be ideologically affiliated with a way of speaking (Irvine & Gal 2000), engage in normative discourse and practices, create boundaries and so on. In this regard, language ideologies are also crucially linked

to power and influence language policies, politics of culture, infrastructures and institutions (education, academia, media).

The fluidity of both social and language practices, however, suggests that these rationalizations and prescriptions need to be adaptive if they were to be successful; Verschueren (2012) consequently portrays language ideologies as a dynamic concept, which can be adapted to different contexts, situations and needs. Kroskrity (2007) adds another important aspect to the complexity and fluidity of language ideologies and ideological concepts: they are, he argues, always multiple; there is no single language ideology, but several to which ‘speakers’ may refer. Moreover, ideologies are always dynamic, governed by a variety of different interests, reflect different kinds of linguistic awareness, and are based on diverse terminologies. Thus language ideologies do not only relate to language attitudes and beliefs about language practices and variation and speakers, but also to epistemologies and metalinguistic knowledges (see also Woolard 1998).

It seems, by reading across the relevant publications of the past thirty years that language ideologies in all their multiplicity and diversity tend to explain the strange, diverging, weird about speech. Language ideologies may help people to explain away the messy in communication, make it ownable, controllable, and turn untidy language as resulting from construction “out of messy variability” (Gal & Woolard 2001: 1) into order. Studying them, in turn, helps to uncover these processes by looking at the ways in which images and ideas about language(s) and communicative practices are constructed. This is an interesting process by itself, which has begun to be of interest in particular among critical sociolinguists: how do the ideologies of the linguists themselves contribute to the choices of their topics, shape their perspectives on order and disorder, methodologies and concepts of data? The hegemony of Northern (European-American) language concepts of language as structure, separated from other structural entities by boundaries, spoken and owned by native speakers as a mother tongue (and often as a standardized national language) is increasingly seen as linguistics’ difficult heritage (Bonfiglio 2010, Errington 2007, Santos 2014). Moreover, some language documentation projects, especially those focusing on ‘endangered languages’ as depicted above (as well as the amount of funding granted to such projects), always have the potential to testify to the (normative) power of Northern hegemonic language ideologies. Hence, on the one hand, such practices are increasingly seen as problematic and part of a neocolonial linguistic science that produces artificial and reduced (zombie) languages (also see Irvine 2008), while on the other hand they often help to raise awareness about epistemicide and marginalization (Evans 2010).

Turning the gaze to the language ideologies of linguists and experts therefore is supposed to result in a very helpful contribution to a debate on the relevance of those hegemonic language ideologies that still prevail in Northern academia and education systems in very normative ways, despite critical voices gaining momentum.

Other ideas about what language might be, how it should be transmitted, and its diverse forms are only occasionally taken seriously and not as ‘folk linguistics’ (Niedzielski & Preston 2010). It should, therefore, be of considerable import to change the perspective a bit and focus on precisely those ways of conceptualizing language that do not presuppose the existence of a mother tongue, a monolingual community, and undisrupted communicative settings, but that help to understand language as diverse, only partly shared repertoire, a practice that not always aims at order or at being understood, but that can also be seen as particularly meaningful where it hides meaning.

The South African playwright and artist Brett Bailey has a different, more ambiguous take on zombies. He argues that it is not only a matter of language ideology that makes us choose a certain way of speaking, style or word in accordance to acquired social norms, but also a matter of the complexity and multi-facetedness of language, sign and symbols at our disposal that make us think about how we should employ them:

As a creator the language I speak is not so much one of words, it is one of other signs: of images and sounds. These signs and symbols are as complex as – if not more so than – a language of words, for they resonate with so many nuances, meanings, associations, can be read in so many ways. I must be clear about what I am trying to communicate. (Zombie workbook 1996; Bailey 2003: 37)

Thinking about language is not, therefore, only concerned with making choices about the appropriate ways in which one might be able to communicate one’s concerns, but also about how to reach the other – how one breaks through to an audience and reaches the hearer. This, like the points raised in Perley’s study cited above, is just another aspect of language ideology.

The Banal and the Special

In her work on *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice*, Ingrid Piller (2016) critically discusses the various implications of purist language ideologies and the notion of the monolingual speaker as the norm. She argues that

Three thousand years of linguistic diversity confirm the point I have already repeatedly made: that diversity is a feature of all human societies, or as anthropologist Ward Goodenough put it in 1976, ‘multiculturalism is the normal human experience’. However, there is a line of thought that linguistic diversity is relatively novel, that it is increasing, and that we are today confronted with an entirely new form of diversity, namely ‘super-diversity.’ (Piller 2016: 22)

The particularity of the diverse is located, Piller further argues, among migrants, people from the South, but rather not in the historical or contemporary sociolinguistic settings of the metropolitan North. The notion of ‘super-diversity’ thereby can be read as an indication for how Northern, or Eurocentric ideologies shape perceptions of migration and social change. The banal – that people are different and that they are mobile, that societies are dynamic and open to change – is seen as special once it can be associated with Southernness and Otherness. The postcolonial *Other* therefore needs to be explained, in this context of multilingualism and diversity. Once such explanations feed into state language policies and other ways of application, they turn into “attempts to reduce diversity and to make populations fit an imaginary homogeneous norm” (Piller 2016: 24). Such attempts are nothing new, as are the language ideologies that go along with them.

As critical contributions to multilingualism research gain attention, other (non-Northern) perspectives on language ideologies have become more relevant to sociolinguists. Language ideologies of the South are not seen any longer as epistemologically hermetic, but increasingly also as reflections of the entanglements between different knowledges, societies, Northern and Southern ways of conceptualizing language, and so on. They are therefore not simple rationalizations of how multilingual practices or complex honorifics might work best, but often also negotiate these practices as contested by the hegemonic ideologies of orderly monolingualism and ethnic language, for example. And they are more than ‘alternative knowledges’ that can be juxtaposed to Northern hegemonic knowledge, but rather represent an epistemic challenge to established paradigms and predominant ways of conceptualizing language.

One possible way of expressing and performing such decolonial, delinking concepts of language is the deliberate violation of norms. Noisy, disturbing language practices and other forms of norm-violating practice thereby always remain linked to the ability to master the mess and noise. In order to negotiate the experiences of messiness and disruption,

people using alternative language concepts often situate themselves in border contexts, assuming liminal identities (Mignolo 2000). In this situation, it is of existential importance to inverse established norms and remake order into messiness. Other possible and observable ways to deconstruct colonial established truths is by dismantling them through (re)appropriating cultural and social techniques of communication which can include writing (back), poetry, social media, protest, academic thought, activism and so on. The resulting reflexivity opens up new spaces for creativity and decolonial thinking, which might help to develop fresh, inspired ideas about language and linguistic theory-making:

Once we leave the relationship of, let's say, Africa and Europe via colonialism, the world suddenly becomes very vast, complicated, and scary as the knowledge of how just little we know settles in. Yet, this place that is just outside our comfort zone is a beautiful place to be in – it's a place of discovery of new ideas and seeing old ideas anew. (wa Ngugi 2012)

In taking the option of moving out of our comfort zone seriously, we can learn, in the tradition of Irvine, Woolard, Gal and others, *and* in the tradition of Southern theorists wa Thiong'o, Alexander, Odora-Hoppers and others, about different ways in which language can be conceptualized and described. This also entails the possibility of finding other options of producing knowledge, sharing insights and making theory.

This Special Issue

As a consequence of such considerations, this volume contains a small collection of contributions that focus on the Global South not as a linguistically special space that needs to be explained away, but as the space where the larger part of languages globally present are located, and where language practice reflects what is normal, not weird among humans.

This collection of papers presents a diverse bunch of contributions which illustrate, in various ways, that language ideologies can be not only regulating and fixing, but also empowering, thought-provoking and rebelling, and investigate the relationship between ideologies and multilingualism, social change, linguistic creativity, social transgression global and local entanglements among others.

Eyo Mensah and Idom Inyabri investigate youths and their performances of transgression through metaphor as important contributions to social change. In their case study focus-

ing on the Calabar Metropolis (Nigeria) the authors draw on language ideologies to analyze the contested field of sexualized language, gender identities, the socially acceptable and the transgressive with regard to sexualized metaphors of (male) youth gangs.

Friederike Lüpke's contribution depicts multilingualism and language contact as normality and necessity while acknowledging the diversity of multilingualisms. Her study of small-scale multilingualism, enables and demands a reconceptualization of approaches to multilingualism and language contact which includes a deeper understanding of social dynamics, cultural characteristics, and, importantly, language ideologies underlying and influencing multilingual settings.

The concept of linguistic hybridity in a multilingual setting is addressed by Kristine Stenzel and Velda Khoo who examine the linguistic practices of an individual speaker in the multilingual Vaupés region of northwestern Amazonia. They show that the essentialist language ideologies prevailing in the region conflict with actual language usage and employ the notions of 'hybridity' and 'indexicality' to analyze the speaker's multilingual performance with regard to identity formation.

In a similar setting, Josep Cru investigates ideologies of linguistic purism in Yucatán, Mexico with regard to Yucatec Maya and its revitalization. He discusses diverging language ideologies which reveal that on the one hand, established Maya intellectuals aim for a revitalization of 'pure' and 'authentic' Maya while on the other hand younger experts focus on the impure, mixed, fluid nature of linguistic practices of Maya speakers and value these practices as profitable for language revitalization. Importantly, the author contextualizes and historicizes the disputed ideologies and reflects on them with regard to politics and identity.

Andrea Hollington's contribution deals with language ideologies in a contested space characterized by migration and contact in a transatlantic scenario. Studying the repatriation of descendants of enslaved Africans to Ethiopia the paper examines ideologies and linguistic practices of the repatriates and the Ethiopian host community. Looking at the local reggae scene, this contribution looks at linguistic and other semiotic practices in music which reflect the meanings of complex entanglements between global and local in this transnational contact scenario.

Another perspective on the deconstruction of Northern hegemonic language ideologies is presented by Chris Bongartz and Anne Storch. By focusing on the 'unmaking' of lan-

guage by Northern experts in colonial contexts (and beyond) and unveiling the noise and silence, the void found behind this ‘unmaking,’ the authors argue that ideologies of the postcolony produce no straight, linear ‘development,’ but are characterized by imperial debris and ruination.

Maren Rüsç and Nico Nassenstein investigate the Ugandan youth language Leb Pa Bulu by taking language ideologies and their political and historical regional contexts into account. They focus on ideologies of differentiation and distinctiveness which are at the core of this linguistic variety’s functions and draw on concepts of liminality and creativity as well as manipulation and ownership.

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